

Sexual Harassment Experiences of Hospitality Interns in Ghana

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ABSTRACT: *The study was undertaken to investigate experiences of sexual harassment by hospitality interns in Ghana. Phenomenology design was employed for the study to collect data from final year 2020/2021 B-Tech Hospitality interns who were doing a four-month internship programme. Semi-structured interview was used and validated through peer review and re-reading. The study revealed that interns were unaware of sexual harassment policies and were not given any form of sexual harassment orientation prior to their posting. The study further established that interns experienced sexual harassment at their various work places but refused to report any of the cases. Additionally, the results of the study have brought to the fore that uniforms worn by interns, their youthful ages and their attractiveness were major causes of sexual harassment of hospitality interns. This study is important as it offers current empirical data of hospitality interns experiences of sexual harassment and beefed literature which seems not known to exist in a developing country, Ghana. The study recommends that Management of Technical Universities should organise orientation on sexual harassment for interns prior to their postings so as to alert and protect them from any forms of sexual harassment.*

KEY WORDS: Sexual harassment policy, sexual harassment, Hospitality interns, Gender-neutral clothing, experiences

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that sexual harassment is a persistent issue that has gained prominence in recent years especially at hospitality industry work places. This may be due to factors such as long working hours, night shifts, working conditions and interactions that take place during service delivery (Mkono, 2010; and Ram, 2018). (Waudby and Poulston 2017) defined sexual harassment as sexual behaviours that are unwanted and offensive. According to (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, and Magley, 1997) sexual harassment include: gender harassment, seductive behaviour, sexual bribery, sexual assault, unwanted touching, sexual comments about the person's look, sexual coercion, fondling, rape, attempted rape and continued expressions of sexual interests after being informed that the interest is unwelcome.

Prior studies such as (Yassour-Borochoowitz's 2020; Lynch, 2019; Ram, 2018; Jennings, 2017; Harte, 2017; Wynen, 2016; Waudby, 2012; Mkono, 2010; and Poulton, 2008) have found that hospitality industry has the highest level of sexual harassment reported cases. For instance, (Mkono 2010) study in Zimbabwe found that 80 % hospitality interns in the hospitality industry had been victims of sexual harassment. (Ineson, Yap, and Whiting, 2013) study identified that 82% of employees in hospitality industry had witnessed being harassed sexually. A study by (Lin 2016) also found that 91.7% of hospitality interns experienced sexual harassment in Taiwan. (Mooney 2016) study also found that hospitality industries have more reported cases of sexual harassment than any other industrial sector.

In another study, (Good and Cooper 2016) identified that in the United States of America women who worked in the food and beverage department may be required by managers to wear tighter uniforms that expose themselves sexually in order to encourage customer-based sexual harassment. A study by (Ram 2018) also found that, in the United State of America between 10% and 20% of hospitality workers report having experienced sexual harassment.

Based on the literature reviewed, it is clear that sexual harassment is a persistent workplace problem in the hospitality industry. However, in every year hospitality educators in Ghana send out a number of students to complete their compulsory internships programme in the industry as a fulfillment for graduation for the award of B-Tech Hospitality. This situation exposes them to various forms of sexual harassment. (Karunaratne and Niroshani 2019) defined internship as part of the formal curriculum of most tertiary institutions where students are placed in organisations to work for a specific period of time to gain relevant skills and competencies.

According to (Adjei, Nyarko, and Nunfam 2014), internship programme is deemed necessary as an academic requirement for tertiary students in Ghana to fulfil before they graduate. (Enghagen 2018) also opines that internship programme is necessary as it provides opportunity for interns to apply theoretical knowledge to practice.

