

State of Sexual Harassment Among Senior High School Students and Academic Performance in Ghana: A Call for Policy Direction

Benedict Osei-Owusu

University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development. Department of Educational Studies, Asante Mampong Campus, Ghana-West Africa, boowusu@aamusted.edu.gh

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Abstract: *This research aimed to investigate the state of sexual harassment of senior high students: and school performance in Ghana - a call for policy direction. The study used descriptive survey design approach. Using a random sampling method, 4,600 students were selected as participants from 46 senior high schools. The data collected using questionnaires was analysed in descriptive statistics and multiple regression froms with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. Thematic analysis was done for the interview data. The study found that more than a third (32.1%) of students had experienced any form of sexual harassment and majority of the perpetrators were male (90%) and peers (33.4%). The study found that unhealthy sexual touch significantly ($p < .001$) predicted school social behaviour. Also, indecent exposure ($p < .05$), unhealthy sexual touch ($p < .001$) and sexual exploitation ($p < .05$), significantly predicted academic performance and school retention rate. Based on the findings, the study concludes that unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and, sexual exploitation are among the key factors that predicted academic performance of students and their ability to recall what taught in school. This brings to the fore that sexual harassment still predates on students thereby having and influence on their academic ability at the pre-tertiary level. The study recommended awareness campaigns, training of teachers, inclusion of sexual violence in school curriculum, empowerment of victims, encouraging easy reporting of sexual violence in school curriculum, empowerment of victims, encouraging easy reporting of sexual harassment and appropriate reporting systems, parental involvement, conducive and safe school environment, strict law enforcement and, challenging cultural beliefs as policy interventions to mitigate or address the prevalence of sexual harassment in Ghana.*

Key words: Sexual harrassment, Senior high school, Academic performance, School retention rate, Policy direction

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment occurs in a variety of locations and conditions worldwide. Psychosocial issues, developmental obstacles, physical challenges, and substance abuse are all key risk factors for sexual abuse, according to global studies. Sexual harassment is a violation of a student's fundamental human rights and is caused by a complex web of familial, social, psychological, and economic circumstances (Assink et al, 2019). Student sexual harassment is a major issue in a number of African countries, with children and adolescents being exploited for sex in exchange for money or other forms of payment such as food, shelter, and gifts (Russell, Higgins & Posso, 2020). Sexual assault against peers is very prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Sexual abuse was associated with school absence or dropout, sleep problems, multiple sexual partners, and mental health problems in Tanzania and Zambia (Brown, 2015).

In Ghana, students' sexual abuse is becoming a growing concern with survivors experiencing bad physical, emotional, behavioral, and educational results (Quarshie et al., 2021). Female sexual abuse has been proven to be more prevalent than male sexual abuse. As Markwei and Osei-Hwedie (2019) discovered, all the victims except one were female. Despite the detrimental consequences of sexual assault, students' sexual harassment in Ghana remains under-researched (Quarshie, 2021). Probably, the inadequacy of research explains why Aguilar and Baek (2020) found that sexual harassment in academe is underreported due to institutional and departmental barriers driven by power asymmetries. Furthermore, available research has tended to focus on the extent of sexual abuse of school children in Ghana, its forms, the primary reason for the abuse, and strategies for minimizing or eliminating the abuse (See, for example, Agu, Brown, Adamu-Issah & Duncan, 2018; Quarshie, 2021), while ignoring the effects of sexual harassment on the victims' academic performance. It is critical, therefore, that additional research be undertaken on the effects of sexual harassment on senior high school students' academic performance. The current study examines how sexual abuse impacts senior high school students in terms of academic performance, social behavior, the consequences of certain types of sexual abuse, the effects of sexual abuse on school retention rates and any policy intervention to address it in Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The study examines the effects of sexual abuse on school performance among senior high school students and policy interventions in Ghana.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To find out the effects of sexual harassment on school social behaviour among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.
- 2) To examine the impact of sexual harassment on academic performance among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.
- 3) To evaluate the effects of sexual harassment on school retention rate among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

- 4) To recommend any policy intervention to mitigate or address the prevalence of sexual harassment in Ghana.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does sexual harassment affect social behaviour of the victims in school?
2. How does sexual harassment affect academic performance of victims?
3. How does sexual harassment affect school retention rate among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana?
4. What policy intervention can be recommended to reduce/solve it?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework: Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF CBT) is a research-based treatment strategy for children, adolescents, and their caretakers who are experiencing trauma-related challenges. This approach is intended to mitigate negative emotional and behavioral responses in the aftermath of child sexual abuse, domestic violence, catastrophic loss, and other traumatic experiences. The treatment, which is based on cognitive and learning theories, addresses inaccurate ideas and attributions about the abuse and creates a supportive environment in which children are encouraged to discuss their horrific experience. In this study, TF CBT was used to assist non-abusive parents and caregivers in efficiently coping with their own emotional distress and developing skills to support their children. This idea is relevant to this study because it demonstrates the potential detrimental consequences of sexual abuse on children. Additionally, it proposes strategies for mitigating these impacts. It establishes a solid foundation for examining possibly concrete methods of mitigating the impacts of sexual abuse on teenagers in the research area.

