

**ASSESSING THE ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING.**

by

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ABSTRACT

The use of social media has in the last decade become popular among students in Institutions of Higher Learning (IHL). Social relationships and communications among students mostly take place on social networks. However, because of their growing popularity abuse is also increasing on these social media platforms. Female students are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of abuse on these platforms. This study explored the experiences of online sexual harassment among female students at a selected Institution of Higher Learning (IHL) in South Africa. This was to gain insights into the extent to which female students in institutions of Higher Learning are affected by this phenomenon. In particular, the study sought to find out the different forms of online sexual harassment experienced by female students in IHL, the specific types of online platforms where this sexual harassment take place, and the coping strategies employed by these students to cope with online sexual harassment. To address these objectives, the study adopted a qualitative exploratory design which allowed understanding of these experiences through the eyes of the victims. Twenty female participants were used for the study, while semi structured interviews were employed to collect data from these individuals. Purposive and critical case sampling technique was used to identify female students who had experienced sexual harassment online in the IHL. Findings reveal that sexual harassment at the IHL has occurred mostly in the form soliciting and sending of inappropriate pictures and videos to the victims. The study also revealed that the two main platforms on which sexual harassment of female students took place were WhatsApp and Facebook. While the main strategies of coping with online sexual harassment were blocking of harassers and complete disregard of the harassers.

Key Words: Biological; coping strategies. Dominance; Online disinhibition; online sexual solicitation; Power; Social media; Victims

DECLARATION

I, **Sehlule Thambo**, declare that the dissertation for the Master of Arts in Sociology degree at the University of Venda, hereby submitted by me, has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution and that all reference material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Signature_____Date_____

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Virus
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CC	International Criminal Court
CCR	Coordinated Community Response for Domestic Violence
CDC	Center for Disease Control and Prevention
CSVV	Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation
DoJ&CD	Department of Justice and Community Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HEAIDS	Higher Education
HIV	Human Immuno Deficiency Virus
IHL	Institution(s) of Higher Learning
NPA	National Prosecuting Authority of South Africa
RPE	Rules of Procedure and Evidence
SABC	South African Broadcasting Commission
SADC	Southern African Development Committee
SAPS	South Africa Police Service
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TB	Tuberculosis
TCC	Thulamela Care Centers
TVeT	Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNIVEN University of Venda
VAW Violence Against Women
WHO World Health Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Background of the Study

Sexual harassment is a problem that has continued to occur in the different facets of the human society: religious institutions, military barracks, business, and corporate offices, and academic institutions including, Institutions of Higher Learning (Paludi & Paludi, 2003; Sbraga & O'Donohue, 2000; Barak, 2015). Cases of Catholic Priests' abuse of women and children in churches all over the world (Sands, 2003); the case of Harvey Weinstein, the alleged US disgraced filmmaker who used his influence to harass numerous women in Hollywood (Hemel and Lund, 2018); and Bill O'Reilly, another American top journalist, who used his TV position to harass several women (Hemel and Lund, 2018) are prominent examples. Using their influences, the actors in these cases have either tried or have abused their victims. In the age of the #Me Too Movement, more women have begun to come out to testify to how they have been harassed and abused in different segments of our society. Given the power structure of our society, there are much more likely to be victims of sexual harassment because, they more often than not women lack the power, and are often in more vulnerable and insecure positions, than men (Barak, 2015; Gruber, 1997; Paludi & Paludi, 2003; Sbraga & O'Donohue, 2000).

However, sexual harassment is not limited to physical structures. Sue Scheff, author of the recently released book *Shame Nation: The Global Epidemic of Online Hate*, which includes a foreword by Monica Lewinsky (the (in)famous girl in the Bill Clinton sexual harassment scandal in 1999), says that in the digital age, sexual harassment is prevalent online (Scheff, 2017). According to her, people are just as emotionally abused and are in pain in online abuse as they are, when they are harassed or abused outside the Internet. With the advent of the Internet and the corresponding different social media platforms, where people can receive and send messages to virtual and real friends, sexual harassment does not have to occur in a face-to-face confrontation anymore but can occur on these mediums in the different environments; giving room for the possibility

of this phenomenon to increase.

When it comes to online sexual harassment, interestingly, women have been on the receiving end. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (2014) found that of the Internet users that exist, 40% reported having experienced harassment, and these were mostly females in a particular age range. The survey found out that overall women are more likely to be sexually harassed on the Internet than men. The prevalence of sexual harassment and stalking was higher for women of a young age than men. The results also indicated that young women between the ages of 18-24 years were twice likely to experience sexual harassment online more than women between 25-29 years of age (25%vs. 10%). They also were thrice likely to not only to be harassed but also stalked online compared to their counterpart age range (26%vs.8%). These women also reported their harassment experienced online to have been extremely or very upsetting more than men. A later follow up study also reported that even though men might most likely suffer more incidents of online harassment of any kind, it is women that report to experience emotional stress of higher levels from this and towards the causes that are underlying to these incidences their attitudes vary (Pew Research Center,2018).

