

A Comparison between the Consequences of Peer Sexual Harassment for Boys and Girls

Lynette Jacobs and Corene de Wet

*School of Education Studies, University of the Free State, PO Box 339,
Bloemfontein, 9300, South Africa*
Telephone: +27514012326, Fax: +27514013077, E-mail: dewetnc@ufs.ac.za

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ABSTRACT This article reports on findings of a concurrent mixed method study on gender differentiating consequences of peer sexual harassment for learners in the Free State Province of South Africa. A self-reporting questionnaire, based on Fitzgerald's Sexual Experience Questionnaire and Timmerman's questionnaire on unwanted sexual behaviour in secondary schools, was completed by 474 Grade 8-12 learners (286 girls, 180 boys, and gender not indicated for 8). The average age of the respondents (in completed years) was 17.0 years. Frequency tables, ratios, Spearman's rho, Kendall's tau, χ^2 - and t-tests, as well as coding frames were used to analyse the data. The qualitative and quantitative data reveal that contrary to popular belief and most sexual harassment research findings, the consequences of sexual harassment for boys and girls are more similar than different. Boys, however, experience sexual harassment as more flattering and "normal" than girls. This study shows that boys who have been subjected to sexual harassment feel more like fools, embarrassed and powerless than their female counterparts. It may, therefore, be concluded that whilst female victims react more emotionally, male victims react in terms of their idea of masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

Through her critical analysis of letters, recorded conversations, interviews, women's writings, fiction and newspaper articles Farley (1978) shows that the practice of sexual harassment was rife in nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe, Britain and the USA. Indeed, until recently, this way of treating women was considered by many to be acceptable. In 1968, Farley, while discussing employment issues with a group of women, recognised that unwanted attention was a common problem at work. She noted that it was detrimental and repressive and labelled it as "sexual harassment". In her book, Farley (1978) describes how women talk about how their bosses and other colleagues stroke and touch them, making sexual innuendoes and propositions and in some cases, actually sexually assault them. Sexual harassment was consequently generally recognised as a problem in the workplace and in colleges.

It was, however, not until the 1980s that attention focused on the harassment of school-age children (Grube and Lens 2003). One possible reason for this relative lack of attention is the belief that sexual harassment is normative for teens (Fineran and Bennett 1999). Stein's unpublished seminal survey (1981, in Fineran and Bennett 1999) among 71 members of three high school learner councils and a vocational high

school was probably the first systematic attempt to investigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in schools. The 1992 poll by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), *Hostile Hallways*, was the first comprehensive study conducted in schools. Prior to this date, retrospective studies of (mostly female) university students attempted to shed light on the problem in American schools (Grube and Lens 2003). The first noteworthy research on sexual harassment in African schools was carried out in Zimbabwe by Leach and Machakanja (2000) (cf. Leach et al. 2003). Since the publication of the Zimbabwe report, a major study of violence against girls in South African schools entitled *Scared at schools: Sexual violence against girls in South African schools* has been produced (HRW 2001). The report on abuse of girls in Zimbabwean schools revealed that for girls, the greatest threat of abusive behaviour on a daily basis came from older male learners in the school, in the form of aggressive sexual advances at times – usually when the girl rejected the boy's advances – turned to assault and threats of rape. Abusive behaviour by educators, in the form of requests of demands for sex, unsolicited and provocative or insulting physical contact and verbal abuse was also mentioned by those who took part in the study as relative common forms of abuse directed at schoolgirls (Leach et al. 2003). The study furthermore found that the

abuse of girls in schools is part of “a wider problem of school-based violence ... and is also a reflection of society-wide violence by males against females” (Leach et al. 2003:4). The core findings of the HRW investigation into sexual violence against girls in South African schools are to a large extent a mirror image of the findings of abuse against girls in Zimbabwe. According to HRW report,

South African girls continue to be raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed, and assaulted at school by male classmates and teachers. For many South African girls, violence and abuse are an inevitable part of the school environment (HRW 2001:1).

The majority of international research in the area of sexual harassment in school has been concerned with establishing the prevalence or the incidence rate of this behaviour (Clift and Maloney 2004; DeSouza and Ribeiro 2005; Leach et al. 2003; USAID 2003; Winters et al. 2004; Zeira et al. 2002), the consequences for the victims (Duffy et al. 2004; Gådin and Hammarström 2005; Gruber and Fineran 2007; Hand and Sanchez 2000; Timmerman 2004; Timmerman 2002; Winters et al. 2004), the gendered nature of unwanted sexual behaviour (Dunne et al. 2006; Harber 2004; Leach 2003; Leach 2002; Timmerman 2005), educators’ attitudes, perceptions and responses towards peer sexual harassment (Stone and Coach 2004), as well as the judiciary and human rights aspects of sexual harassment (Grube and Lens 2003; Thro 2006).

Research on sexual harassment in the South African context focuses on the prevalence of educator-to-learner harassment (Deane 2003; George 2001; HRW 2001; Prinsloo 2006), peer sexual harassment (Deane 2003; De Wet 2007; Fineran et al. 2003; Fineran et al. 2001; Van Vuuren and Jacobson 1997), sexual harassment as a violation of the human and constitutional rights of victims (De Wet 2007; Prinsloo 2006; Prinsloo 2005), the consequences of sexual harassment (HRW 2001) and the gendered nature of harassment and sexual violence (Brookes and Higson-Smith 2004; Mabusela 2006; Morrell 2002; Morrell 1998).

Whilst Herbert (1992) argues from a feminist perspective that men cannot be sexually harassed (by females) in male-dominated societies, the groundbreaking research by AAUW (1992, in Hyman and Snook 1999), as well as contem-

porary researchers (Benbenishty and Astor 2005; Winters et al. 2004; Zeira et al. 2002; Fineran and Bennett 1999) found that both boys and girls can be victims, as well as perpetrators of sexual harassment. Whereas several researchers looked at the impact of sexual harassment on female victims (for example, Gruber and Fineran 2007; HRW 2001), little research could be found on the differentiating impact of sexual harassment on boys and girls (Duffy et al. 2004; Gådin and Hammarström 2005; Hand and Sanchez 2000; Timmerman 2005). A reading of the South African sexual harassment literature reveals a lack of research on gender differentiating consequences of harassment (De Wet 2007; HRW 2001). The aim of this article is, therefore, to address the foresaid hiatus. This article will report on findings of a concurrent mixed method study on sexual harassment in schools in the Free State Province (South Africa).

WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?

Harassment based on sex, gender or sexual orientation is defined by the *Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act* (RSA 2000:4) as

Unwanted conduct which is persistent or serious and demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences and which is related to

- (a) sex, gender or sexual orientation; and
- (b) a person’s membership or presumed membership of a group identified by one or more of the prohibited grounds or a characteristic associated with such groups.

The aforementioned act thus describes sexual harassment as unwanted conduct related to sex, gender or sexual orientation, or a person’s membership of a group, such as females.

De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005:29) identified the following categories of sexual harassment: *gender harassment*, including generalised sexist statements and behaviour that convey insulting, degrading and/or sexist attitudes; *seductive behaviour*, including unwanted inappropriate and distasteful physical or verbal sexual advances; *sexual coercion*, including coercion or sexual activity or other sex-linked behaviour for promise of reward; and *sexual assault*, including indecent assault and rape.

The literature (cf. De Wet and Van Huyssteen

2005; Timmerman 2005) has identified different categories of sexual harassment (verbal, non-verbal, physical, *quid pro quo* and secondary harassment), as well as different harasser-victim relations (educator-to-learner, learner-to-educator and peer harassment) in schools. This article will focus on verbal, non-verbal and physical peer sexual harassment.

EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

Research Instrument

After an extensive literature study on sexual harassment and the scrutiny of sexual harassment questionnaires, a self-reporting questionnaire, based on Fitzgerald's Sexual Experience Questionnaire (Larsson et al. 2003) and Timmerman's (2005) questionnaire on unwanted sexual behaviour in secondary schools, was compiled. The questionnaire consisted of open-ended, as well as several closed questions.

Section A of the questionnaire provides demographic details of the respondents. In Section B, questions are firstly asked about the respondents as possible victims of peer (Table 1) sexual harassment during the past 12 months. Questions connected with the possible consequences of sexual harassment on victims are also asked (Tables 2-6). In Section C, open-ended questions attempt to obtain qualitative data on respondents' exposure to, as well as feelings after being the victims of sexual harassment. A concurrent mixed-method approach, embedded in the post positivist research paradigm, was thus followed (Onwuegbuzie 2002).

We avoided the use of the term "sexual harassment" in the construction of the questionnaire, because of its association with the overt and serious forms of unwanted sexual behaviour. According to Timmerman (2005) young people seem to be inclined to associate sexual harassment with severe forms of abuse, such as rape or attempted rape. Unwanted sexual comments or physical comments or physical contact with sexual connotations are less frequently considered sexual harassment. The terms "unwanted sexual behaviour" and "sexual violence" were therefore used in the questionnaire. We also felt that rather than having learners endorse items that use legal definitions of sexual harassment, it would be clearer for them if we provided a list of behaviours. The questionnaire

included the following items relevant to verbal, non-verbal and physical harassment:

- *Verbal Harassment*: Spread sexual rumours about me. Said I was a slut or a whore. Said I was gay or a lesbian. Made sexual comments about parts of my body. Made sexual remarks about my clothing. Made remarks about my sexual activities. Told suggestive stories or offensive jokes. Called me "babe" or "sexy thing" or "hot" or something similar. Made sexist remarks about men/women's behaviour.
- *Non-verbal Harassment*: Blocked or cornered me in a sexual way. Leered or eyed-up my body. Indecently exposed him-/herself to me. Made sexual gestures at me. Showed me sexual pictures. Sent sexual cell phone pictures to me.
- *Physical Harassment*: Pulled at my clothes in a sexual way. Flashed at me or mooned at me. Touched, grabbed or pinched me in a sexual way. Touched my body underneath my clothes in a sexual way. Fondled me against my will. Kissed me against my will. Attempted to have unwanted sex with me. Raped me.

According to Bless et al. (2006), criterion-related validity, as well as construct validity, may be increased if use is made of an existing instrument. Items from existing instruments (Fitzgerald's Sexual Experience Questionnaire and Timmerman's questionnaire on unwanted sexual behaviour) were combined and adapted for the South African context (for example, township schools) and used, thus enhancing the validity of the study. Another aspect of validity, namely content validity, is also applicable here. We consulted experts and undertook an in-depth literature study prior to the empirical study to ensure that the questionnaire covered existing knowledge on the issue of sexual harassment. This increased content validity.

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the items on verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual behaviour were calculated and found to be 0.72, 0.60 and 0.69, respectively. The overall Cronbach alpha coefficient for the 24 items was calculated to be 0.83. The reliability coefficient for items in Table 2 is calculated to be 0.76. The reliability of the items in Tables 3 and 4 is good ($\alpha = 0.83$). The reliability coefficient for items pertaining to actions taken by victims of sexual harassment (Table 6) is calculated to be 0.62.

We concede that the internal consistency reliability scores for some of the items are slightly below the recommended internal consistency score of 0.70 and higher (Bernardi 1994). The sensitivity of the topic may have contributed to the relatively low scores (cf. Hulin et al. 2001). The qualitative information about the respondents' exposure to, as well as feelings after being harassed, provided an extra check for reliability. Triangulation was increased through the use of the mixed method approach (Onwuegbuzie 2002).

Sample, Procedure and Data Analysis

The studied population was Grade 8 to 12 learners from schools in the Free State Province. A random test sample of 80 of the 335 secondary, combined, intermediate and senior secondary schools in the Free State Province was drawn from an address list supplied by the Free State Department of Education. Ten questionnaires were sent by post to each of the selected schools. Of these 800 questionnaires, 483 were returned of which 474 were suitable for processing. The gender distribution of the respondents are as follows: girls: 286 (60.34%) (average age 16.68 years), boys: 180 (39.97%) (average age 17.42 years), and gender not indicated 8 (1.69%) (average age 17.20 years).