Understanding Sexual Harassment

Student Sexual Harassment has maintained a high level of interest among academics globally, particularly in light of the increasing number of sexual assaults reported in educational institutions (Karami et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2021). There is, however, no widely accepted definition of sexual harassment, though it is frequently seen as a kind of bullying that has a detrimental effect on a student's psychological, physical, behavioural, and interpersonal well-being (Singh et al., 2014). Scholars appear to agree, however, that sexually harassing behaviors are obtrusive, may or may not be repetitive, and are generally disliked by the victim. Sexual harassment, as accentuated by Anwar, Stermann, Korkor, and Björkqvist (2020), is any physical, visual, or verbal sexual act experienced by a person from another person at the time or later that asserts a person's sexual identity over another person's identity, causing the person to feel embarrassed, frightened, hurt, uncomfortable, degraded, humiliated, or compromised, and which has the additional effect of eroding the person's power and confidence. Sexual harassment, according to this definition, can occur only when the recipient of the behaviour does not want or desire it. Put differently, this type

of behaviour is in direct opposition to an individual's will. The implication is that sexual harassment has the ability to elicit negative reactions in the victim, such as rage, despair, trauma, psychological distress, powerlessness, and low self-esteem. It is critical to understand that sexually harassing behaviours can be committed by any gender, which means that both males and females are likely to be sexual harassment victims. Unwanted sexual behaviours include unwanted verbal and nonverbal acts, as well as unwanted physical behaviors that the target finds difficult to cope with or manage. According to Robinson (2000), sexual harassment encompasses physical, visual, or verbal sexual acts that an individual asserts over the identity of another person making them feel uncomfortable, scared, hurt, humiliated or compromised which further results in weakening the person's confidence. Sivertsen et al. (2019) view sexual harassment as unsolicited sex-related behaviours that are offensive and threaten one's well-being. In line with this definition, behaviour is said to be sexual harassment if the recipient of that behaviour sees it as something against his or her free will. Perpetrators of this act, however, can be either gender. Unwanted sex-related behaviours include unsolicited verbal and non-verbal acts together with bad physical behaviours that victims find difficulty in handling. Due to its intrusive and offensive nature, sexual harassment has the potential to produce negative reactions such as anger, depression, trauma, psychological anxiety, powerlessness and reduced self-esteem of the victim (Imonikhe *et.*, 2012). In addition, sexual harassment encompasses aggressive behaviours (Gruber & Finneran, 2007) and serves to reinforce power imbalances between the sexes (Stein, 1999). According to the USA Department for Education and Civil Rights (2008), sexual harassment comprises acts such as touching of a sexual nature, making sexual comments, jokes, or gestures, writing graffiti or displaying or distributing sexually explicit drawings, pictures, or written materials and calling students sexually charged names, spreading sexual rumours, rating students on sexual activity or performance and circulating, showing or creating e-mails or Web sites of a sexual nature. Paludi (1997) establishes from his finding that, sexual harassment generates a feeling of a damaged self in whichever way a student who has experienced it chooses to react. As observed by Idoko, Ngane and Ogbe (2015), sexually harassing behaviours leave the victim feeling vulnerable, worthless and angry.

Globally, sexual harassment in educational institutions has been on an upward trajectory. This is confirmed by the USA National Advisory Council which observed that since 1980, sexual harassment in schools was an increasing problem (Till, 1980). Studies by (AAUW, 1993 & 2001) confirm that in 1993 and 2001, in every two minutes in the world someone was being sexually assaulted. A later study by the AAUW confirmed that in secondary schools, sexual harassment was on the rise with reports revealing that 8 in every 10 students experienced some form of sexual harassment while in school (AAUW, 2006). According to Hill and Holly (2011), sexual harassment begins in adolescence but increases in prevalence as students enter puberty. It is for this reason that the target population for this study was secondary school students whose ages generally range from 14 to 19 years old. Sexual harassment is considered a social and public health problem and a form of Gender-Based Violence (GBV). In evidence reported, studies reveal girls outnumber boys as victims (Gruber & Fineran, 2007).

To (De Wet, 2010), Sexual harassment is equated to bullying whose intention is to inflict injury or discomfort. More often, Sexual harassment occurs in relationships marked or perceived to be an imbalance of power. This probably explains why more females are reported as victims due to the perceived power differentials between them and males. In a national study on sexual harassment carried out in the USA, 46% of girls and 22% of boys reported experiencing uninvited sexual comments, gestures or jokes, while 13% of girls and 3% of boys mentioned being subjects of uncanvassed touch. The study revealed that 3.5% of girls and 0.2% of boys were forced to perform a sexual act and an equal number of boys and girls (18%) were called gay in a derogatory way (Hill & Holly, 2011). They further established that girls, especially those pretty and who have beautiful appearances were mostly at risk of sexual harassment. The World Bank (WB) in a study detected that sexual harassment has the likelihood of causing as much ill health and death to women between the ages of 15-44 as compared to cancer, malaria and traffic accidents combined (World Bank, 2004). Panos, (2003) believes that sexual harassment is a key source behind some reproductive health complications being faced by the female counterparts of our time. In addition, it is worth noticing that sexual harassment generates low self-esteem with students who are victims often feeling stigmatized and unable to freely partake in school activities (Fitzgerald, 2017).