These recent research findings are corroborated by earlier research which shows that not only have the bulk of the population facing online sexual harassment been women but that the number has increased over the years (Martellozzo & Jane, 2017; Wihbey & Kille, 2015; Goldman & Hatch, 2000). Studies carried out in Europe by Golbeck (2018) also show growing evidence of female students being sexually coerced and abused over the Internet in their different IHL. Broad *et al.* (2018) also found a similar result in a comparative study conducted in Africa and Europe. According to these scholars, sexual and abusive messages over the Internet have increased among young people across the two continents (Broad et al., 2018). Even though more cases were under-reported, there was a significant increase. This occurred, not necessarily because of the physical attractions, but because of the anonymity that the Internet provides for the harassers. With the increasing use and popularity of the Internet, it is unlikely that this will start reducing soon.

It is with this background that the current study examines the sexual harassment

experiences of female students in a South African IHL. Drawing from the analytic paradigms from four main theories: the power and dominance model, the biological model, online disinhibition effect model and the SIDE model, the study investigates the different platforms on which this phenomenon occurs, the forms it takes when it occurs and the main coping strategies developed by victims to deal with it when it occurs. Utilizing a synthesized form of these models, the Biological Model, the study is able to understand not only why this phenomenon has increased over the years, but also how the Internet has provided conducive platforms for sexual harassment to occur in an IHL. In line with the biological model, for example, the study understands that men often have sexual drives and urges that are often more compelling than women. Thus, being in a position of power, and having the appropriate platform in the form of the Internet men are able to act out their sexual tendencies. Women, on the other hand, are often more vulnerable than men because of the societies' social settings. Often they are more active on the Internet, but this activeness comes with a price - an opportunity to become prey to the harasser acting out of his whims and caprices in the social networks.

The study will fill the gap in research about online sexual harassment research in South Africa where most have largely dwelt on intimate partner violence and physical or verbal sexual harassment. Not much research has dwelt specifically on online sexual harassment of female students at an IHL.

Data were drawn from interviews with 20 female students, who had been victims of online sexual harassment at the selected institution of learning. This data-set contains detailed information which locates online sexual harassment within the IHL to the experiences of the female participants.

1.2 Problem Statement

The popularity of social media means that social interactions are now more common on social media than in the physical world. People now spend more time interacting with their "friends" on social media than they spend with their friends and colleagues in real life (Nie & Erbring, 2002). Unfortunately, this means that they are also more exposed to

abuse on such platforms than they do in real life (Griffiths, 2003). According to Saleh (2018), most of such abuse comes in the form of sexual harassment. Pornographic pictures, nude pictures of ones' genitals and other similar materials or sexually charged words are constantly sent to others, often with the intent to harass or solicit for sex. This is likely to be more rampant in IHL, where easy accessibility to the internet and youthful exuberance have increased the use of social media as a means for social interaction. In such institutions, it is likely that different social media have become a "conducive" platform for sexual harassment. Unfortunately, there is no real documentation of how and why these forms of abuse happen. Using a South African Institution of Learning, this research profiles this phenomenon, with a view to exploring the various students can deal with it in the IHL environment.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this research is twofold: theoretical and empirical. Theoretically, it aims to fulfill the gap in the literature on sexual harassment on girls in the institution of higher learning. Although a number of studies on sexual harassment have been conducted at institutions of higher learning, most of them have only focused on intimate partner violence, physical and verbal sexual harassment and rape. Previous studies have not really articulated the sexual harassment experiences of female students on the internet. By exploring the sexual harassment experiences of these kinds of actors, the current study fills this gap. This will improve and contribute to existing knowledge on sexual harassment of students, specifically on the online platforms.

Empirically, conducting this study is important because of its practical implications on policy in South Africa higher and tertiary education landscape. By providing details on the different forms of sexual harassment and factors that contribute to sexual harassment on these online platforms, the research would help policy-makers and stakeholders both in the society and at the different institutions in formulating new policies or improving existing ones in order to deal effectively with cases of sexual harassment online.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The study's aim was to assess the prevalence of online sexual harassment experiences of female students at a South African institution of higher learning.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by three main objectives thus:

1. To identify the specific forms of online sexual harassment experienced by female students at the institution of higher learning.
2. To identify specific platforms on which this sexual harassment occurs at the institution of higher learning.
3. To explore the coping strategies employed by female students to deal with online sexual harassment at the institution of higher learning.

1.6 Research Questions

For the above aim to be achieved, the following objectives were adopted.

The study formulates three main research questions, thus:

- 1) What forms of online sexual harassment do female students experience at the selected South African IHL?
- 2) What specific online platforms does sexual harassment take place at the selected institution of higher learning?
- 3) What coping strategies do female students at the selected institution of higher learning employ to deal with online sexual harassment?

1.7 Definition of Operational Terms

For more clarity, few key terms (female student, online harassment, institution of higher learning, social media, victims, power, dominance, biological, online disinhibition, online sexual solicitation) used in the thesis are explained below:

1.7.1 Online Harassment

Online harassment refers to the use of the Internet to solicit, threaten, harass, or malignantly embarrass another person (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2017). Throughout the thesis, the term is used interchangeably with cyber harassment or Internet harassment. Some of the most common behaviors include unsolicited sending of threatening emails, encouragement of others to send a victim unwanted and threatening email messages that are intended to overwhelm the receiver, an electric sabotage where a harasser sends viruses to a victim, posting messages that are rumors or untrue about a victim, sending of defamatory comments to a victim online, sending of negative messages to a victim, the online impersonating of a victim by sending either controversial, inflammatory or enticing messages which influences negative responses being sent to the victim, harassment of a victim in a live chat, abusive messages being left online for a victim in particular on social media platforms, the sending of unwanted graphic or pornographic material to the victim to intentionally offend them or creating online content that negatively depicts a victim.