In Ghana, sexual harassment cases have been studied to some extent and had been mainly focused on employees experiences of the menace in the work environment (Larbi, 2020; Amofah, 2020; Ashe, 2014; Ganu and Boateng, 2013; Bortei-Doku, 2004; and Andoh, 2001). However, no study has been done on hospitality student interns' experiences of being harassed sexually in Ghana. This current study, the first of its kind in Ghana, aimed at exploring hospitality interns' experiences of sexual harassment. It is important to study the subject matter as that would help advance our understanding of current data in Ghana (which seems unknown to exist) as that would help contribute to improvement in policy and practice. The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. to explore sexual harassment experiences of hospitality interns in the hospitality industry.
2. to ascertain whether cases of sexual harassment are reported.
3. to assess factors that influence sexual harassment suffered by interns in the hospitality industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual Harassment Concepts in Ghana

The Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) Section 175 in Ghana defines sexual harassment as ‘any unwelcome, offensive or request made by an employer or a co-worker to a worker, whether the worker is a man or woman. It includes: making comments about a person’s appearance; indecent remarks about a person’s sex life; sexual demands by a member of the same sex or opposite sex; unwelcome physical contact and other conduct of a sexual nature that creates humiliating working environment. In Ghana, there are no clear laws that specifically prohibit sexual harassment. Just that the criminal code of conduct of Ghana has a provision on indecent assault. Section 103 of the 1960 Criminal Code (Act 29) states that whoever indecently assaults any person shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and shall be liable on conviction to a term of imprisonment of not less than six months. Sexual harassment is therefore not clearly treated as a criminal offence in the laws of Ghana. As a result of this, many people do not think sexual harassment is a serious matter that infringes on the right of individuals. Therefore, the issue of sexual harassment is not openly discussed and often regarded as trivial (Ganu and Boateng, 2013).

Sexual Harassment Cases in Ghana

Below are some studies of sexual harassment cases that have manifested at different levels within different sectors of the Ghanaian work environment.

(Bortei-Doku 2004) carried out a study into Ghanaian perspectives on sexual harassment in relation to the definition, sites of harassment, experiences and perspectives on redress. Semi-structured interview was utilized to solicit data from 298 participants from the public offices in Accra, Takoradi and Tamale. The results of the study revealed that participants of the study understood sexual harassment as ‘unwelcome sexual advances’. The study further revealed that many reports of harassment are treated unofficial since it exposed the victims to stigmatization. The study recommends that social education on the sexual rights of males and females should be intensified at various workplaces.

(Terkpeh 2011) studied sexual harassment in the workplace. The study sought to look at how sexual harassment was handled in Ghana’s leading Telecommunication Company. The study sampled 106 workers from the organization and employed a descriptive statistical tool to analyse the data. The study found that sexual harassment was prevalent in the organization among both male and female workers. The study revealed that Ghana’s leading Telecommunication Company had sexual harassment policy but most workers who were harassed did not report the harassers because they did not want them to lose their jobs since harassers happened to be senior staff.

(Ganu and Boateng 2013) set out to examine sexual harassment experiences in the Ghanaian work environment and determine how males and females employees react to sexual harassment behaviours. The study adopted questionnaire to gather data from 324 respondents within Tema Metropolitan area. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse the data. The study

found that sexual harassment incidents were unreported. The study also found that sexual harassment has a direct impact on the image of an organization. The study recommended that organisations should establish counselling units that will provide support for affected individuals and encourage employees to courageously confront sexual harassers.

Another study by (Ashe 2014) was conducted to explore adoption and effective implementation of sexual harassment policies at the organisational level for experts in Accra. Semi-structured interview was employed to gather data from 13 key experts and stakeholders. The findings of (Ashe 2014) revealed that comprehensive sexual harassment policies do not exist in organisations in Ghana. The study also found that victims refused to report sexual harassment cases. The study recommends that all organisations need to draft comprehensive sexual harassment policies.

(Amofah 2020) also sought to explore the sexual harassment experiences of actresses in the Ghanaian film industry. Semi-structured interview was used to solicit data from eight actresses in the film industry. The study revealed that sexual harassment occurred at the early stage of actresses' career. The study further established that, the intimate working environments and the competition in the movie industry provided opportunities for sexual harassment to take place. The study further found that film directors were the main perpetrators of sexual harassment incidents in the film industry. The study recommended that victims of sexual harassment should come out boldly to name the harassers as the best way to put a stop to the menace.