Quantitative data were analysed using the Data Analysis Tool of Microsoft Excel and StataIC 10 software packages. Data were analysed by means of frequencies, ratios, Spearman's rho, Kendall's tau, as well as the t- and χ^2 -tests. Only 90% and higher levels of significance are reported.

For the analysis of the open-ended questions, a coding frame was drawn up, also providing for verbatim reporting where applicable. From the codes, patterns and themes were identified and described. The identification of emergent themes allowed the information to be related to the literature, as well as to the quantitative data. Both researchers read and coded the responses independently to try to enhance reliability (Lichtman 2006).

Ethical Measures

Care was taken to adhere to ethical measures during the research on this sensitive topic (Sikes 2006). Permission was first obtained from the

Free State Department of Education to conduct the research on the basis of the submitted research outline and questionnaire. In order to ensure the safety and rights of the respondents, they were informed in writing of the prevailing ethical considerations (Wassenaar 2007), such as the informed consent of the Department of Education, the school and the respondents (learners), voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were asked to return their completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes.

FINDINGS

Quantitative Data

Although it is not the aim of this article to present our findings on the extent of sexual harassment in Free State schools, insight into the nature of the problem is necessary to contextualise our findings on the gender differentiating consequences of sexual harassment. The serious nature of the problem is illustrated by the respondent-harassment ratio. The female and male peer respondent-harassment ratios were calculated to be 6.14 and 7.62, respectively. This implies that on average, each female respondent was subjected to at least six, and each male respondent to at least seven different types of peer harassment. The statistical significance of the influence of gender on the different forms of sexual harassment was also probed (Table 1). Comparisons were however problematic for two reasons:

- In the questionnaire the different categories of sexual harassment (verbal, non-verbal and physical) were investigated with unequal numbers of items (9, 7 and 8).
- On these questionnaire items, the respondents could indicate more than one transgressor (male peer, female peer) per item.

To overcome these disproportions, a harassment factor for each respondent was calculated for each category of harassment (verbal, non-verbal and physical) using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{number of times harassments indicated}}{\text{max number that can be indicated}}$$

The mean scores of these decimal factors, obtained with this formula, were used to analyse the influence of gender on the different categories of unwanted sexual behaviour. The Student's t-test was used to calculate the statistical

Table 1: Gender differentiating exposure to sexual harassment

	Verbal			Non-verbal			Physical		
	Rating	Mean	Std. dev.	Rating	Mean	Std. dev.	Rating	Mean	Std. dev.
Female (n=286)	1	0.12710	0.10238	2	0.12434	0.12273	3	0.09228	0.09851
Male (n=180)	2	0.13722	0.11126	1	0.16285	0.13834	3	0.13025	0.12110
t			1.0049			3.1377			3.7030
p			0.3155			0.0018			0.0002*

* - probability of a statistically significant difference of 99% or more ($p \leq 0.01$)

significance of the difference in means (cf. Bless and Kathuria 2004).

A scrutiny of the data in Table 1 reveals that boys experience more harassment than their female counterparts in all three of the overarching categories. The differences of their exposure are statistically significant (on a 99% level of significance) for non-verbal and physical sexual harassment. While verbal harassment is the most common type of sexual harassment that the girls are experiencing, non-verbal sexual harassment is the most common category of sexual harassment experienced by the boys (cf rank order).

Respondents who were victims of sexual harassment were asked to indicate if they experienced psychosomatic health problems (Timmerman 2005) as a result of their trauma. They could indicate as many items as applicable. Table 2 summarises their responses, as well as the results of the χ^2 -test. Table 2 shows that the victims of sexual harassment suffer mostly from fits of crying (34.75% girls versus 21.74% boys), anxiety (29.08% girls versus 26.09% boys) and depression (31.21% girls versus 23.91%). Girl victims appear to have more psychosomatic problems than boys: a larger percentage of girls indicated that they suffered from seven of the 12 identified psychosomatic problems. However, with the exception of one psychosomatic problem ("fits of crying": $\chi^2=3.18$; $df=1$; $p=0.08$), the differences are statistically non-significant at a 90% or higher level.

Tables 3 and 4 summarise girl and boy victims' feelings after exposure to sexual harassment in sequence, from the most intense to the least intense. The victims were asked to indicate the intensity of their experiences on a five-point scale (extremely = 1, very = 2, moderate = 3, a little = 4, hardly at all = 1).

Table 3 shows that the following are the three most intense feelings experienced by girls who

Table 2: Psychosomatic health problems experienced after sexual harassment

Psychosomatic health problems	Boys (n=92) ^o		Girls (n=141) ^o		χ^2 -value	p
	f #	%	f #	%		
Headache	19	20.65	35	24.82	0.3051	0.581
Heart palpitations	13	14.13	26	18.44	0.5030	0.478
Perspiration/Sweating	6	6.52	9	6.38	0.0123	0.912
Depression	22	23.91	44	31.21	0.9088	0.340
Anxiety	24	26.09	41	29.08	0.0925	0.761
Stomach ache	9	9.78	19	13.48	0.5283	0.467
Difficulty in breathing	11	11.96	14	9.93	0.3217	0.571
Insomnia	5	5.43	6	4.26	0.2216	0.638
Fits of crying	20	21.74	49	34.75	3.1756	0.075*
Thoughts of suicide	7	7.61	10	7.09	0.0484	0.826
Attempted suicide	2	2.17	5	3.55	0.3031	0.582
I hurt myself	20	21.74	24	17.02	0.9555	0.328

df = 1

^o - 88 of male, and 145 of female respondents who answered this question, indicated that they were not victims of sexual harassment.

- victims could indicate more than one psychosomatic health problem.

