

## Sexual harassment among Zimbabwe elite sportswomen: A study at the Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union (ZITISU) Games 2012.

**Author's Details:** <sup>1</sup>Patricia Muchena-Faculty of Science and Technology,Zimbabwe Open University, Manicaland Region P. Bag V 7480 Mutare Zimbabwe <sup>2</sup>John Mapfumo-Sabbatical Scholar at Zimbabwe Open University, Manicaland Africa University Box 1320 Mutare

**Abstract** *Researchers in this country and elsewhere have done considerable work on the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment in colleges and universities as well as in schools. Most studies have focused on the student –lecturer relationship and very little on harassment in sport. This study aimed to establish the extent and nature of sexual harassment of elite collegiate sportswomen from different sporting disciplines. The study also aimed to establish the perpetrator profiles. A ten- item questionnaire was completed by one hundred and fifty- five elite sportswomen from the Zimbabwe Tertiary Institutions Sports Union (ZITISU) who voluntarily took part in this study. The results of the study revealed extensive sexual harassment of the elite sportswomen by trainers and other officials as well as spectators. Victim sportswomen were subjected to unwanted touching, pinching and grabbing of body parts, repeated asking out, and sexual comments about their clothing, anatomy or looks. Most frequent time of harassment was after games or training at the sports centres. Conclusions were that sexual harassment of Zimbabwe elite sportswomen was likely to remain a problem for the foreseeable future. It was also concluded that sexual harassment in Zimbabwean collegiate sportswomen took the same forms as that found all over the world. The study recommended that policies, guidelines and other materials be prepared to increase awareness of collegiate sportswomen to sexual harassment and to enhance the security of the elite sportswomen. The study also recommended that harassers be appropriately punished as deterrent against sexual harassment of elite collegiate sportswomen.*

### Key words

Female elite athlete, sexual harassment, sport

### Background

Researchers the world over have conducted extensive research in the area of sexual harassment of the female students by male teachers and by fellow students as well as other male employees of various educational and other formal institutions. There has been increased interest in harassment in sport. In that respect many scholars have also investigated the sexual harassment of the female athlete (Brackenridge, 1997; Fasting, Brackenridge & Sundgot-Borgen, 2000; Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Hayden, 2003; Hogshead-Makar & Steinbach 2003; Fasting, Thoresen, & Knorre, 2005; Freberg, 2011; Nevin, Hakan & Mitat, 2007; Toftegaard 1998;).The researchers just cited have produced wide-ranging evidence on prevalence, incidences, causes and consequences of sexual harassment as well as the profiles of the perpetrators.

The concept of sexual harassment has been well-defined and explained in the literature. The Manual on Preventing Sexual Harassment SDC IP.73 (1992) explains harassment as any behaviour by a person or organisation which is offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening,

directed at any person or group of people. The Manual further states that sexual harassment includes verbal harassment such as cat calls, telling sexual jokes and, stories whilst non- verbal harassment such as looking a person up and down, blocking a person's path, throwing kisses; or physical harassment such as unwelcome hugging, touching the person's clothing, hair or body. The sentiments expressed in the Manual are consistent with the prior view of Dziech (1990) who defined sexual harassment as intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favours. Therefore, sexual harassment is an unwelcome action of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment is sex discrimination. Title V11 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits sexual advances, fondling, demands for sexual favours, and other improper behaviours. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (1980) which enforces Title V11 defines sexual harassment as:

Unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature

constitute sexual harassment when (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decision affecting such an individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating and intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (1980) demarcated sexual harassment into two types: unwanted physical and verbal sexual attention and solicitation of sexual activity by threat of punishment or promise of reward (quid pro quo sexual coercion) and hostile environment.