Within this definition actions such as “receiving unsolicited explicit sexual messages, text online or emails, offensive and improper advances on chat rooms and social media websites, threats of sexual or bodily violence online by texts or emails, hateful speech, insults, demeaning and derogatory language or threats made to a victim based on either their gender, disability or sexual orientation” What is important is that such acts of abuse are administered over the Internet and on an online form. Online harassment has various forms and categories, depending on the author and their preferences in the administration of their actions.

1.5.2 Online Sexual Harassment

Online sexual harassment is one form of online harassment. Also referred to as cyber sexual harassment or Internet sexual harassment, it simply means “sexual conduct that is unwantedly occurring on digital platforms,” (Project deShame, 2017). As Project deShame, (2017) explains, this type of harassment includes a variety of behaviours that utilize digital content that may be either messages, videos, images, pages or posts in a

multitude of online platforms which are either public or private. Sexual online harassment causes an individual to feel humiliated, upset, discriminated against, coerced and or threatened. Ahmed, Rasha, Nahed & Ahmed (2017) state that online sexual harassment is a form of Internet abuse, and it may undermine the mental wellness of the youth because of its consequences that have a negative impact on their emotions. In this study, online sexual harassment refers to unwanted sexual material that the victims, who are female students receive on the Internet from a harasser either in the form of pictures, videos or sexual jokes.

1.5.3 Social Media

According to Ward (2018), social media is a form of media which is online, and facilitates conversation. This is different from previous types of media which only conveyed content without providing the receiver the opportunity to actively relay messages back. Thus, Jones (2009) further explains that social media it is a category of online media where people get to talk, participate, network, share and bookmark online. Orenstein (2012), Oxford Internet Institute (2018), Berry et al., (2017) argue that these social networking platforms describe any form of social interaction using technology with some combination of words, photographs, video, or audios. These series of applications and websites accessed on smartphones, tablets, and computers are designed to allow for quick and efficient information sharing among people. It is against this background that the phrase social media is also used in this study. There are different kinds of social media platforms, but this study will dwell more on those kinds of platforms that are mainly used for social networking like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube. The phrase 'online platforms' has been used interchangeably with social media platforms in this study.

1.5.4 Female Student

This term has been drawn from Hornby (2010)'s definition which conceptualizes female students as any female studying in a place of higher education. This is not to be confused with the female pupil, which is used to refer to individuals who are female and

attending high school. These students study at an institution of the highest level of education where one can study for a degree or conduct research. The biological make-up of the individual is the one that is used to determine whether they are female or not, this then explains the exclusion of persons that define themselves as female but are not physically made up as women.

1.5.5 Institution of Higher Learning

This term simply refers to universities or colleges. The IGI Global (1988-2018), U.S Legal (1997-2016) defines an institution of higher education as an institution of education in any country that enrolls people to be regular students who already have graduated and hold a certificate from a school which provides secondary education and is constitutionally and lawfully permitted within the country to provide an educational program after secondary education. Such an institution awards a degree which gives the individual leeway to be admitted for a postgraduate program, and this is reviewed and approved by the Secretary (IGI Global (1988-2018)).

The South Africa Higher Education Act, article 101 of 1997 which was amended by the Higher Education Laws, Article 26 of the 2010 Amendment concurs with the above definition by explaining that an institution of higher learning is also referred to as a higher education institution and is an institution that either on a part-time, full-time or even distance basis issues higher education certification lawfully.

1.5.6 Victims

In this current study, the term 'victim' has been used as prescribed by the Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power which serves as a guideline for provision under the ICC. This means individuals, who either as an individual or collectively have been subjected to harm. This harm includes physical, injury to the mental faculties, emotional suffering, loss of economic value or basic fundamental human rights impairment through certain misdeeds, acts or omissions or intentional or unintentional breaking of the law (Khan,2007). Brouwer (2005) explains that a victim, as defined by rule 85 of the ICC RPE is a natural person who has

experienced or been subject to harm as a result of this above-mentioned undertaking. These definitions are wholesome and all-encompassing in defining a victim. The current study does not take into consideration the repetition of an offense, but rather, the description and feelings of the individuals that a certain crime has been committed to defining their victimhood.

1.5.7 Dominance

Understanding and use of the term dominance in this study has been drawn from definitions of various scholars whose conceptions can be summed up thus: Fedigan (1982) defines dominance as the ruling or controlling of others by influence or superior power. He explains that the ability to control, influence and rule others is widely considered as dominance. Jacobson (2013) argues that dominance is behavior acted with the intention to subordinate another individual, thereby giving higher status to the dominant individual than the subordinate. This means that dominance occurs where one individual has the power to manipulate another individual in a way they may not be comfortable with. Because of the perceived power they possess, the subordinate has little power to disagree.