* - probability of a statistically significant difference of 90% and more, but less than 95% ($0.05 < p \leq 0.1$).

have been sexually harassed: anger, discomfort and fear. Table 4 reveals that the three most intense feelings for boys are anger, embarrassment and powerlessness. Very few girls felt flattered after being harassed: only 2.94% of them indicated that they felt extremely flattered after being harassed. However, 12.61% of the boys indicated that they felt extremely flattered. Both Spearman's and Kendall's rank correlation was used to compare the feelings of girl and boy victims of sexual harassment (Tables 3 and 4). While the calculations showed that some measure of association between the ranking of girls and boys exist ($\rho \neq 0$ and $\tau \neq 0$), neither Spearman's rho ($\rho=0.38$; $p=0.28$) nor Kendall's tau ($\tau=0.29$;

Table 3: How girl victims felt after an incident of sexual harassment (n = 170)

RO	Mean ^o	How did you feel after an experience of unwanted sexual behaviour?	Extremely (1)		Very (2)		Moderate (3)		A little (4)		Hardly at all (5)	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	3.1353	Angry	39	22.94	38	22.35	12	7.06	23	13.53	58	34.12
2	3.5000	Uncomfortable	30	17.65	32	18.82	10	5.88	19	11.18	79	46.47
3	3.5882	Frightened	33	19.41	23	13.53	9	5.29	21	12.35	84	49.41
4	3.7118	Powerless	24	14.12	28	16.47	12	7.06	15	8.82	91	53.53
5	3.7353	Embarrassed	27	15.88	23	13.53	8	4.71	22	12.94	90	52.94
6	3.8647	Guilty and ashamed	22	12.94	21	12.35	11	6.47	20	11.76	96	56.47
7	3.9353	Felt like a fool	21	12.35	19	11.18	6	3.53	28	16.47	96	56.47
8	4.1176	Dirty	16	9.41	15	8.82	11	6.47	19	11.18	109	64.12
9	4.1882	Normal	13	7.65	13	7.65	11	6.47	25	14.71	108	63.53
10	4.4706	Flattered	5	2.94	10	5.88	11	6.47	18	10.59	126	74.12

^o - Note that a lower mean score implies a more intense feeling (cf. rating scale)

p=0.28) confirmed a statistically significant relationship between the rankings of the girls and boys.

The Student's t-test was subsequently carried out to ascertain the possible influence of gender on the victims' feelings (Table 5). From Table 5 it may be concluded that girls experience more anger, fear, guilt and shame, discomfort ("uncomfortable") and feeling dirty than boys. Boys, on the other hand, feel more like fools, embarrassed, powerless, flattered and "normal" (in the sense of regular, day-to-day behaviour) after being harassed. The t-tests show that girl victims statistically, experience feelings of anger (t=1.85; df=279; p=0.07) and fear (t=1.70; df=279; p=0.09) significantly more intense than their male counterparts at a 90% level. The t-test calculations furthermore reveal that statistically significantly more boys than girls experienced acts of sexual harassment as flattering (t=4.06; df=279; p=0.0001) and "normal" (t=3.21; df=279; p=0.0015) at a 99% level.

Table 6 presents the victims' actions, or lack

thereof, after being victimised, as well as the results of the χ^2 -test pertaining to the possible influence of gender on their actions. Passivity rather than assertive action characterises the behaviour of victims of sexual harassment: 20.56% of the boys and 14.3% of the girls ignored their harassers and 16.11% of the boys versus 12.24% of the girls did nothing. The passivity is underlined by the following data: 5.56% of the boys and 9.79% of the girls confronted their harassers, while a small percentage of boys (5.56%) and girls (6.64%) threatened their perpetrators. Two items that may be linked directly to the educational impact of sexual harassment reveal the following: 6.67% of the boys and 4.55% of the girls went to another school, while 9.44% of boys and 5.59% of girls are often absent from school. With the exception of one of the listed items ("I ignored the person": $\chi^2=3.07$; df=1; p=0.08), the differences between the answers of the boys and girls are statistically non-significant at a 90% or higher level for the items in Table 6.

Table 4: How boy victims felt after an incident of sexual harassment (n = 111)

RO	How did you feel after an experience of unwanted sexual behaviour?	Extremely (1)		Very (2)		Moderate (3)		A little (4)		Hardly at all (5)	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1	Angry	12	10.81	25	22.52	12	10.81	21	18.92	41	36.94
2	Embarrassed	21	18.92	12	10.81	12	10.81	16	14.41	50	45.05
3	Normal	11	9.91	22	19.82	9	8.11	21	18.92	48	43.24
4	Powerless	11	9.91	19	17.12	15	13.51	14	12.61	52	46.85
5	Uncomfortable	10	9.01	18	16.22	11	9.91	26	23.42	46	41.44
6	Felt like a fool	11	9.91	15	13.51	8	7.21	28	25.23	49	44.14
7	Flattered	14	12.61	10	9.01	11	9.91	18	16.22	58	52.25
8	Frightened	11	9.91	12	10.81	13	11.71	15	13.51	60	54.05
9	Guilty and ashamed	10	9.01	5	4.50	14	12.61	19	17.12	63	56.76
10	Dirty	8	7.21	8	7.21	5	4.50	26	23.42	64	57.66

^o - Note that a lower mean score implies a more intense feeling (cf. rating scale)

Table 5: The influence of gender on the feelings of victims of sexual harassment

<i>How did you feel after an experience of unwanted sexual behaviour?</i>	<i>Girls</i>		<i>Boys</i>		<i>Difference in means</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std dev</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std dev</i>			
Angry	3.1353	1.6243	3.4865	1.4514	- 0.3512	1.8467	0.0659*
Felt like a fool	3.9353	1.4722	3.8018	1.3871	0.1335	0.7601	0.4479
Embarrassed	3.7353	1.5785	3.5586	1.5897	0.1767	0.9154	0.3608
Powerless	3.7118	1.5706	3.6937	1.4510	0.0181	0.0971	0.9227
Frightened	3.5882	1.6375	3.9099	1.4113	- 0.3217	1.6982	0.0906*
Flattered	4.4706	1.0444	3.8649	1.4553	0.6057	4.0586	0.0001***
Normal	4.1882	1.2917	3.6577	1.4491	0.5306	3.2066	0.0015***
Guilty and ashamed	3.8647	1.5111	4.0811	1.3013	- 0.2164	1.2382	0.2167
Uncomfortable	3.5000	1.6218	3.7207	1.3828	- 0.2207	1.1806	0.2388
Dirty	4.1176	1.3796	4.1712	1.2422	- 0.0535	0.3305	0.7431

df = 279

° - cf. rating scale (extremely = 1, very = 2, moderate = 3, a little = 4, hardly at all = 1).