Sexual harassment and School Social Behaviour

Sexual harassment has been linked to increased rates of depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual and relationship problems (Ramphabana, & Kgatla, 2022). Sigurdardottir and Halldorsdottir (2021) added that victims frequently suffer from chronic anxiety, tension, anxiety attacks, and phobias. Depression has been identified as the most frequently occurring long-term symptom among sufferers (Rothman, et al., 2021). Victims may have difficulties externalizing the abuse, leading to unfavorable self-images (Ensink, et al., 2020). After years of negative self-talk, victims develop sentiments of worthlessness and withdraw from others, believing they have nothing to contribute. According to Dye (2020), sexual abuse frequently results in long-term tension and worry. In a different light, sexual harassment as established by (Andrews *et al.*, 2004) leaves students at the mercy of violence and sexually abusive relationship throughout their lives. That's often engaging in uncommon behaviours such as drug and substance abuse as well as prostitution. Male victims of sexual harassment completely share equal negative social consequences as their opposite sex (Jewkes *et al.*, 2010). Several researches have established that sexual abuse affects students adversely in terms of confidence and self-esteem. According to Hall and Lloyd (1993), from the onset of the abuse right into adulthood, being sexually harassed connotes those students have been violated physically, emotionally, and sexually and their trust has been betrayed.

In educational institutions, teachers are expected to care for the students. The dilemma, therefore, is why a teacher, who should rather care for them, is rather the operating source of the victim's pain and fear (De Witt, 2009; Spies, 2006). The student who has been sexually harassed, or is not sure who to trust (Hall & Lloyd, 1993). There is a correlation between sexual harassment and depression, guilt, shame, self-blame, eating disorders, somatic concerns, anxiety, dissociative patterns, repression, denial, sexual problems and relationship problems. Depression, the most

common long-term symptom among survivors is a pressing challenge that victims face. Students who endured sexual harassment may have difficulty in externalizing the abuse, thus thinking negatively about themselves (Hartman, 2017). Victims have feelings of unimportance and completely avoid people because they believe they have less offer of significance (Long, 2016).

Ratican (2015) established that suicidal attempts, depression, sleeplessness and disturbed eating patterns are major consequences of sexual harassment of students. When one is sexually harassed by an adult, the student struggles to comprehend the perpetrator in a negative light, thus leaving them incapable of seeing what happened as not their fault. Victims blame themselves instead of internalizing negative messages about themselves. This results in the likelihood of self-destructive behaviours and suicidal attempts as compared to those not sexually harassed. The long-term effect of sexual harassment includes dissatisfaction with body outlook and eating disorders. Some other effects may be related to pelvic pain, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and difficulty in swallowing (Ratican, 2015). Also, anxiety and stress are common lasting effects of sexual harassment. One can be frightened and stressed during or after the experience ceases. On several occasions, victims experience chronic anxiety, tension. Anxiety attacks, and phobias (Browne, 2016). Difficulty in establishing an interpersonal relationship is a corresponding factor of sexual harassment which may later hinder the development and growth of relationships. Some among them are fear of intimacy, difficulties with trust, passive behaviours and getting involved in abusive relationships, fear of being different or weird and trouble establishing interpersonal boundaries (Ratican, 2015). Findings by Feinauer (2017) identify that sexual harassment is often initiated by trusted adults. This breaks trust and results in victims being certain of being hurt by people they trust most (Pearson, 2016). National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2015) identifies a list of top ten sexual symptoms that often result from experiences of sexual abuse. These include, (a) lacking interest in sex (b) approaching sex as an obligation (c) Being angry, disgusted feeling guilt when touched (d) arousal dysfunction or feeling sensation, and (e) feeling emotionally distant or not present during sex (f) experiencing disturbing sexual thoughts and images (g) engaging in inappropriate sexual behaviours (h) difficulty establishing an intimate relationship (i) experiencing vaginal pain or orgasmic difficulties in women and (j) erectile, ejaculatory, or orgasmic difficulties in men. Predictors of sexual dysfunction in a study conducted in the United States revealed that victims of sexual harassment encounter sexual problems more than the general population. It was revealed that male survivors of sexual harassment were more likely to experience erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation and low sexual desire meanwhile, they found that ladies were more likely to have arousal disorders (Laumann, 2016).

Sexual harassment and Academic Performance

Sexual harassment is often believed to have a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement, (Usui & Blevins, 2021). Students who have been sexually molested typically have a shorter attention span in class (Berman, 2020). Klein and Martin (2021) recommended, among other things, that the effects of sexual abuse on students' classroom behavior and subsequent academic performance be addressed in educational policy forums; and those parents should always relate to their children with love and affection while also providing for their needs. In schools,

these symptoms emerge as pupils' inability to concentrate, complete coursework on time, or comprehend academics; feelings of fear, frustration, and self-doubt; low grades; and being told they are slow or lazy (Tsegba, Ologele, Jidda & Stephen, 2021). Several authors have indicated that sexual harassment negatively affects academic performance (Bromberg & Johnson, 2001; Patel & Andrew, 2001).

Sexual harassment has the potency of negative consequences on students' (Doodaa *et al.*, 2022) and it tends to cause discomfiture and self-consciousness, compounding an emotional state of timidity and insecurity coupled with a lack of confidence. In effect, victims feel reluctant to attend to school when sexually abused, burdened to be audible in class, or struggle to pay attention in class. Similarly, female victims who have been sexually harassed have worse academic outcomes than their male victims with adolescent girls having had weak grades (Brown *et al.*, 2020). Several authors (De Witt, 2009; Bakar & Hodes, 2007; Louw, 2000) have indicated that the academic prospects of sexually abused students are messed up and it affects intensely, students' ability to focus at school. However, Hall and Lloyd (1993) disputed by opposing that; some sexually abused students divert their frustration and pain into focusing on their academic work as a means of compensation mechanism: hence making them excel highly in academics.