1.5.8 Online Disinhibition

In this study, the term 'online disinhibition' is used in accordance to Wittkower (2010)'s explanation, which he took from Psychologist John Suler's words that, it is the inability to restrain oneself when conversing with others on the Internet compared to the face to-face form of communication. There is, however, a tendency in this virtual space for people to loosen up and express themselves more freely with less restraint than they would have when chatting with others face-to-face. This motivates some individuals to say or do things that are unwelcome to others while online because the Internet provides the freedom to express oneself in ways that are socially inappropriate in a face to face conversations. Stohr (2012) concurs that people tend to expose things while online than they would face to face. Neff (2003) also agrees, arguing that while online a phenomenon widely known as the 'online disinhibition' may occur. Simply put, people's

behavior because of the Internet environment tend to change either to become less inhibitive or they can be more extreme or become more revealing than they most probably could do be face to face.

1.5.9 Online Sexual Solicitation

In this study, the term online sexual solicitation is used to refer to all kinds of behaviors that entail unwelcome requests and discussions about sex or sexual activity in an online format (Mitchell *et al.*, 2008). In some cases, such requests could either be on a personal or group level. What is important is that in communication, the harasser actively requests or makes an effort to coax the other person to be engaged in unwanted sexual conduct (Mitchell *et al.*, 2008).

1.5.11 Coping strategies

In this study 'coping strategies' basically explains how we think and what we do with the emotions we feel in dealing with stress. Folkman (2011) argues that coping is an important aspect of humans as a mechanism to protect both the physical and mental health from the harmful effects of stress. Coping strategies can, therefore, be classified into two approaches. Namely, the problem focused and emotion-focused coping. According to Folkman and Lazarus's (1980) conceptualization of coping strategies, problem-focused coping is fixed on changing the source where the stress emanated from while emotion-focused coping aims at managing the emotions that go with the perception of the stress (Brannon & Feist, 2009). In this study, coping strategies will be taken collectively and not separately in explaining how female students cope with online sexual harassment.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises of five chapters. Chapter one presents the background of the study, the problem statement, rationale/significance of the study, the research objectives and its related questions, and definitions of concepts and operational terms.

Chapter two focuses on the literature review; here the thesis presents a detailed literature review of online sexual harassment. It will present this in terms of the gaps in the previous studies and how the present study aims to address such gaps. It also presents the theoretical frameworks that underpin the study. It is here that the researcher expands on various theories that all contribute to explaining the aspect of online sexual harassment since there is a lot that contributes to it.

The Power and Dominance Model, Biological Model, Online Disinhibition Model and the Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) Model are discussed in this chapter. These theories give an analytical background that provides a backdrop to which the study was conducted.

Chapter three is the methodology chapter, where the different research components and philosophical assumptions made in the study are explained. Some of the most important components explained here are: the research approach, research design, sampling techniques, the study area, study population, data collection procedure, ethical considerations and, also the analysis of data.

The fourth chapter is the presentation of the data, its analysis, and interpretation and explicates how the themes and subthemes relate to theory. Themes and subthemes that emerged from the data are presented.

Chapter five, is the very last chapter of the study, presents the themes and subthemes giving a detail of the implications of the research on previous research in table formats and summaries of these themes are provided where the final comments are made of the arguments put forward by the study and then lastly, suggestions for future research and recommendations are made. Except chapter 5, each of the chapters end with a summary of what was discussed in the chapters.

1.8 Summary

This chapter has presented a general over-view of the dissertation. An introduction was given which encompasses the general background upon which the study was conducted. The statement of the problem explains the situation where there no studies at the institution of higher learning that has documented the online sexual harassment

of students and in the context of this study, female students. A motivation for conducting the study is also given in the chapter. The objectives and research questions were set in line with the study aim in order to guide the researcher. Finally, some of the key terms used in the study were defined in order to provide clarity on the focus of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This literature review chapter provides a theoretical justification for conducting the present study. The chapter discusses significant literature on online sexual harassment in IHL. The literature is discussed in an inverted pyramid format. First, it starts with a conceptualization of sexual harassment in general and the various forms it takes. The literature then narrows down and discusses online sexual harassment; the different forms such phenomenon takes also. The platforms on which online sexual harassment mostly occurs and the types of coping strategies that victims of such abuse adopt, in the IHL, and lastly, policies governing against sexual harassment in South Africa, other selected IHLs and at the IHL where the study is conducted are discussed in this chapter. Through these discussions, the chapter identifies some of the research gaps in relation to online sexual harassment in IHL in the previous literature. This being that most studies have neglected the experiences of female students of online sexual harassment rather they focused on perpetrators. In conclusion, the chapter introduces and discusses four main theories namely, power and dominance model, biological model, online disinhibition effect model and social identity model of deindividuation effects as the theoretical framework with which underpins the study.

2.2 Sexual Harassment

In the literature, the term sexual harassment is often conceptualised as a behavior or the act of making unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances towards another person, in either private or social institutions (Anju, 2015). Such acts do not only infringe on the dignity, the right to equality and social security of the other individuals, but also infringe on their right to peaceful existence and life (Anju, 2015).