* - probability of a statistically significant difference of 90% or more but less than 95% (0.05 < p ≤ 0.1).

** - probability of a statistically significant difference of 95% or more but less than 99% (0.01 < p ≤ 0.05).

*** - probability of a statistically significant difference of 99% or more (p ≤ 0.01).

Table 6: Actions taken by victims of sexual harassment

<i>Type of action taken by victim</i>	<i>Boys (n=98)°</i>		<i>Girls (n=143)°</i>		χ^2 -value	<i>p</i>
	<i>f #</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>f #</i>	<i>%</i>		
Did nothing	29	29.59	35	24.48	1.3989	0.237
I ignored the person	37	37.76	41	28.67	3.0666	0.080 *
Confronted the guilty party	10	10.20	28	19.58	2.6450	0.104
Requested counselling	12	12.24	11	7.69	1.8730	0.171
Went to another school	6	6.12	13	9.09	0.4150	0.519
Often absent from school	17	17.34	16	11.19	2.4886	0.115
I hit, pushed or punched the person	10	10.21	21	14.68	0.5682	0.451
I got a friend to give the guilty person a hard time	5	5.10	14	9.79	1.2663	0.260
I threatened the person	10	10.21	19	13.29	0.2240	0.636

df = 1

° - 82 of the male and 143 female respondents who answered this question indicated that they were not victims of sexual harassment.

- victims could indicate more than one action.

* - probability of a statistically significant difference of 90% and more, but less than 95% (0.05 < p ≤ 0.1).

Qualitative Data

In section C of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to reread the checklist of verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment before they described the incident of unwanted sexual experience they remembered best, as well as their

feelings after being harassed. The ensuing discussion will focus on the themes that emerged while analysing the latter part of the open-ended question.

Theme 1: Psychosomatic Consequences of Sexual Harassment

Several victims mention the fact that they suffered from psychosomatic problems as a result of their trauma. While two boy victims made reference to feelings of depression, another boy wrote the following: "It is not good ... I felt like I was raped". Another three boys mentioned that they suffer from severe and constant headaches. One of them wrote: "I am never without a headache".

One girl ("I felt like I am nothing in this world and I'm not like other learners and I nearly committed suicide. My friends stopped me") and two boys ("I thought about suicide" and "I felt like crying as if I was not myself. I even wanted to kill myself, but I was supported by my best friend") wrote that they had suicidal thoughts.

Theme 2: Negative Feelings Experienced by Victims

The following negative feelings were identified while analysing the victims' narratives: anger, shame and humiliation, fear, sadness and feeling dirty. From the subsequent discussion and quotations it will become apparent that the victims' negative feelings are multifaceted. Although the researchers tried to identify different types of negative feelings, rigid classification is

not possible, as is illustrated by the next two narratives: "I felt uncomfortable, I felt like crying and I was full of sadness. I take myself as a fool. I ended up having a low self esteem" and "Dirty, angry, used and humiliated; I was crying, disgust". In each of the foregoing quotations reference is made to several negative feelings. The following findings are thus presented with caution, as a number of the quotations may fit into more than one sub-theme.

Feelings of Anger

Several boys expressed feelings of anger. The next three quotations illustrate the intensity of their anger: "I feel very angry"; "I feel angry because it was the first time I have been kissed" and "I felt that they were invading my privacy and was quite angry". In some narratives there was a combination of anger and powerlessness: "Angry and powerless" and "I feel very angry and like a fool, because it is a bad thing in my life". The previous two quotations show the victims' frustration. Female victims also wrote about their anger, as is illustrated by the following: "I was scared and angry" and "I felt upset and extremely angry".

Feelings of Shame/Embarrassment/ Humiliation

An important sub-theme that was identified is the victims' feeling of shame. The following are a few of the examples extracted from the narratives of girl victims: "I felt embarrassed and ashamed and did not know what to do"; "I felt embarrassed and ... uncomfortable"; "I felt like a fool"; "I felt so useless, shameful, lost, scared and guilty"; "I felt like a fool and I was ashamed"; "I felt like I was nobody and I felt like I don't belong in this world"; "...depressed, powerless and embarrassed" and "I felt sad and embarrassed". Girls also used words such as "insecure" and "shy" to describe their feelings.

From the following quotations it is apparent that boys also experience sexual harassment as humiliating. The harassment of boys by girls seems to be damaging for the victims' male ego: "I felt ashamed, embarrassed because people will laugh at me and say I am a victim who was abused by a woman" and "I felt that I was stupid; a girl did this to me" The fact that the harassment happened in public seems to aggravate victims' shame. One of the boys wrote:

I felt embarrassed and wanted to hit the guilty party. I was extremely embarrassed. At one point I wanted to go to another school in order to have peace of mind. I felt ashamed and embarrassed because there were a lot of people in class.

These feelings of shame are echoed by a boy who was harassed in the classroom:

I feel like crying because my schoolmates were watching me. They were watching all those movements (touching my body all over).

This public humiliation may be aggravated by the unsympathetic reaction of friends: "I was very embarrassed because my friends were laughing at me".