Sexual abuse is a causative agent for the negative effects on students' academic performance Rew (2015). Sexually harassed students hardly pay attention in class. When Adolescents are abused, they are characterized as the inability to concentrate, finish schoolwork soon enough, or understand lessons; being abysmal, frustrated, feeling bad about themselves; weak grade achievers; and being called lazy or dull (Larkin, 2016). Research conducted by Nyakerario (2013) disclosed that the major category of sexual harassment prevalent in the community was interfamilial sexual abuse: whereby close relatives were sexually harassing them, and both male culprits and girls were found to be the common survivors of the vice. Their study further revealed that the majority of the respondents knew of father-daughter sexual abuse, almost everybody knew of father-son, 19% for mother-son, 19% for sibling-incest, 83% on rape, 66% on sodomy, 19% on paedophilia correspondingly. The consequences of such acts reported by Nyakerario were teenage pregnancies, school dropouts, and disease infection. Based on the above sexual harassment has lasting consequences on the lives of survivors, as a result of their personal experiences and memories of these practices (Spies, 2016). The journey to adulthood contributes to how one develops into a self-sufficient and independent adult. Students process external experiences and then internalize them to form a basis on which they interact with the world. Hence it translates to how the student will academically perform since there is a likelihood of psychological effect, which leads to stigma and logjam and loss of self-confidence. Spies (2016), indicated from his findings that, information taken in, processed and internalized by sexually harassed children has a dire effect on the child's academic performance. The reality of a child recalling other external stimuli that may have felt while the abuse continued (Freyd, 2017). Academic performance challenges and behaviour experienced by sexually harassed children may impact negatively on future advancement in academics and eventually disrupt the development of promising life skills including self-discipline and the ability to sustain effective work roles (Ferrara, 2015). Sexual harassment has a profound

effect on a child's potency to develop skills and abilities, it affects almost every aspect of the child's growth and development thus, development of concentration problems at school, and anxiety regarding school attendance. Instabilities in school performance led to low self-esteem which directly increases fear and guilt (De Witt, 2016). Ah Hing (2016) offered recommendations to teachers of students who are or have been sexually harassed. He opined those teachers should be taught practical measures to control sexual harassment to help students who are likely to be victims of this happening in schools. Olatunji (2014) also recommended; that the effects of sexual abuse on children's classroom behaviour and later academic performance should be a priority in the education policy forum; and that parents should have good relationships, and positively affect and also provide for the needs of their children.

Sexual Harassment and School Retention Rate

Sexual harassment victims are more likely than their peers to drop out of school before graduating. Mengo and Black (2016), for example, discovered that students who had been subjected to both physical/verbal and sexual assault not only had a significant decline in their grade point average, but were also more likely to drop out of university. Similarly, Koss (2015) revealed that one in five victims in the United States do not complete high school, reducing their lifetime earning potential by 20%. Eisenman (2015) reported that the greatest rates were found in Sub-Saharan African countries, where approximately 22% of primary school learners and 21% of senior high school students drop out each year. The indication is that sexual harassment is pandemic in educational institutions of Africa and are a major constraint on the ability of students to pursue their studies. This necessitates additional research into how sexual harassment and its harmful psychological consequences might be mitigated or prevented. Many young ladies have dropped classes, had poor grades, limited socialization, and may even drop out of school altogether. In a related study by Plan Ghana, similar effects of sexual harassment have been discovered on female students in Ghana. It was discovered that sexually harassed victims exhibit distorted attention in class, loss of interest in education, develop a fear for their perpetrators, experience stigma, and withdraw completely from peers and other school activities. Notable of the literature is that victims of sexual harassment are disadvantaged in benefiting from educational opportunities or are forced to exit school due to pregnancy and early motherhood challenges (Andrews *et al.*, 2004). Victims of sexual harassment are more susceptible to drop out of secondary school before completing as compared to their peers. According to Finkelhor (2014), a study conducted in the USA on sexual abuse, whereby 1 in 5 girls and 1 in 20 boys is a victim of sexual harassment; studies show that 20% of adult females and 5-10% of adult males recall a sexual abuse incident; during a year in the U.S., 16% of youth between ages 14 to 17 had been sexually abused; throughout their lifetime, 28% of U.S. youth ages 14 to 17 had been sexually harassed and adolescents were more vulnerable victims.