Along this understanding, studies such as the UN Women (2010) Report and the American Association of University Women (AAUW,2001) have defined sexual

harassment as the behavior of a sexual nature which is viewed as unwelcome. It can also be sexual suggestions, which are uninvited or demands made for sexual favors which may either physical or verbal and are sexual in nature. Based on such understanding, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Commonwealth Act of 1989 state that sexual harassment occurs when a sexual advance, which is not welcome is done by an individual, or when such individuals make requests for sexual favors, which are also not welcome, and the individual to whom these acts are being done to has reason to believe that a rejection to these may be grounds for being disadvantaged in terms of their job or gaining employment (CISACA, 2017). These definitions have in the past decades dominated the understanding of sexual harassment. In general, their value is hinged on their ability to narrate how an individual's rights are denied when such unwanted acts or abuse occurs.

The subject of sexual harassment basically was documented first in the year 1908 (Fitzgerald, Weitzman, Godd & Omenold ,1988 in Siduna ,2017). It was not however, until the 1970s that it was legally recognised and labeled as a problem after significant research had been undertaken (Farley,1978). It is noteworthy to acknowledge that research was now done after feminists had aired their concerns about unfair treatment of women in the workplace when they coined the specific term "sexual harassment" in the 1960s. They did this after observing that there was a general lack of sympathetic understanding when a woman experienced sexual harassment at the workplace because the legal set-up of most organisations was mostly comprised of men (Oswald & Wyatt,2007). Siegel (2004) concurs that the term came because of a dialogue session by a feminist movement on women and work in 1974 at the Cornell University, facilitated by Lin Farley. However, the term was finally acknowledged by the legal system in the United States after a lot of ground work had been conducted by the feminist movement in 1979.

Catherine Mackinnon, an academic in the legal circles and feminist, in her book on the sexual harassment of working women also proposed the term sexual harassment as she battled to explain the discriminatory nature of sexual harassment when she

advocated that an employer would have violated the 1964 Civil Rights Act when a female employee was continuously exposed to sexual behavior that was unwelcome (The Schuster Institute of Investigative Journalism in Kabaya, 2016). Thus, the sexual harassment term was finally accepted as the legal term to describe sexual advances that are unwelcome (Kabaya, 2016).

2.2.1 Sexual Harassment Categories

The United States Supreme Court in 1986 defined sexual harassment in two categories, namely hostile environment and *quid pro quo* (US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1993).

2.2.1.1 *Quid pro quo*

Derived from the Latin language the word *pro quo* is a Latin word which means 'this for that' (Stop violence against women, 2010). This normally happens when an individual who has high authority, for instance, a lecturer can disadvantage a student's marks depending on whether or not he/ she consents to their sexual advances (Fineran & Bennett, 1999; Joslyn, 2011). *Quid pro quo* is basically sexual bribery where promises of some kind are made for benefits, however, if the one receiving these does not consent then the use of threats or harm is used. If this behavior is severe, then it does not need to be repetitive for it to be considered sexual harassment. In an IHL, this basically tends to happen between lecturers and a person with lesser power, in this case, students who may have consequences to their education when their willingness to partake in sexual activity will be a determining factor for their educational achievement (Conroy, 2013; Kabaya, 2016).

This type of sexual harassment can best be understood as sexual bribery whereby sexual activity or any other form of sex-linked conduct is solicited for with a reward promise being made either in a subtle or overt form. However, this proposition may be

either overt or subtle. Adrian (2016) highlights that some teachers threaten to fail girls or give them bad marks.

This means that teachers or school personnel will either explicitly or implicitly make sexual requests or advances in exchange for some desired results such as good grades, class positions or recognition. Willness (2007) argues that *quid-pro-quo* harassment is as much a crime whether the learner resists and falls victim to the threatened consequence or chose to submit to escape victimization. In a research conducted at a public University in Ghana, male students complained that *quid pro quo* harassment was rampant at their campus as most female students excelled academically as a result of such fraudulent practices (Morley, 2011).

Another study on sexual violence at a college of education in Nigeria exposed high levels of *quid pro quo*. Solicitation for sex is found to be high by lectures to female students with an approximated 45 to 65%. Findings of the study also revealed that it is considered as normal when a female student faces sexual harassment from their lecturer and is forced to either consent or drop their studies. This is because the repercussions of declining the sexual requests are severe as the lecturer will lower the students' marks drastically or either make sure that this deters the student from passing or something like that (Bakari & Leach, 2008; Kabaya, 2016).

Findings from a study by Kabaya (2016) concur with this observation in that, female students face *quid pro quo* not only from lecturers but from senior students and SRC male members who violate them because they hold high positions, utilize their perceived status and power because they approach these individuals for assistance to attain funding for their studies because of their economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These males promise to assist these female students in exchange for sexual favours, and especially first-year female students.

2.2.1.1 Hostile Environment

According to the University of Michigan Sexual Assault Prevention Awareness Program (2015), hostile environment is either the threatening, abusing or intimidating or learning environment which is abusive and is created by the pervasively severe sexual behavior that a student is subjected to, thus their involvement and gaining maximumly from an educational program. Fineran and Bennett (1999) and Kabaya (2016) concur that a hostile behavior is fostered when a harasser makes an educational setting to be aggressive and hostile in a way that negatively affects a student's work or that of an employee by either a fellow student, a lecturer or third party (Fineran & Bennett, 1999). Gruber and Fineran (2007) further explain that the hostile environment is perpetuated by the severity of the persistent behavior of the harasser that ends up compromising the students' capacity in benefiting from an educational activity or programme. Generally, hostile environment harassment alludes to the regular subjection of female workers to offensive, sexual or gender-related comments, unrequited sexually related conduct which may not be related to the job outcomes (Pina and Gannon, 2012).