(Andoh 2000) embarked on a study on the sexual harassment at workplaces in Ghana. The study employed survey and interviewed 100 workers from both the public and private sectors of Ghana. The study showed that both females and males experienced sexual harassment but the cases for females were more than that of males. The study further established that employees in their early years of work as well as unmarried workers were more prone to sexual harassment. The study also found that sexual harassment affected the performance of organizations if not dealt with out rightly.

(Larbi 2020) set out to assess the influence of sexual harassment on employees' performance at Saint Gregory catholic hospital in central region of Ghana. Questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Multiple regression was utilized to analyse the data. The study found that sexual harassment has a negative influence on employees' performance. The study further established that sexual harassment influenced employees absenteeism and affects employees to work slowly. The study recommends that Ministry of Health should implement a policy that forbid sexual harassment in all health institutions.

Global Sexual Harassment Cases in the Hospitality Workplaces

(La Lopa and Gong 2020) set out to investigate sexual harassment of hospitality interns from United States. Questionnaire was employed to solicit data from 786 students on five hospitality programmes. The study found that 44.8% of female interns experienced sexual harassment from

male customers but never reported such cases of sexual harassment because they were afraid of stigmatization..

(Derdar 2019) conducted a study to explore perceived sexual harassment among waitresses in Morocco. In-depth interview was employed to gather data from 10 waitresses, 5 café managers and 10 male café customers. The study found out that perpetrators of sexual harassment were male customers, managers and coworkers.

In a related study, (Ram 2018) conducted a study to investigate perceived sexual harassment incidents in the hospitality work places. The study found that, in the United State of America between 10 and 20% of hospitality workers reported having experienced sexual harassment.

In another study, (Waudby and Poulston 2017) studied sexualization and harassment in hospitality workplaces in New Zealand. Interview was used to collect data from 18 women who worked at a restaurant. The study found that all the participants experienced sexual harassment from customers in various ways. (Waudby and Poulston 2017) study also found that, women aged under 25 were most vulnerable to customer-based harassment.

(Manuel 2017; as cited in Amofah, 2020) set out to examine the experiences and perception of sexual harassment in the workplace in South Africa. The study found that there were cases of sexual harassment incidents in South Africa.

(Weber, Coats, Agrusa, Tanner and Meche 2002: as cited in Amofah, 2020) studied sexual harassment in the restaurant industry in the United States. Questionnaire was used to collect data from 330 respondents. The study found that sexual harassment was prevalent among females than males. The study further established that victims were harassed in the form of touching, hugging, comment on their appearance and flirting.

Factors Influencing Sexual Harassment in the Hospitality Workplaces

(Yassour-Borochowitz's 2020) study found that some hotels in Israel expected female service staff to dress sexually to increase management's perceived customer satisfaction and loyalty. Zhang (2020) multiple case study from three countries showed that customer-based sexual harassment, power imbalance, uniform worn by interns and their youthful ages as factors that influenced sexual harassment incidents to occur in hospitality workplaces. Another study by Harte (2017) found that sexual harassment is more frequent in a workplace where the number of males are more than females employees; this could be a reason for the high levels of sexual harassment in hospitality industry. Harte (2017) study showed that female employees are more likely to be seen as sex objects and targets of harassment by men, when working in a male-dominated organisation. In a related study, Waudby and Poulston (2017) found that power differentials between customers and hospitality employees is a significant factor that influenced sexual harassment at hospitality workplaces. The study further established that employees who wore conservative uniforms were not harassed as against those who wore their own choice of clothes. Clothing choices affect the likelihood of harassment (Waudby & Poulston, 2017). A study by (Good and Cooper (2016) also identified that in the United States of America, women who worked in the food and beverage