Related Studies in Ghana

Several researches have established that sexual harassment is prevalent in Ghana. Agu *et al.*, (2018) explored and documented the extent of sexual abuse of school children in Ghana and initiate an informed dialogue with all stakeholders for solutions. Their findings revealed that there is

evidence suggesting the occurrence of sexual abuse in Ghana public schools. About 11.2% of the children who responded had been victims of either rape or defilement which is 'the natural or unnatural carnal knowledge of any child under sixteen years of age. The occurrence and severity of abuse are strongly related to gender. 92% of victims were female students. According to Quarshie (2021), girls were approximately three times more likely to report sexual harassment victimization than boys. Female sexual violence victimization was particularly connected with breakup, sexual minority status, and disagreement with parents. Markwei and Osei-Hwedie (2019) found that four major themes define the victims' experiences: (a) forced sex, (b) incest, (c) jollyng, and (d) transactional sex. Additionally, their investigation uncovered sociocultural elements that contribute to the normalization of sexual abuse in the Ga Community in Ghana. These studies emphasize the importance of developing effective prevention programs and policy initiatives to safeguard students and assist victims of sexual abuse. Doodaa *et al.*, (2022) conducted a study on sexual harassment against female students in senior high schools in Bono region of Ghana and the findings of their study revealed that: (i) majority of the participants knew about the issue of sexual harassment of female students in schools; (ii) verbal sexual harassment was the most common form of sexual harassment; and (iii) that the victims of sexual harassment generally feel uncomfortable, stigmatized, and ashamed after being harassed.

Bordoh *et al.*, (2016) evaluated perceptions of students' Sexual Abuse in Selected Senior High Schools in the Mfantseman Municipality of Ghana. Their results show that sexual abuse is frequent and female students are mostly the victims of sexual abuse and teachers are the most perpetrators. Their results further indicated that factors responsible for sexual abuse were; age, gender, care arrangement/parental absence, substance abuse and parental level of education, school and schooling environment, demographic risk factor/unemployment of a parent, poverty and poor parent-student relationship. The causes of student sexual abuse according to the respondents' perceptions Bordoh *et al.*, (2016) were rooted in the structural, economic and socio-cultural context within our social fibre. Bordoh *et al.*, (2016) concluded that senior high schools present a prime target for perpetrators of sexual abuse because most schools have few if any protective barriers in place. Thus, the current study examines the situation of sexual harassment among senior high students and their academic performance in order to determine the most effective methods for minimizing sexual harassment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The descriptive survey design helped the researchers identify cases of sexual harassment in selected senior high schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.

Research Site

This study was carried out in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The Ashanti Region is centrally located in the middle belt of Ghana, and shares boundaries with six of the sixteen political regions, Bono, Bono East and Ahafo Regions in the north, Eastern region in the east, Central region in the south

and Western region in the South west. The region is divided into 43 Metropolitan Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDA's), comprising 1 Metropolitan, 18 Municipal, and 24 District Assemblies. Out of the 43 MMDA's, the current study involved 8, namely: *Sekyere South District*, *Sekyere Central District*, *Mampong Municipal*, *Ejura Sekyere Municipal*, *Ejisu Municipal*, *Kumasi Metro*, *Sekyere East*, *Juaben Municipal* and *Offinso District*. These MMDA's for the study were selected owing to its proximity to the researcher. All the private and public senior high school in the selected MMDA's were involved.

Table 1 illustrates the number of schools involved with respect to their MMDA's

N o.	MMDA	Number of schools	Names of school
1.	Sekyere South	9	[1] Agona SDA Senior High School [2] Agona Senior High Technical School [3] Okomfo Anokye Senior High School [4] Adu Gyamfi Senior High School [5] Konadu Yiadom Senior High School [6] Agyeiko Senior High School [7] Fast Track College [8] Frimpong College [9] Mountain High Senior High School
2.	Sekyere Central	3	[1] Nsutaman Cath. Senior High School [2] Ghana Muslim Mission Senior High School [3] Presby Senior High/Tech School, Kwamang
3.	Mampong Municipal	6	[1] Opoku Agyeman Senior High/Tech School [2] Kofiase Adventist Senior High/Tech School [3] Amaniampong Senior High School [4] St. Joseph Sem/Senior High School, Mampong [5] St. Monica's Senior High School, Mampong [6] Oduko Boatemaa Senior High School
4.	Ejura Sekyeredumasi	2	[1] Ejuraman Anglican Senior High School [2] Sekyedumase Senior High Technical School
5.	Ejisu Municipal	7	[1] Achinakrom Senior high school School [2] Bonwire Senior high school Technical School [3] Church of Christ Senior High School [4] Ejisuman Senior high school School [5] Ejisu Senior high school Technical School [6] Onwe Senior High School [7] St. Sebastian Cath. Senior High School
6.	Kumasi Metro	10	[1] Adventist Senior High School [2] Anglican Senior High School

			[3] Asanteman Senior high school School [4] KNUST Senior High School [5] Kumasi Girls Senior high school School [6] Kumasi Senior High Technical school [7] Osei Kyeretwie Senior high school School [8] Kumasi Academy [9] Ghana Armed Forces Senior High School [10] <u>Prempeh College</u>
7.	Sekyere East	4	[1] Effiduase Senior high school [2] Krobea Asante Vocational/Technical Institute [3] T.I. Ahmadiyya Girls Senior High School [4] Tweneboa Kodua Senior high school School
8.	Offinso	4	[1] Akumadan Senior high school [2] Dwamena Akenten Senior high school [3] Namong Senior high school [4] St. Jerome Senior high school
9.	Juaben	1	[1] Juaben Senior high school School
		4600	

Target Population

The researcher focused exclusively on form three students from the selected senior high schools. These students were chosen because by the time they reach this class, they would have gained an understanding of the repercussions of sexual harassment and their experimentation with sex. Additionally, the researcher was able to track their academic performance from form one to form three, when their abstract thinking is established and senior high school students become more conscious of sexual harassment and its ramifications. Academic performance was evaluated by analyzing the study participants' perceptions.