Sexual harassment in sport has been found to have similar characteristics to that in educational institutions and work places in general (Brackenridge, 2000; Fasting et al., 2000; Fasting et al., 2005). However, there are additional aspects of sexual harassment in sport as opposed to that in educational institutions in general. These additional aspects include collective verbal assault, humiliating female athletes during coaching sessions, sexual bullying and attacking the dress and making of negative comments on a sportsperson's body or performance (Buzuvis, 2011; Nevin et al., 2007). As in other more general cases sexual harassment can be non-verbal. Examples of this sort of sexual harassment include such behaviour as showing sexually suggestive objects or pictures, suggestive or obscene gestures, and unwanted sexual contact. Sexual harassment can also be physical through touching, scratching palms, patting or grabbing bottoms or grazing breasts in the playing field during demonstration of a skill. We need to discuss the statement which follows my words here. It may also include witnessing any of these actions, even if the witness is not the target of the harassment (Sexual Harassment Policy for Athletic Departments 89). This study, however did not employ the definition that has just been given. Roscoe, Strouse and Goodwin (1994)

added 'wedgies' (pulling up another's pants) and 'shuckies' (pulling down another's pants). Hogshead- Makar & Steinbach (2003) include the consensual romantic relationships which can easily arise within the context of athletic relationship between the athlete and a sports official.

The prevalence of sexual harassment among the female student populations in colleges and universities is well- documented in many countries and to some extent in Zimbabwe. Zindi (2002) found that lecturers exploited their position to demand sexual favours from female students whom they can pass or fail depending on the outcome of their overtures. Although this went against teacher professional ethics, perpetrators in colleges harassed their female victims with impunity. In colleges and universities, likewise, the sport department may also represent an environment in which sexual harassment can easily occur. Since men, masculinity and traditional male values heavily dominate most sport organisation, this makes it highly possible for sexual harassment to occur in sport (Fasting et al., 2005).

In Zimbabwe the researchers guessed that it was possible for elite female sportswomen to suffer in the same manner since the sport personnel (the coaches, administrators, medics and assistants) were commonly male persons with authority over the athletes much in the same way as male lecturers had authority over their students in colleges and coaches had much power over athletes as in other countries. Coaches have been found to have power to decide scholarship awards and amounts, play time, and playing positions (Hogshead-Makar & Steinbach (2003). These sports personnel may entice their female victims by promising them money, food and extensive travel for competitions. Sexual harassment in African universities and colleges can be of student by staff; of staff by staff; of staff by student; of student by student (Jamela, 2011; Zindi 2002). This scenario may also apply in the sport departments in the same institutions. This study only, however, examined the possible harassment of female athletes by coaches, other sports officials and peers but did not include possible

harassment of coaches and other officials by athletes.

Studies in countries such as Norway, Turkey, Canada and the USA, established that the prevalence of sexual harassment of elite sportswomen was no less than 20 percent in each of those countries. Sexual harassment occurred in almost every sport group and was not specific to any particular sport type. Both male authorities and male peer athletes were implicated particularly in women involved in masculine sport much more than women in gender-neutral and feminine sport. Sexual harassment was found to have taken place after games or training sessions and most frequently at the sport centre of an institution. It was also found that sexual harassment in sport could occur on the bus to and from sports trips, at a sports camp, in any sports facility and other places (Fasting, Brackenridge & Sundgot-Borgen, 2000; Hayden, 2003; Hogshead-Maker & Steinbach, 2003 and Nevin et al., 2007; and Staurowsky, 2011).

### **Statement of the problem**

The issue of sexual harassment is extremely topical in higher education. The prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe is well documented. The forms of sexual harassment have also been well investigated and in general hinge on the power disparity between male officials and female students. Also well documented for the general population of female students in colleges are the results of sexual harassment which can be both physical and psychological. Some of the harassment even adversely affects academic performance and self-esteem/ self-worth of the females that are the targets of harassment.

It is possible but not yet empirically established in Zimbabwe that sexual harassment is as prevalent among elite sportswomen as it is among the general population of females in colleges and universities. It could be more. It could be less. The motivation for this study was thus to empirically establish the prevalence and types of sexual harassment among elite sportswomen from different disciplines in sports in higher education. The lead author was particularly interested in this

study considering her long experience with sport in higher education and other environments.

### **Purpose of the study**

Sexual harassment of female athletes has been found in colleges and universities in the different parts of the world. This study however focused on the possible harassment of the college elite sportswomen in Zimbabwe. The study further aimed to find out the type of harassment, when it takes place, the place(s) where it commonly occurred and any physical and psychological effects that it might have on the athletes.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study hinged on the following objectives whereby it attempted to:

- determine whether elite sport women in Zimbabwe experience sexual harassment from their coaches, administrator, and spectators,
- establish the type of harassment,
- determine the time and place when /where sexual harassment took place, and
- specify the effects reported from acts of sexual harassment

From the objectives above the following research questions were derived.