Fear

Victims of sexual harassment are often filled with fear. The following narratives give insight into three girls' fear: "I felt scared"; "I was too scared to walk on the street" and "I feel very upset and frightened". While the female victims' fears were vague, the male respondents specify theirs. Whereas one boy is worried about possible health consequences ("I can get infected with sexual diseases"); another one mentioned the possibility of unplanned fatherhood ("an unprepared baby"); a third boy was afraid of intercourse *per se* ("Afraid of sex").

Theme 3: Sexual Harassment as a Positive Experience

Not all the victims experienced sexual harassment as degrading. Two girls were up front in this regard ("I feel happy" and "It was nice"). The following are a few of the comments of boys who felt flattered and manly about the sexual attention: "I feel happy"; "A bit happy"; "I felt sexy after she kissed me"; "I felt proud of myself"; "I feel very happy ... I feel strong ... I feel like a man" and "I felt like a superman or a rich boy".

Whereas the above quotations highlight the fact that some victims are flattered by the attention, the next two narratives paint a picture of victims who are in emotional turmoil because they felt good about the (unwanted) sexual attention they received:

I felt embarrassed and sometimes good because boys see me in a sexual way ... it is very stupid of me to think this way (girl).

...even if I was angry ... her caresses made me feel okay, thus I was not a victim (boy).

Theme 4: Victims of Harassment Blame Themselves for What Happened to Them

Some girls blame themselves for what happened. A girl who was harassed while under the influence of alcohol wrote: "I felt like a worthless piece of rubbish. I sometimes blame myself for what has happened." A victim of verbal harassment wrote: "I felt small and blame myself." A girl who was forcefully kissed wrote: "I felt a little bit naïve and embarrassed and so guilty for not having the power to defend myself against him." One girl who was told that she was attractive, had the following to say: "I felt very awkward. I felt as if I deserved that because of the clothes I wore at the time or myself. I blame my body. I just want to be ugly and very thin."

Theme 5: Action Taken by Victims of Sexual Harassment

While the foregoing narratives (Theme 4) illustrate some of the girls' self-reproach, a girl who wore shorts at a Valentine's party wrote:

I felt very hurt and angry and I slapped him, because I don't think that anyone has the right to do that no matter what I'm wearing; after all this is a free country.

Whereas the girl quoted in the previous narrative acted assertively, others justify their lack of action or silence:

I said nothing because I was scared that he will kill me or something.

I was angry and wanted to go to the police. I wanted to insult him and beat him up, but then I told myself that I am going to go on with my life.

I thought no one was going to believe me.

Some victims stress that they tried unsuccessfully to resist their harassers. A girl, who was told that she had no moral values, wrote: "I get angry every time he talks to me about that thing. If I tell him to leave me alone, he laughs." One of the boys wrote: "I felt stupid because I stood in front of her and asked her nicely to leave me without taking any action or scream for somebody to help me".

Theme 6: Negative Impact of Sexual Harassment on the Victim's Social and Academic Life

A few victims made reference to the negative impact of sexual harassment on their social life.

The subsequent quotations were taken from girl victims' narratives: "I was very scared to face people"; "I felt lonely" and "I ... will never attend any party ever again".

Several victims mentioned that they skipped classes to avoid facing their harassers. One of the boys wrote: "You feel so bad every day when you see her, so you want to live away from her (changing schools)".

DISCUSSION

Against the background of condensed data from the study that shows that sexual harassment is a serious problem for both boys and girls in some schools in the Free State Province, the following discussion will focus on the differentiating impact of harassment on boys and girls. The results of the current study will be tentatively juxtaposed with findings from other South African or international studies on sexual harassment. Comparisons between these studies and the present one may be misleading because of methodological and definitional differences and inconsistency in the timeframes and the events on which the respondents were asked to report. Comparison is furthermore complicated by the fact that while some researchers differentiate between the sexes, others focus exclusively on females. Furthermore, there are also researchers who ignore the gender dimension of sexual harassment.

The findings by, among others, Gruber and Fineran (2007) and Fineran (2002a) that sexual harassment may result in serious psychosomatic health problems for victims is confirmed by the qualitative and quantitative data from this study. Both boys and girls made reference to feelings of depression and constant headaches in their narratives. Relatively large percentages of the victims furthermore indicated that they suffered from anxiety, depression and headaches (Table 2). While Fineran's (2002a) study did not explore the gender differentiating impact of harassment, Gruber and Fineran (2007) focused only on the harassment of girls. According to these two researchers, girl victims of harassment suffer statistically significantly more from psychosomatic health problems than those who were not harassed. Several researchers (Duffy et al. 2004; Gådin and Hammarström 2005; Hand and Sanches 2000; Lee et al. 1996; Timmerman 2005, 2004) found that girls suffer more often from

psychosomatic health problems than boys. It may seem as if this study corroborates the aforementioned findings: Table 2 shows that a larger percentage of girls than boys suffered from seven of the 12 identified psychosomatic problems. However, with the exception of one psychosomatic problem ("fits of crying"), the differences are statistically non-significant at a 90% or higher level. We may thus only tentatively conclude that girl victims of sexual harassment in the Free State suffer more psychosomatic health problems than boys. The tentative nature of our conclusions will also be underlined by the following discussion of the negative impact of sexual harassment on victims' will to live.

Qualitative and quantitative data shed light on the attempted suicide or suicidal thoughts as serious consequences of sexual harassment. Whereas three respondents ("I nearly committed suicide" [girl], "I thought about suicide" [boy] and "I even wanted to kill myself" [boy]) wrote about their suicidal thoughts, Table 2 shows that some victims thought of (7.61% boys versus 7.09% girls) or attempted (2.17% boys versus 3.55% girls) suicide. These results are in line with those of Winters et al. (2004), Pellegrini (2002) and HRW (2001) as far as it confirms that sexual harassment may lead to suicidal thoughts. Whereas the aforementioned researchers did not probe the possible influence of gender, findings from our study reveal that gender has a statistically non-significant influence on thoughts ($\chi^2=0.0484$, $df=1$, $p=0.826$) and/or attempts of ($\chi^2=0.30$, $df=1$, $p=0.56$) suicide.