Sampling Procedure and Sampling Size

The simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select students and school's teacher counsellors respectively from each school. Purposive sampling was used for purposes of ensuring that only form three students were sampled. On its part, random sampling was chosen for purposes of ensuring that each student within the sampling frame had equal chances of being selected. In this case, the students were presented with a basket of shuffled up pieces of paper written either "yes" or "no". Those who chose "yes" were the ones who were selected to participate in the study. At the same time, school principals were sampled from each selected schools. 100 students in form three (3) per school were targeted. That is, in all, 4,600 students from 46 senior high schools were involved in the study.

Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used the self-administered structured students' questionnaire to collect data from the students and interview for the schoolteacher counsellors.

Data Processing and Analysis

The data collected using questionnaire was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24. The researcher derived descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means. The application of inferential statistics Multiple Regression Analysis was used to examine the relationships between the independent variable (sexual harassment) and the dependent variables (retention rate in school, social behavior, and academic performance). Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data from interviews. These findings were utilized to corroborate the results of the student questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section provides an analysis and presentation of the data obtained using the questionnaire as well as semi-structured interview

Effects of Sexual Harassment on School Social Behaviour

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the acts of sexual harassment significantly predicted participants' school social behaviour. The results of the regression (Table 2) indicated that the predictors explained 19.7% of the variance in school social behaviour ($R^2 = 0.197$, $F(6,450) = 18.4$, $p < .001$). It was found that unhealthy sexual touch significantly predicted school social behaviour ($\beta = -0.234$, $p < .001$), as did sexual exploitation ($\beta = -0.092$, $p < .01$) (Table 3). Therefore, unhealthy sexual touch and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on school social behaviour.

Table 2: Model Fitness

R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Df 1	Df 2	p
0.444	0.197	0.186	18.412	6	450	< .001

Table 3: Model Coefficients (School Social Behaviour)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	p
Constant	1.719	0.098	17.479	< .001
Unhealthy Sexual Touch	-0.234	0.036	6.443	< .001
Indecent Exposure	0.038	0.041	0.931	0.353
Verbal Abuse	-0.041	0.027	-1.490	0.137
Sexual Exploitation	-0.092	0.028	3.297	.001
Defilement	-0.188	0.305	-0.616	0.538
Rape	0.054	0.040	1.365	0.173

Effects of Sexual Harassment on Academic Performance

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the acts of sexual harassment significantly predicted participants' academic performance. The results of the regression (Table 4) indicated that the predictors explained 15.8% of the variance in academic performance ($R^2 = 0.158$, $F(6,451) = 14.1$, $p < .001$). It was found that unhealthy sexual touch significantly predicted academic performance ($\beta = -0.143$, $p < .001$), as did indecent exposure ($\beta = -0.078$, $p < .05$) and sexual exploitation ($\beta = -0.053$, $p < .05$) (Table 5). Therefore, unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on academic performance.

Table 4: Model Fitness

R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Df 1	Df 2	p
0.398	0.158	0.147	14.135	6	451	< .001

Table 5: Model Coefficients (Academic Performance)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	p
Constant	1.527	0.084	18.240	< .001
Unhealthy Sexual Touch	-0.143	0.031	4.628	< .001
Indecent Exposure	-0.078	0.035	2.249	0.025
Verbal Abuse	0.002	0.023	0.069	0.945
Sexual Exploitation	-0.053	0.024	2.240	0.026
Defilement	-0.182	0.260	0.702	0.483
Rape	0.039	0.034	1.169	0.243

Effects of Sexual Harassment on School Retention Rate

Multiple regression analysis was used to test if the acts of sexual harassment significantly predicted school retention rate. The results of the regression (Table 6) indicated that the predictors explained 16.1% of the variance in school retention rate ($R^2 = 0.161$, $F(6,451) = 14.4$, $p < .001$). It was found that unhealthy sexual touch significantly predicted school retention rate ($\beta = -0.137$, $p < .001$), as did indecent exposure ($\beta = -0.074$, $p < .05$) and sexual exploitation ($\beta = -0.048$, $p < .05$) (Table 7). Therefore, unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on school retention rate.

Table 6: Model Fitness

R	R²	Adjusted R²	F	Df 1	Df 2	p
0.401	0.161	0.149	14.388	6	451	< .001

Table 7: Model Coefficients (School Retention Rate)

Predictor	Estimate	SE	T	p
Constant	1.383	0.077	17.96	< .001
Unhealthy Sexual Touch	-0.137	0.028	4.802	< .001
Indecent Exposure	-0.074	0.032	2.325	0.020
Verbal Abuse	-0.003	0.021	0.132	0.895
Sexual Exploitation	-0.048	0.022	2.207	0.028
Defilement	0.127	0.239	0.532	0.595
Rape	0.036	0.031	1.175	0.241

DISCUSSIONS

This study sought to identify the prevalence of sexual harassment in senior high schools in selected districts of the Ashanti region. The study also sought to examine how the experience of sexual harassment affects school social behaviour, academic performance and school retention rates. Additionally, the study sought to identify effective strategies to mitigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in senior high schools (policy direction). The study found that more than a third (32.1%) of students had experienced any form of sexual harassment and majority of the perpetrators were male (90%) and peers (33.8%). These results confirm the earlier findings of Leach et. al. (2003) who found that abusive behaviours by male pupils, teachers and sugar daddies did exist in the Ghanaian school context. The findings of this study revealed that more than two-thirds of perpetrators had been male. These findings show that whereas there were various types of perpetrators however the majority of perpetrators were peers. This confirms to a similar study conducted by Idoko *et al.*, (2015).