- Do elite sportswomen in Zimbabwe experience sexual harassment from their coaches, administrator, and spectators?
- In what sort of places does sexual harassment on the Zimbabwe elite sportswomen take place?
- During what sort of times do perpetrators sexually harass the elite sportswomen in Zimbabwe?
- What are the effects of sexual harassment on the Zimbabwe elite sportswomen?

## Methodology

### Research design

The study used quantitative design. This quantitative design was the design of choice because it was ideal for finding and recording numbers of types of harassment, places where athletes were harassed and the times of harassment among the Zimbabwe elite sportswomen. The quantitative design, therefore, was the design of choice because the entire questionnaire used in this study was made of closed-ended questions.

### Population and setting

The elite sportswomen were the female students in the tertiary educational institutions in Zimbabwe. At this meeting they were participating in the following codes of sports: athletics, soccer, netball, volleyball, basketball, cricket, tennis, table tennis darts, and chess. These sportswomen were individuals who had won in local leagues and tournaments at lower levels in sports competitions in different parts of the country.

A total of five hundred and eighty two (582) elite sportswomen from tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe (11 teachers' colleges, 7 polytechnic colleges and 10 universities) could possibly participate in this study. This population was made up of women between 18 to 29 years of age. Roughly a third of these athletes were deemed to be an adequate representation for purposes of this study. After the study had been explained and an invitation to participate in the study extended to the elite sportswomen, one hundred and fifty-five athletes volunteered.

### Instrumentation

A ten-item self-administered questionnaire sought data on whether the elite sportswomen had experienced sexual harassment or not. If they had, the questionnaire then sought the type of harassment, by whom they had been harassed, the place where they had been harassed, the time and the perceived psychological and physical effects. The questionnaire was used because of the large number of respondents to be surveyed. It was the

most appropriate instrument where participants in the study could be brought together at the research site to take the survey at one time and was very economical in the use time (Munn and Drever 1999). Closed-questions were used in order to solicit specific responses about the elite sportswomen. Responses from closed questions were easy to tabulate and allowed more items to be presented than would be the case with open-ended questions.

### Pilot study

To make sure that the questionnaire would collect the data that were needed without presenting any difficulties to the respondents, the questionnaire was pilot tested with twenty female athletes from one of the colleges. Those who participated in the pilot study were individuals comparable to the sportswomen but who would not participate in the main study. It was feared that including them in the study would bias the results because they would have been primed before entering the main study. There were no major modifications to the questionnaire as a result of pilot testing.

### Data collection procedure

The lead researcher sought permission from the organisers of the competitions to carry out the study. She explained the study to the leaders/heads of the various teams. The heads of the various teams (upon request) explained the study to the athletes and told the athletes that they would complete a self-administered questionnaire if they were willing to participate in the study. The prospective participants were informed that the information they would give would be held in confidence and would not be used for purposes beyond the study. No one else apart from the researchers would have access to the completed questionnaires. The identities of the participants who had completed the questionnaires would not be revealed to anyone. To make sure that the identities of the participants were protected, they were requested not to write their names on the questionnaires that they were completing. It was stressed to the prospective participants that taking part in the study was entirely voluntary and those who felt that they wished to withdraw from the study at any time during the progress of the study were free to do so.

The researchers availed themselves to the sportswomen while they were filling out the questionnaires in their rooms and asked the sportswomen to seek any clarification that might be needed as they completed the questionnaires. The researchers offered any needed explanations.

### Data Analysis strategy

Analysis of data was quantitative since the entire questionnaire was made up of closed questions. Responses were counted, and expressed as frequencies and percentages which were then presented in tables.