Studies by among others Gruber and Fineran (2007), De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005) and HRW (2001) investigate the influence of sexual harassment on girls. De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005:31) found for example that sexual harassment leaves girls with "feelings of fear, shame, self-consciousness, embarrassment and without confidence". Whereas the aforementioned studies did not compare gender differences and similarities, Hand and Sanches (2000), Timmerman (2005 and 2004) and Lee et al. (1996) found that girl victims have lower levels of self-esteem and suffer from more negative feelings than do boy victims. ANOVA results from a study by Fineran (2002b) show that girl victims of harassment were significantly more upset and threatened than boy victims ($F=24.7$; $p\leq 0.01$). Our study (Table 5) found that girls felt more anger, fear, guilt and shame, discomfort and

dirty than their male counterparts. Results from the t-test show that girls were significantly more angry and frightened than boys. Whereas the foregoing national and international studies found that the effects of sexual harassment is more profound for female than male victims (Fineran 2002b; Lee et al. 1996; Sanches 2000; Timmerman 2005, 2004), our study show that boys feel more like fools, embarrassed and powerless than girls. The differences are however, non-significant for all three of the aforesaid feelings. It may, therefore, be concluded that whilst female victims react more emotional, male victims react in terms of their idea of masculinity, *inter alia* that a real man is attractive to the ladies, or a real man makes the move.

The foregoing findings, namely, that sexual harassment impacts negatively on both boy and girl victims are confirmed by the narratives. Participants from both genders wrote about their anger, feelings of humiliation and shame, and fear. Differences were identified pertaining to their narratives on their feelings of shame and fear. While the girl victims gave no reason for their shame, boys gave the following reasons why they felt ashamed and humiliated:

- they were abused by girls ("people will laugh at me and say I am victim who was abused by women" and "I felt that I was stupid; a girl did this to me"), and
- the public character of their humiliation ("I felt ashamed and embarrassed because there were a lot of people in class" and "I feel like crying because my schoolmates were watching me").

Researchers (cf. Dunne et al. 2003; HRW 2001) stress the negative influence of unwanted physical harassment on girls. Nevertheless, none of the girls in our study referred to the possibility of their contracting sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancies. Our study however reveals that some boys fear sexually transmitted diseases ("I can get infected with sexual diseases") and/or unplanned fatherhood ("an unprepared baby"). Although girl victims were statistically significantly more afraid that their male counterparts ($t=1.70$; $df=279$; $p=0.09$), only one of them gave a reason for her fear ("...I was scared that he will kill me or something"). The other girls just stated that they were afraid ("I felt scared" and "frightened"). Despite the fact that girls reported more emotional turmoil than their male counterparts;

only one gave a reason for her fear. This silence may be a consequence of “the low social and economic status afforded women in many societies” (Leach et al. 2003:4). Leach (2006:27) writes that sexual harassment

...originates in the imbalance in power between males and females, in the gendered hierarch and separations of tasks and responsibilities, and in the socially accepted view of what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour. The school, alongside the family, is a prime site for the construction of gender identity and gender relations build on socially sanctioned inequalities.

Mabusela (2006:58) supports this view and argues that

...due to gendered normative values in our [South African] society some of the sexist behavior towards school girls goes without comment and this... behaviour is mostly viewed as natural and undeserving of attention.

According to De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005), comments such as “you are overreacting”, “that is the way life is” or “what do you expect when you wear clothes like that?” convey the message that sexual aggression is a normal part of life and needs to be accepted. Quantitative data from our study show that while only 2.94% of the girls indicated that they felt extremely flattered by the unwanted sexual attention, 12.61% of the boys felt extremely flattered. The data furthermore reveal that while 74.12% of the girls indicated that they felt “hardly at all” flattered, noticeably fewer boys indicated that they “hardly at all” felt flattered (52.25%) (cf. Tables 3 and 4). The results of the t-test show that statistically, boys felt significantly more flattered than the girls (Table 5). These statistical data are confirmed by the narratives. Whilst only two girls described sexual harassment as a positive experience (“I feel happy” and “It was nice”) several boys described how flattered and manly they felt (for example, “I felt sexy”, “I felt proud”, “I feel like a superman or a rich boy”).

Another important gender differentiating impact of sexual harassment revolves around the so-called normality of the transgression. Whereas 63.53% of the girl victims indicated that sexual harassment is “hardly at all” normal, less than half of the boys (43.24%) indicated that it was “hardly at all” a normal experience (Tables 3 and 4). The results of the t-test show that statistically,

boys felt significantly more than the girls that sexual harassment is “normal” (Table 5).

It is worrying to note that some of the boys see sexual harassment as a flattering and/or a normal experience. These findings are verified by comments by Unterhalter (2003) and findings by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (1995, in Duffy et al. 2004). According to the aforementioned study, some boys reported increased self-confidence as a result of having been sexually harassed. Unterhalter (2003) found that boys often treat unwanted sexual attention as a “game”. Shumba (2004: 354) rightly warns that the perception that some male victims have said that it is “advantageous to be raped by female predators ... could turn out to be dangerous”.

It should nonetheless be noted that only 29.73% and 21.62% of the male victims felt both “extremely” or “very” flattering and normal after an incident of sexual harassment (Table 4). There were also boys that experienced sexual harassment as emasculating: 27.03% and 29.73% of the male victims of harassment indicated that they felt either “extremely” or “very powerless and embarrassed (Table 4). It, therefore, seems as if the male victims can be divided into two clearly distinguishable groups: those who felt emasculated and those who felt flattered.

Several girls blamed themselves for what had happened to them (“I sometimes blame myself for what has happened”), their inability to defend themselves (“...guilty for not having the power to defend myself against him”), for not looking after themselves (“I blame my body), and the way they dress (“I felt as if I deserved that because of the clothes I wore at the time”). None of the boys made reference to feelings of guilt and self-reproach in their narratives. Although differences between the feelings of boys and those of girls are non-significant, girls reported feeling more shame and guilt than boys (Table 5). Is therefore seems as if girls are more inclined than their male counterparts to perpetuate myths about sexual harassment (the person who was harassed must have asked for it) (Harber 2004).