To evaluate the effects of sexual harassment on school social behaviour among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study found out that predictors explained 19.7% of the variance in school social behaviour and further revealed that unhealthy sexual touch significantly ($p < .001$) predicted school social behaviour. Therefore, unhealthy sexual touch and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on school social behaviour. American Psychiatric Association (2013) showed that victims of sexual abuse end up having a negative psychological effect on their children. Baye and Gidey (2014) found a negative effect of sexual harassment on self-esteem ($\beta = -0.83$). This indicates that sexual harassment has a damaging significant impact on self-esteem and therefore students who have higher experiences of sexual harassment tend to have lower self-esteem. Kyale (2021) attributed variation in School Social Behaviour performance could be explained by child sexual abuse, $r^2 = 0.827$.

To evaluate the effects of sexual harassment on academic performance among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The predictors explained 15.8% of the variance in academic performance. Furthermore, the study found that unhealthy sexual touch significantly ($p < .001$) predicted academic performance, as did indecent exposure ($p < .05$) and sexual exploitation ($p < .05$). In short unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on academic performance. Sexual harassment has been reported to negatively affect academic performance (Rew, 2015; Larkin, 2016). Baye and Gidey (2014) found out there is a chain of impact of sexual harassment on academic performance. They further indicated that sexual harassment ends up in lower self-esteem, engages less academically and demonstrates lower levels of academic success. Their study revealed strength in the effect of sexual harassment ($\beta = -0.83$) and that of self-esteem on academic engagement ($\beta = 0.68$) which in turn significantly predicts academic success ($\beta = 0.39$). Kyale (2021) found out that the variation in academic performance could be explained by child sexual abuse, $r^2 = 0.847$. Results of Adelana & Amadi (2022) indicated that teachers and students accepted there is a significant negative influence of indecent dressing on the academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Usui and Blevins (2021) reported that pupils in schools where sexual harassment is reported, either from their peers or from their teachers, marked statistically significant lower examination scores than peers without experiences of sexual harassment.

To evaluate the effects of sexual harassment on school retention rate among senior high school students in selected districts in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Predictors explained 16.1% of the variance in school retention rate. Again, unhealthy sexual touch significantly predicted school retention rate ($p < .001$), as did indecent exposure ($p < .05$) and sexual exploitation ($p < .05$). Unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and sexual exploitation had significant negative effects on school retention rate. Kyale (2021) stated that variation in school retention could be explained by child sexual abuse, $r^2 = 0.871$. There have been several reports of high level of dropout among students who are sexually abused (Eisenman, 2015; Newsom, 2017; Kang'ethe, 2016).

To recommend any policy intervention to mitigate or address the prevalence of sexual harassment in Ghana. School counselors and headteachers gave out recommended interventions to mitigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in Ghana. These include awareness campaigns, training of teachers, inclusion of sexual violence in school curriculum, empowerment of victims, encouraging easy reporting of sexual harassment and appropriate reporting systems, parental involvement, conducive and safe school environment, strict law enforcement, challenging cultural beliefs. However, several authors have given out several recommendations and these include the giving of orientation to freshly admitted students immediately after their registration exercise on indecent dressing (Adelana & Amadi, 2022) and orientation on sexual harassment and its consequences to members of the school community (Baye and Gidey, 2014; U-Sayee, and Adomako, 2021), conference, seminars, and workshops should be organized to create awareness on unethical issues and punishment for unethical behaviour such as indecent dressing (Adelana & Amadi, 2022). U-Sayee, and Adomako (2021) stated that to act as a deterrent, policies on sexual harassment in senior

high schools should be implemented, and teachers implicated in sexual assault scandals should have their licenses revoked. Furthermore, Sayee, and Adomako (2021) stated that all senior high schools can display billboards and posters on their campuses to publicized the impact of sexual harassment on teaching and learning.

Suggested Strategies to Curb Sexual Harassment in Senior High Schools; Nine (9) themes emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions with school counselors and headteachers. The themes cover insightful recommendations that if implemented will help curb sexual harassment in senior high schools. All the nine themes have been presented in turns in the sections below.

- **Awareness campaigns**

A common view amongst interviewees and discussants was the need to raise awareness within the broader Ghanaian society about the adverse effects of sexual harassment. For example, one interviewee said;

“There is the need to have awareness-raising campaigns in communities where people can be made aware of the challenges posed by sexual violence” (School counselor 8).

According to them, such campaigns should be used to sensitize all relevant stakeholders in the community about acts that are accepted to be normal but are indeed acts of sexual violence. The comment below illustrates this perspective;

“In these meetings children, teachers, parents, and community members could be sensitized and conscientized about the various situations which they dismiss to be ‘innocent’ exchanges but are indeed acts of violence” (Headteacher 2).

Talking about this issue an interviewee said; *also learn about and discuss their rights” (School counselor 4)*

- **Training of teachers**

A recurrent theme in the interviews and focus group discussions was a sense amongst interviewees and discussants that teacher training should be a priority area if the issue of sexual harassment is to be effectively tackled. For them several questions have been raised about the unprofessional conduct of some teachers in the study schools. As one discussant put it;

“...efforts to prevent sexual harassment in schools should also focus on teacher training. Teachers need to be trained on ethical and professional standards” (Headteacher 23).