operations may be required by managers to wear tighter uniforms that expose themselves sexually in order to encourage customer-based sexual harassment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was framed within phenomenological design to solicit data from the participants. Phenomenology is a study of how people experience issues. It tends to study participants' perspectives of issues with respect to their thoughts and feelings of an experience (Kuranchie 2021). The approach adopted in this study afforded the researchers the opportunity to engage in extensive interaction with the interns for their lived experiences on the subject matter in new settings.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population of the study was made up of sixty- seven (67) final year 2020/2021 B-Tech Hospitality interns who were doing four-month internship programme in a Public Technical University. Out of the sixty- seven (67) participants, twenty- four (24) female hospitality interns were purposively sampled to participated in the exercises. This was achieved when respondents at the onset of the interview admitted having experienced various forms of sexual harassment and hence met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. All those who said they have not experience any form of sexual harassment were excluded from the study. This inclusion criterion of the study was adopted with the aim of permitting subjects to pour out their experiences with respect to the issues under study in sufficient detail to enable those who had no experience on the issues to comprehend.

Research Instrument

Semi-structured interview was used to solicit data from the participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how the interns experienced sexual harassment in the hospitality industry. The choice of semi-structured interview was appropriate for this study since it allowed the interviewers to probe for the necessary details in order to gain further insights into what was prevailing in the hospitality industry with regard to sexual harassment of interns.

Validity of Instrument

To establish credibility of the findings, peer review and re-reading were employed to ensure the right data were captured and used for the analysis so as to improve trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Collection Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were scheduled to gather data from the participants. The interview was held at the interns' work places and lasted between 25 and 35 minutes with each participant. One respondent was interviewed at a time, until all the respondents were interviewed. The interviewer used guiding questions, but the tone of the interview was more of conversation. The following interview questions were asked: First: are you aware of any sexual harassment policy document in your institution? Second: did you receive any briefing on sexual harassment prior to posting?

Third: have you ever been sexually harassed as an intern before? Fourth: if you have experienced, did you ever report any incident of sexual harassment? Fifth: what may be the causes of sexual harassment during the period of internship?

Data Analysis Method

The narrative data obtained was manually analysed.

Ethical Considerations

As the study involved human beings, the researchers took ethical issues seriously during the exercise by seeking permission from the participants. Participants were further assured of confidentiality of their responses. Interviewees were given a clear outline of the purpose of the study.

DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Profile of the Participants

In this study, data was gathered from twenty-four (24) final year female interns who were pursuing Bachelor's degree programme in Hospitality Management in a local Technical University. Their ages were grouped into four quintiles ranging from 18 - 25, 26 - 30, 31 - 35 and 36 and above. The age range of the participants showed that 42.8 % fell into the age group ranging from 18 to 25 years, while 27%, 12.4 % and 17.8 % fell within the age groups of between 26 - 30, 31 - 35 and 36 and above respectively.

Sexual Harassment Policy

Participants were asked if they were aware of sexual harassment policy document in their school. Interestingly, all the participants responded that they were not aware of any sexual harassment policy. One participant stated that: *I don't know any thing about sexual harassment policy. One participant also argued: I have to say that I have no idea of what sexual harassment policy is about.* This finding of the study showed that participants were not aware of any sexual harassment policy in their school. The finding further showed that school management in the study had not designed any sexual harassment policy to alert students of the possibility of its occurrence. This revelation is consistent with a finding by (Taylor and Hardin's 2017) in a study in the United States of American where it was found that interns did not receive any briefing on sexual harassment prior to postage.

Sexual Harassment Orientation for Interns

Participants were asked if they received any sexual harassment education prior to their postings. Surprisingly, all the interviewees said that they were not given any sexual harassment orientation prior to their postings. This suggests that all the participants in the study did not receive any briefing on sexual harassment prior to internship programme. Two participants claimed that: *they have not attended any internship programme in the school before and they said they were only aware of freshers orientation when they were in the first year.* Interns may not even know how to exercise their rights when harassment occurs (Lynch, 2019). It is clear that more needs to be done

by management of the school in the study to prevent interns from sexual harassment and its related abuses rather than waiting for its to occur.