Unlike the previous category of sexual harassment which is clear and agreed upon by scholars across the board, hostile environment, on the other hand, has a bit of controversy surrounding it. Ekore (2012) explains that because of the subjectivity of the term 'hostile environment', individuals find it difficult to understand as there are varying views on what constitutes a hostile educational setting. For instance, some individuals may find jokes of a sexual nature sexually harassing yet others view it lightly as part of the normal ways of socializing in a learning or working environment. A study by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) on sexual harassment in the US found that as many as 80% of students are affected by the hostile environment while 5% to 10% are affected by *quid pro quo* (Conroy, 2013).

2.2.1.1 Contra power Harassment

Contra power is a form of harassment which is a complete divergence from the mainstream traditional harassment which involves the perpetrator holding a position of higher authority over the victim. In this case there is a kind of reversal of roles where

the victim of sexual harassment is the one who holds a position of higher authority, and the perpetrator possesses lesser organizational power (Renzetti et al., 2012). This category of sexual harassment has not been widely researched on (Munyuki and Vincent, 2017). Munyuki and Vincent, (2017) state that this happens when a lecturer is harassed sexually by a student. Although there is minimal research on contra-power harassment in South African institutions, the considerable cases have been documented in the global North. Contra power sexual harassment may vary, ranging from forms that are mild and nonthreatening to extreme and hostile behaviour. Examples of this form of sexual harassment are disrespect, stalking on social media and graffiti (Munyuki and Vincent,2017).

Buluma (2009) concurs noting that by further explaining that teachers may be sexually harassed as a result of different factors which may be either their personal characteristics or the environment's conduciveness for such behavior. These may include their age, gender, marital status or if the teacher is ignorant of the school's sexual safety measures. Other factors may be school related and may include poor disciplinary measures or the school lacking standards that clearly define moral relations.

2.3.1 Forms of Sexual Harassment

Following this understanding of the broader categories of sexual harassment, it is noteworthy that there are forms under these categories in which sexual harassment can further happen. These can be categorized into three main forms, namely: sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention and gender harassment (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

2.3.1.1 Unwanted Sexual Harassment

Unwanted sexual attention occurs when explicit sexual intentions or desire is directed towards another person, who obviously does not welcome it. Such actions include long staring, inappropriate touching, inappropriate and sexually charged comments towards another person about the person's body parts (e.g. the breast, the ass, the face or the legs). In such cases, such comments are meant to insinuate or coax sexual activities or proposal for sexual behaviours.

2.3.1.2 Gender Harassment

Gender harassment similarly refers to either visual or verbal remarks and comments of an insulting nature made to a person as a result of their gender in order to invoke negative emotions (Cantor et al ,2015). Examples of these include the posting of pictures pornographic nature in public which are intended to insult. Other examples of gender harassment may include degrading remarks which are gender related and jokes that have chauvinistic connotations. In an academic setting, sexist remarks and jokes that are outrageous are common if the victims have gender roles that are perceived to be transgressed.

2.3.1.2 Sexual Coersion

Sexual coercion is the exerting of either psychological or physical pressure on an individual to get sexual cooperation from them. This includes, either offering bribes in exchange for sexual favors, threatening an individual in order to get sexual cooperation from them, or physically touching of an individual which is unwanted in order to get sexual cooperation (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Paludi & Paludi, 2003).

2.3 Online Sexual Harassment

As the Internet has in the last decade become popular, it has become one of the biggest platforms upon which sexual harassment occurs (William &Julien,2015). With the frequency of its utilisation and ever-growing number of new users every day, it has continued to provide a platform for abuse and sexual harassment. This form of sexual harassment is simply categorised as online sexual harassment.

Since the current study seeks to explore sexual harassment, which mainly occurs on the Internet, several authors have defined it in various ways. Arafa et al (2018) defines it as harassment of a sexual nature that takes place over the internet. This definition however fails to address specifics about the kind of sexual material that is harassing

that is being disseminated through over the Internet. This is an area that has been missing in previous scholarship and has been addressed by the Project deShame (2018) which conceives sexual harassment online as sexual conduct which is unwanted occurring on any of the various digital platforms and is legally acknowledged as a sexual violence form. Thus, online sexual harassment encompasses behaviours of a broad range that utilize digital content which may be videos, images, pages or posts on a multitude of various platforms which are either public or private (Project deShame, 2018).

In the same vein, Wise geek (2018) defines online sexual harassment as sexual harassment which basically takes place on the Internet, and is mostly through online messaging programs, Internet forums or via email. Barrios & Sosa (2010) also define online sexual harassment as sexual harassment on the Internet such as when a harasser sends over the Internet, unwanted, obscene, threatening, or messages of an abusive nature to a victim either via instant messages, blogs, internet forums or discussion boards.

From the above definitions it become clear that online sexual harassment happens on the various platforms of the Internet and is of a sexual nature. This can be through receiving unwanted sexual material which can be either images, videos, unsolicited sexual jokes or threats. This is the preferred definition of online sexual harassment is unwanted sexual material which a victim receives on social networking sites or popularly named social media and these materials being unwanted pornographic videos and images, jokes of a sexual nature and sexual solicitation.