Another interviewee alluded to the notion that;

“It is imperative that teachers need to be acquainted with issues on children’s rights and protection to acquire the skills needed to apply a more open and gender-sensitive education, which prioritizes children’s knowledge, opinions and viewpoints” (School counselor 17).

- **Inclusion of sexual violence in school curriculum**

This theme came up in the focus group discussions when one headteacher raised the issue of the abandoned Comprehensive Sexual Education and how it might have helped deal with this issue of sexual harassment in senior high schools. On this particular issue, divergent and often conflicting discourses emerged. However, one thing that was clear was the need to have some form of continuous reorientation of students on the issue of sexual violence as one participant commented;

“...sexual violence should become part of the school curriculum by being included in Life Orientation. Teachers need to teach about gender and violence, and sexuality education” (Headteacher 11).

- **Empowerment of Victims**

The majority of the discussants felt that there is the need to empower both learners and female teachers who are mostly the victims of sexual violence. In one case, a school counselor suggested that;

“Learners and female teachers need to be empowered to stand up against acts of sexual violence in schools. They need to be sensitized about their rights and supported in protecting and enjoying such rights” (School counselor 29).

- **Encouraging easy reporting of Sexual Harassment and appropriate reporting systems**

Two discrete perspectives emerged from this theme. First, was the need to encourage early reporting of acts of sexual harassment in schools as captured in the view of one discussant;

“Teachers and learners should be encouraged to consistently report cases of sexual harassment and not to report only when it suits them” (School counselor 5).

The second perspective was the need to have appropriate procedures for reporting cases of sexual harassment in which victims can feel secured and protected after reporting acts of sexual harassment. The quote below illustrates this perspective;

“...without trustworthy and confidential procedures within schools, the number of reported cases will remain extremely low. Reporting should be kept confidential and private (Headteacher 13).

On this same issue another interviewee had this to say;

“Effective support services such as confidential counselling and helplines can encourage victims to come forward and report” (School counselor 11).

- **Parental involvement**

Concerns were expressed about the complicit role parents play when it come to the issue of sexual harassment. Some discussants were of the view that parents are not doing much in the home to empower their wards to stand up against perpetrators of sexual harassment. To them, if parents get involved and stand their feet in cases of sexual harassment in the home to empower their wards, they are likely to transfer this attitude to school and stand up to sexual harassment in schools. The comment below illustrates this view;

“Parents need to be encouraged to speak openly about sexual harassment against their children and to stop colluding with perpetrators by accepting bribes or payments for damages” (School counselor 32).

- **Conducive and safe school environment**

A number of issues were identified concerning the atmosphere in senior high schools. First, was the need to promote open and productive student-teacher relationships as remarked by one discussant;

“Teachers should be seen as approachable and trustworthy to encourage reporting by learners. They need to show love and care to learners so that they [students] become free to come forward if they experience sexual harassment” (Headteacher 3, emphasis added).

Another view centered around the need to promote safe classrooms. To some of the discussants, classrooms are a common place where sexual harassment takes place. In view of this one discussant opined that;

Teachers should ensure constant monitoring of classrooms throughout the day and should refrain from leaving girls to sweep unsupervised after school” (School counselor 18).

- **Strict law enforcement**

Issues related to law enforcement were not particularly prominent in the interview and discussions. However, a number of school counselors were concerned about the weak law enforcement efforts in senior high schools when it comes to sexual harassment, especially those that involve teachers. According to them, this gives perpetrators the moral license to continue victimizing the vulnerable. Suggesting solutions to curb sexual harassment in this regard, one interviewee had this to say;

“...therefore, school management, teacher unions, police, parents, and school management should be decisive in enforcing regulations and codes of conduct in educational institutions” (School counselor 9).

Another had this to say;

“Prevention policies, as well as grievance procedures need to be clear and implemented without fear nor favour” (School counselor 23).

- **Challenging cultural beliefs**

When the issue of culture was raised by the interviewer, the participants were unanimous in the view that sexual harassment happens within a social and cultural context of dominant patriarchal gender relations. For them economic marginalization of women and the lack of confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to protect women against sexual violence are some of the reasons why sexual harassment abounds. In view of this, one discussant suggested strongly that;

“Male masculinity should then be challenged and teachers do this by openly discussing sensitive topics... in which traditional cultural views are questioned” (Headteacher 16).

Another discussant had this to say;

“...learners must be allowed to express fears and to seek advice without fear of retaliation at school or at home” (School counselor 2).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that unhealthy sexual touch, indecent exposure and, sexual exploitation is among the key factors that predicted academic performance of students and their ability to recall what taught in school. This brings to the fore that sexual harassment still predates on students thereby having an influence on their academic ability at the pre-tertiary level.

The study recommended awareness campaigns, training of teachers, inclusion of sexual violence in school curriculum, empowerment of victims, encouraging easy reporting of sexual violence in school curriculum, empowerment of victims, encouraging easy reporting of sexual harassment and appropriate reporting systems, parental involvement, conducive and safe school environment, strict law enforcement and, challenging cultural beliefs as policy interventions to mitigate or address the prevalence of sexual harassment in Ghana.

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