Sexual Harassment Experiences of Hospitality Interns

The interviewees were asked whether they had ever been sexually harassed as interns. The study established that interns admitted to having experienced sexual harassment in various forms. One participant bodily described how the incidents occurred: a *customer touched my buttocks*. The responses suggest that the hospitality industry has a bad reputation for sexual harassment. The finding of the study corroborates (Poulston 2008) study which found that 40% of interns experienced sexual harassment.

Report of Sexual Harassment

The interns were further asked whether they reported any cases of sexual harassment. Interestingly, none of the participants made any report. One of them said that: *she was afraid and felt embarrassed to report the incident*. The implication of the finding that none of the participants made any report of being harassed is that the actual cases of sexual harassment may be under-reported as interns are probably afraid and feel embarrassed to talk about it. The outcome of the study strengthens (La Lopa and Gong 2020) whose study found that interns in the United States of American may be afraid to report cases of sexual harassment. This finding of the study corroborates (Andoh 2001) study in Ghana who found that about 74% of female workers in both private and public sectors experienced some form of sexual harassment in their work places but 95% of the cases were not reported.

Causes of Sexual Harassment

The respondents were asked to share their views on causes of sexual harassment during the period of internship. Multiple responses were given by the respondents. Majority of the respondents said that causes of sexual harassment were due to female dominance, uniforms worn by interns, youthful age and attractiveness of interns. One participant commented that. *I think the skirt we wear, our beautiful appearance and our youthful ages encourage sexual harassment*. The finding clearly suggests that uniforms worn by interns made them sexually attractive and exposed them to be sexually harassed. This finding supports the view of (Waudby and Poulston, 2017) that in New Zealand interns who wore skimpy clothes are more likely to be harassed sexually.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study covered experiences of hospitality interns who were doing four- month internship programme in a local Technical University in Ghana. It looked into sexual harassment policy, experiences of sexual harassment by interns and causes of sexual harassment. It emerged from the study that hospitality interns were not aware of sexual harassment policy and were not given any form of briefing prior to their postings. Additionally, all the participants admitted experiencing sexual harassment in various forms but never reported any of such cases because they were afraid and felt embarrassed. The study revealed that uniform worn by participants, youthful age and their

attractiveness as the major factors that caused sexual harassment. The study's findings have contributed to knowledge in literature on hospitality interns' experiences of sexual harassment and it is expected that it will help managements of Technical Universities to put in place sexual harassment policies so as to better protect interns from and alert them of any forms of such harassment.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided for hospitality educators, practitioners and the government.

First, Managements of Technical Universities should endeavour to design sexual harassment policies and ensure that students are briefed through orientation prior to their posting to their work places. The policies should also, be made available at Institutional' website, students' platform and students'handbook so as to make it easier for them to access.

Second, hospitality student interns should be advised by their departmental heads during orientation to wear appropriate uniforms in order to prevent any incidents of sexual harassment. Ram (2018) suggested that in order to prevent incidents of sexual harassment of employees, it is important to change the uniforms of female workers from dresses to gender-neutral clothing.

Third, Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) should ensure that an official sexual harassment policy is put in place to make it compulsory for all Technical Universities in Ghana to offer support and orientation for their new interns.

Fourth, Managements of Technical Universities should encourage interns during orientation programmes to report any form of sexual harassment to their departmental heads of hospitality facilities as well as the heads of department at the school level so that necessary measures could be taken to protect them from such harassment in future.

Future Research

Most of the studies in the literature emphasise that females are sexually abused and for that matter in our study, we concentrated only females. However, the researchers recommend that future study should be carried out to take care of male sexual harassment in this era of homosexuality as well as sexual harassment by interns.

In addition, the study focused on interns' experiences of sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, further research should look at other sectors and investigate the extent of sexual harassment in those areas.

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