### Results and discussions

#### Subjection to sexual harassment

Of the one hundred and fifty-five respondents 22 (14 %) reported that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment from one or a

**Table 1: Type of sexual harassment experienced by elite sportswomen.**

Type of sexual harassment	Frequency	Percent
Facial expression	22	14.9
Practice session with sexual talk	21	14.2
Unwanted sexual teasing, jokes	18	12.2
Grazing breast	18	12.2
Giving personal gifts	18	12.2
Unwanted scratching of palms, touching, and pinching of body parts	14	9.5
Unwelcome correspondences emails/sms	10	6.8
Demearing language	7	4.7
Unwelcome phone calls	6	4.1
Sexual comments about a person's clothing, anatomy or looks	5	3.4
Repeatedly asking out when you are not interested	5	3.4
Grabbing any body parts	3	2.0
Total incidents of sexual harassment	147	100

Table 1 reveals that the most frequent types of sexual harassment are unwanted facial expression, practice session with sexual talk, unwanted sexual teasing, grazing breast, giving personal gifts and a good number of others. The same types of sexual harassment found here were also found by Brackenridge (2000 and 2001); Steinbach (2008); Buzuvis (2011); William & Brake (1998). While in Turkey, Nevin et al (2007) found slang words, covert jokes and unwelcome physical contacts as other forms of sexual harassment.

**Table 2: Major categories sexual harassment as per perpetrator**

Dimension	Male coach		Male administrator		Male spectator		Male peer athlete	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Verbal harassment	24	16.3	5	3.4	21	14.3	12	8.2
Non-verbal harassment	17	11.6	4	2.7	20	13.6	9	6.1
Physical contact	17	11.6	1	0.7	11	7.5	6	4.1

Table 2 shows the major categories of harassment and the relevant perpetrators. The most cited perpetrators of verbal sexual harassment and harassment through physical contact are the male coaches, the male spectators and male peer athletes in descending order. The male spectator is the most-cited for non-verbal. Examples of the various kinds of sexual harassment are shown in Table 1.

From the literature sexual harassment could be verbal i.e. name-calling, descriptions of anatomy or other appearance; non-verbal i.e. staring, showing sexually-motivated pictures etc and physical i.e. pinching, caressing, sexual penetration, rape etc.(Fasting et al., 2000).

These data shows that sexual harassment of the elite sportswoman was a widespread practice. Findings in connection with the nature of the perpetrator were similar to those of Freberg (2003) who found that female athletes suffered most harassment from male athletes, male coaches and assistant male coaches.

Data from the present study on sexual harassment by authority figures (coaches and administrators) and spectators on the Zimbabwe elite sportswomen were much lower than that found by Fasting et al., (2000) on Norwegian elite sportswomen. While the data show that harassing of Zimbabwe elite sportswomen by male athletes

is much less than harassing by the same in Norway and Turkey, (Fasting et al., (2000); Nevin et al., (2007) . The data in Zimbabwe also show a much lower percentage than that found by Hayden (2003) in the USA who found that female college athletes reported that male coaches were the most-cited in making sexual harassment comments and jokes. Hayden (2003) also reported that female athletes experienced sexual harassment by male coaches and male assistant coaches. This shows that all over the world harassers of sportswomen were largely male.

However the percentage of athletes harassed by someone outside sport settings (spectators) is higher than that found elsewhere. It can be concluded that the spectators are the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment on the elite sportswomen possibly because they are not professionals and are not bound by any ethical guidelines in their conduct towards the sports women (Fasting et al., 2000).

### **The time and place where sexual harassment is committed**

Of the 22 respondents who were sexually harassed, eight were harassed at the college sport centre, six in the trainer's office, four on the bus to and from a sports trip, two in gyms, and two in changing rooms. The most frequent place was the college sport centre, trainer's office and the bus to and from a sports trip. The findings seem to establish that the sports centre is a hideaway for

sports personnel who feel that they in charge of those places and control entry to them. This result concurs with that of Nevin et al (2007) who found out in Turkey that 200 out of 356 participants were sexually harassed most frequently at the sport centre. Findings also concur with Steinbach (2008) who reported that a female football team manager was sexually harassed by players on the bus from a sport trip.