With this in mind, we understand that there could be many forms of online sexual harassment. As a result of the virtual nature of the Internet most types of sexual harassment can be classified into three distinct categories. These are unwanted sexual attention, gender harassment and sexual solicitation. However, sexual solicitation happens the least online (Barak, 2005). Within these broader categories, however are types that feed back to these broad ones in explaining the concept of online sexual harassment in its various forms.

2.4.1 Unwanted Sexual Attention

This type of online sexual harassment, also termed 'sexual imposition' refers to unwanted and unwelcome sexual attention communicated directly via the Internet to a victim by a harasser. Usually the harasser utilises personal communication to directly convey messages relating to either sex or the sexuality of the victim. These messages may include: the harasser referring to the victim's sex organs, referring to the sex life of the victim, mentioning of intimate subjects, insinuating or offering sex related activities, imposing sex related sounds or images. A harasser who utilizes unwelcome sexual attention to a victim online usually tends to try and ask for the victim's cooperation either in person or on the Internet. This study concurs with this definition as female students were subjected to this form of sexual harassment online. A study by Finn (2004) confirms that 15% of students from college reported having been sent pornographic material by harassers that they had not asked for.

Arafa et al., (2018) posits that sadly, the tracking of sexual harassment is very hard because more often than not the harasser may be anonymous. Unlike the mainstream harassment that may be mostly verbal and physical, in online harassment the harasser can easily access the victim no matter where they are. In this study, however, none of the harassers had an anonymous status, its either the victim knew them very well, even in person or they had a close relationship prior to the harassment.

2.4.2 Gender Harassment

Gender harassment in cyberspace generally involves unwanted visual or verbal degrading remarks made because of an individual's gender. Typical examples include posting of pornographic pictures in either public or private online places; or posting of sexually charged jokes about another person based on his/her gender. These can be targeted at a particular individual level or they can be directed towards multiple people (Maass et al , 2003). As Cantor et al. (2015) put it, this form of harassment is basically discrimination and more sensitive because it speaks directly on someone's sexual orientation. In an academic setting, sexist jokes or remarks could be considered more

outrageous if the victims have gender roles that are perceived to be transgressive. For example, the abuse of female students in science subject settings. Given that these settings are mostly male-dominated, the female students who excel in these settings are likely to be sexually harassed and may end up facing cynicism from their male counterparts (Hill & Silva,2005). This resentment ends up being sexual harassment as a way of belittling the outshining female students (Cantor et al.,2015). In patriarchal societies, men are mostly expected to basically take up the lead roles in all aspects of life, including the academic side, hence when male students prefer to take up feminine career paths like cookery courses or fashion and design it is more often than not looked down upon and derogatory sexual comments are made towards them (El Sayed, 2012).

The results of the study show that men are equally vulnerable, just as women to email harassment as noted by the findings of Rutgers's study whose reports from various campuses indicated that 42% of the victims were men, clearly meaning that gender is not a factor in the incidences of stalking (Brownstein, 2000). In the absence of more research to assess how affected the victims were, it is difficult to know whether the experiences that were discussed by the female and male respondents were the same (Brownstein, 2000). Additional research is further needed to validate the impact of gender differences in online harassment and stalking incidences on campuses. Thus, as the name entails, this type of sexual harassment is done based on the gender expectations that society has bestowed, hence when an individual tends to take a different route from the 'normally expected' they may end up being victimized because of this. Discussed below are two subtypes of gender harassment which are verbal gender harassment and graphic gender harassment

2.4. 1.1 Verbal gender harassment

This type of harassment is communicated verbally through words. Often, it is remarked that degrade and insult individuals as a result of their gender or unwelcome visual or verbal comments (Barak,2005). This type of harassment alludes to humiliating sexual messages sent by a harasser towards a victim. These may include gender derogatory messages, threats of rape, unwelcome sexual remarks or sexually connotative

messages said by a harasser to a victim with the aim to offend. Such manner of messages are offensive and include gender-humiliating comments, rape threats, and non-consensual and uninvited. This type of verbal harassment can either be targeted towards potential passive receivers or an active specific victim. In the context of this study, these are messages sent to an active specific victim by a harasser. These can be audio messages or video messages describing sex-related issues that are unsolicited. In this study, however, the victims were not subjected to this type of harassment as none confirmed that voice messages were sent to them even on the WhatsApp platforms that is popular with the use of voice notes.

2.4.1.2 Graphic gender harassment

This form of harassment refers to the sending of offensive graphic messages via instant messaging, email or links and pop-ups by a harasser to a victim (Schenk,2008). Poland (2016) notes that researchers such as Barbara Ritter have discussed these harassment types as emanating from offline behaviors and beliefs. Active verbal gender harassment encompasses unwanted messages of an offensive disposition that are sent on purpose. This description also partly describes active graphic gender harassment, but on that aspect, pictures are included. Passive verbal gender harassment involves the intentional posting of messages to various potential receivers. Examples of this may be a harasser creating a username which includes slur which is offensive or a user photographic with offensive graphic content.

Active verbal harassment is a form of online sexual harassment that is more common than other forms as it may be purposefully sent to victims. This definition is in line with forms of harassment that victims revealed they had been exposed to, as active harassment involves harassment targeted to a specific person, while passive harassment is visible to multiple potential targets. Active verbal harassment is the common form of harassment on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook because the participants have defined identities and names that are used to send comments and that is where the abuse largely takes place (Poland, 2016).