It furthermore seems as if both boy and girl victims of sexual harassment feel and act as if disempowered:

- 37.76% of the boys and 28.67% of the girls ignored their harassers (statistically significant difference of 90% and more, but less than 95%) (Table 6),

- 29.59% of the boys and 28.67% of the girls did nothing after being harassed (Table 6), and
- 30.59% of the girls and 27.03% of the boys felt either extremely or very powerless after being harassed (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 6 reveals that more girls than boys confronted the guilty party (19.58% versus 10.2%), hit, pushed or punched their harassers (14.68% versus 10.21%), threatened the harasser (13.29% versus 10.21%) and got a friend to give the guilty person a hard time (9.79% versus 5.1%). From the foregoing statistics, it seems as if girls act more assertively than their male counterparts. None of these differences are however statistically significant. In only one of the victims' (a girl) narratives was there evidence of assertive action:

I felt very hurt and angry and I slapped him, because I don't think that anyone has the right to do that no matter what I'm wearing, after all this is a free country.

Several victims tried to justify their lack of action or silence (for example, "I said nothing because I was scared" and "I thought no one was going to believe me"). The foregoing finding of our study, namely that gender does not play a significant role in avoidance consequences of harassment, is collaborated by Duffy et al. (2004).

Findings relevant to the possible consequences of sexual harassment on victims' education (Table 6) are in line with that of De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005) and Pellegrini (2002); namely, that some victims would rather miss classes or even drop out of school to avoid being harassed. The HRW report (2001) which focuses on girl victims of sexual abuse, states that girls often leave school because they can no longer endure the ridicule and taunting of classmates and harassers. The AAUW (1992) report (cf. Pellegrini 2002) found that nearly 40% of victims do not go to school or attend specific classes. While the foregoing researchers did not look into the possible influence of gender on educational outcomes or focused on only one gender (girls), Hand and Sanches (2000) found that girls experienced more negative educational outcomes from sexual harassment than boys. Duffy et al. (2004), on the other hand, found that gender did not play a statistically significant influence on educational consequences of harassment. Our study shows that a greater percentage of girls

than boys change schools to avoid harassment (9.09% girls versus 6.12% boys). However, more boys (17.34%) than girls (11.19%) who are harassed are often absent from school. None of the foregoing differences is statistically significant (Table 6).

LIMITATIONS

The present study has two important limitations. Firstly, our study has shown that sexual harassment has negative academic, psychological, social and behavioural consequences for both genders. However, the full extent of these consequences, as well as the long-term impact is unclear. We agree with Lee et al. (1996) that surveys like ours are ideal for investigating questions about prevalence and severity. However, a proper exploration of the full consequences of sexual harassment would be better accomplished through personal interviews, allowing victims to define the type and extent of consequences, rather than forcing them to choose from a predetermined response set. To investigate the duration of consequences, victims should be interviewed at several time points and at some temporal distance from the events (Lee et al. 1996). Our results thus permit only limited conclusions about the short-term consequences of sexual harassment. Secondly, we relied only on the self-reporting effects of those who have been harassed. The problems of those who have not been harassed were not studied. It is thus possible that some aspects of the reporting may have been biased, as it may have been difficult for victims to distinguish between problems that result from sexual harassment and those that result from other coexisting problems common to secondary school learners (cf. Duffy et al. 2004).

CONCLUSION

Contrary to popular belief and most sexual harassment research findings, namely, that sexual harassment impacts more negatively on female than male victims, our study revealed that the consequences for boys and girls are more similar than different. When comparing the statistical data pertaining to psychometric health problems, the differences between the genders were non-significant for all the problems, except one ("fits of crying"). A comparison of the data on the

influence of gender on victims' feelings shows that girls suffer from more emotional trauma than their male counterparts. Nonetheless, in only two of these emotions girls suffered significantly more than boys (anger and fear). The two most important gender differences revolve around boys experiencing sexual harassment as flattering and normal. The answers of the boy and girl victims differed statistically significantly at a 99% level.

The qualitative data are to a large extent a confirmation of the statistics. Members of both sexes wrote about their psychosomatic problems, their feelings of anger, shame and fear, as well as the negative impact of their trauma on their social and academic life. A few differences could be identified:

- Boys experienced sexual harassment as contemptuous to their masculinity ("a girl did this to me"), whereas girls link it in a tentative complimentary way to their femaleness ("I blame my body").
- Only boys contemplated the possible negative health consequences of physical harassment.
- While none of the male victims blamed themselves for what had happened to them, several of the girls' narratives speak of self-reproach.

Against the background of the foregoing it may be concluded that whilst female victims react more emotional, male victims react in terms of their idea of masculinity.

Sexual harassment is a serious problem in some secondary schools in the Free State Province. It has negative psychosomatic, social and academic consequences for both sexes. It should therefore be apparent to educational role players to change the general climate where too many learners and educators still accept sexual harassment as a normal part of interaction between peers. Cognisance ought to be taken of the HRW's (2001) recommendations on how to fight this scourge. According to the HRW the South African government should adopt a national plan of action on all forms of sexual violence, including sexual harassment in schools. This plan should, *inter alia*, provide guidelines to schools detailing the appropriate responses to allegations of sexual abuse, set up procedures governing the consequences for educators or learners who have been convicted on criminal charges of sexual violence and provide funding for counselling

and medical services for victims of sexual abuse. The report furthermore stresses the importance of protecting the victims of as well as those reporting incidence of sexual abuse. School governing bodies should also address the problem and its prevention as a regular agenda item. It is moreover important that the South African Council of Educators and educators' trade unions take a harsh stand towards members that are found guilty of sexual offences (vide HRW 2001). If nothing is done, then a number of Free State learners will be emotionally burdened, will find reaching their academic potential more difficult, and will have long-term doubts about whether they are ever able to have healthy relationships.

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