### **The effects of sexual harassment on the elite sportswomen**

The study revealed that 22 (14%) of the respondents who had been victims of sexual harassment suffered psychologically and emotionally. The psychological effects included fear, demoralisation, embarrassment, anger, hate, disrespect, and loss of concentration, among others. The results also reveal that ten percent of the elite sportswomen also changed from athletics to ball games. The results revealed that the athletes changed sport discipline to avoid the harasser. Findings are consistent with Hogshead-Makar & Steinbach (2003) who reported that female college athletes may be obliged to abstain from colligate competitions after being sexually harassed. The findings are also consistent with The Athletic Business (March 31, 2008) which also reports that a female basketball player who revealed that her coach would send her text messages stating, "I love you, I miss you, can't wait to see you." She left the team because she felt uncomfortable.

The results also reveal that four percent of the elite sportswomen experienced stress. The signs of stress were fear, worry, being upset, and boredom among others. The stated examples are negative stress/distress or anxiety. Martens (1982) cited in Cox (1990, p.122) gives the same as signs of anxiety. Anxiety affects sport performance. Sport performance decreases as anxiety increases (Cox 1986 cited in Cox 1990, p.136). In addition to the emotional turmoil that sexual harassment caused, the sportswomen might respond by abstaining from collegiate competition for a year or more under National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) rules. That abstention might lead to

stopping sport participation for good (Hogshead-Makar & Steinbach, 2003).

The present study revealed that 17 of the 22 victims of sexual harassment acknowledged a reduction in participation and sporting performance after being sexually harassed. The results support Clayton cited by Schomo (2007) who stated that individuals who are sexually harassed in sport claim that the harassment adversely affects their participation in athletic programmes. This shows that athletes' performance may be adversely affected by the environment in which they are participating. The results also support Hogshead-Makar & Steinbach, (2003) when they report sexual harassment as a "death-knell" for a sportswomen's career. This means that when a sportswoman is harassed in sport one will never go there again and it will be the end of their sports career.

The present study also reveals that the elite sportswomen suffered several physical problems. The 22 victims suffered in different ways after the sexual harassment: eight sleeplessness (8); headaches (6); irregular menstruation (4); dizziness (4). These results show that sexual harassment has no single effect on the athlete. There seem to be different effects depending on the domain examined and the point in the process where assessment had been made (Guttek and Koss 1993). These authors point to the fact that, in addition to the effect of sexual harassment itself, the after-effects are often influenced by disappointment in the way others react. Garlick (1994) claimed that as many as 90% of sexual harassment victims suffered from a significant degree of emotional stress and Koss (1991) found that between 21% and 82% of all women who had been sexually harassed (depending on the severity of the harassment) reported a deterioration in their emotional and/or physical condition.

### **Conclusions**

From the findings here it is possible to conclude that sexual harassment incidences are widespread among elite sportswomen in colleges and universities in Zimbabwe. Although the

percentage of women who reported sexual harassment was lower compared to the prevalence in other countries, it remained unacceptably high. Secondly, it can be concluded that sexual harassment takes broadly the same forms as those reported from all over the world. Thirdly, awareness of sexual harassment by the elite sportswomen was quite common but it is possible that there was some under-reporting of the sexual harassment.

### Recommendations

Having established a considerable prevalence of sexual harassment among elite college athletes it is possible to make the following recommendations:

Policies, security guidelines and other materials should be prepared to increase the security of the elite sportswomen. The harassers should be punished with deterrent and appropriate punishment.

The present study dealt with a rather small sample and there is need for use of bigger samples by researchers in the future. The study also had a weakness which informs the present recommendations in that the use of questionnaire carrying only closed questions, meant that no advantage was taken of the more intimate information that could have been obtained through the use of qualitative methods. This study was also cross-sectional and in future researchers might find it profitable to employ a longitudinal approach so as to assess the cumulative impacts of sexual harassment on physical and psychological wellbeing of athletes.

### Limitations of the study

Considering that thousands of sports women are involved in sports at different levels in Zimbabwe, the number that was employed in this study was very small and could not possibly be representative of all the sportswomen in this country and elsewhere. The questions that were posed were entirely closed and future studies will need to include open-ended questions that will offer participants the opportunity to tell their personal stories about sexual harassment in sport.

This study was very much a 'snap shot' of the situation and it is likely that a more longitudinal approach would produce richer and more informative data than what was possible in this cross-sectional study.

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