2.4.1.3 *Sexual solicitation*

This form of harassment refers to unwelcome sexual attention basically entailing uninvited behaviors that communicate sexual desires or intentions (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008). Within sexual solicitation can be the extreme end which may be termed sexual coercion. This is rarely encountered on the Internet; what harassers usually do online is to put pressure on the victim to try to solicit for their sexual cooperation. This pressure is often achieved by utilizing threats of harm that are explicitly directed towards the victim or friends and relatives of the victim. Cyber stalking is where sexual coercion is largely seen more.

2.5 Platforms Where Online Sexual Harassment Takes Place

Social network sites are an integral part of the lives of the youth in managing their social lives and in formulating their identities (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Livingstone, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). They are also an excellent a tool to connect with peers and to display one's connections (Livingstone, 2008). For as much as these platforms foster effective and efficient communication among individuals, the downside is that they can also perpetuate aggressive behavior when others send unpleasant material to others, such as sexual harassment and electronic forms of bullying (Kite, Gable, & Filippelli, 2010; Livingstone, 2008; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2008). There are different types of social media platforms that exist today. These may include but not limited to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, WhatsApp, Skype and Badoo (Anderson in Wilson, 2016). In this study, the main platforms of online communication where sexual harassment takes place are Facebook and WhatsApp.

2.5.1 Facebook

Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg in the comfort of his Harvard University room (Dicker, 2017). Mark Zuckerberg officially announced the creation of Facebook on February 4, 2004, and since then it has spread. Powers (2011) argues that by January in 2011, Facebook was rated the largest social networking in the world of its kind. Goldman (2009) notes that Facebook is more of an operating system just like Windows or Mac OS, or Linux. It is an operating system mainly for social networking. It has a

provision of technologies to enable what is termed a social graph, this, in essence, describing a social network. A social graph represents all connections making up a social network. Each member of this network possesses their own social graph which is a representation of users' set of connections which is unique to other members, also linked to the same network. Facebook users are able to create personal profiles where they can not only add other friends and exchange messages but can also share photos, include links, blog posts, read news stories and so much more (Powers,2011). Facebook has become some kind of mirror to our social existence (Wittkower,2010). It has both sides of the coin where there is the good and the bad co-existing.

The study indicates that even though female students have access to Facebook to connect and communicate with their friends and loved ones, thereby fostering positive humanistic features, they, however, have experienced sexual harassment on the same platform. The same further argues that since people have been socialized in this era to communicate on these social networks, these have been seen to give leeway to undesirable behavior by some individuals towards others (Powers,2011). Results from a study by Wegge et al (2015) indicated that both male and female students received nude pictures on Facebook, some described these as 'naughty' pictures from harassers. A study by Henry and Powell (2015) notes that there is an increase in the use of social media to facilitate sexual harassment where harassers post videos and other material that are sexually harassing to the receivers.

2.5.2 WhatsApp

WhatsApp has been described as a servicing App for smart phones (Banerjee, 2011). It was started in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum. Its main use was to make efficient and fast distribution of multimedia messages and communication. A majority of WhatsApp users thus, utilize it for messaging, calling and sharing of videos. It aims to connect its users with family and friends, thereby providing an excellent way for an individual to be connected with their contacts. The study established that female students who were sexually harassed on WhatsApp revealed that they had a close face to face relationship with the harasser before the harassment.

2.6 Coping Strategies for Victims of Online Sexual Harassment

Experiencing sexual harassment has various psychological repercussions that range from distress, sorrow, loneliness, emotional distress up to depressive symptoms. It can also cripple an individual's career, school activities and even activities that an individual regularly does as they may be restrained (Gradinger *et al.*,2009; Houle et al.,2011). The same also applies to the nature of sexual harassment on social media platforms, be it in private inbox chats or chat groups. Female students may be affected by harassment which over the years has become very rampant. Victims of sexual harassment, including those of online sexual harassment, thus need to employ strategies to assist them in coping with these traumatic experiences that they have encountered.

Coping means the responses on how we think, what we do to the emotions we feel in dealing with stress, as this stress can leave emotional and psychological imprints, distress, anger, sorrow, loneliness, up to depressive symptoms (Gradinger et al., 2009; Houle et al., 2011). (Folkman,2011) argues that coping is an important aspect of humans as a mechanism to protect both the physical and mental health from the harmful effects of stress.

Butler & Chang-Yan (2011) argue that in trying to explain females' responses to sexual harassment, vast coping mechanisms have been proposed that come in the form of models or frameworks. These vary in their complexity but have all been formulated to explain women's responses when they have encountered sexual harassment (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Cortina & Wasti, 2005; Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & DuBois, 1997). It is noted that when they have been subjected to the same type of sexual harassment women still choose varying coping ways. This disparity may be a result of chronic stressors which may involve sexual behaviours that have been happening over time, gender disparities, age, to mention but a few (Guttek, 1985). Reactions and coping may be as a result of enduring other similar situations which may not necessarily have been a one-time event, but have re-occurred overtime, thus females then tend to utilize a trial and error approach where over time they learn which coping strategies best work for

them in other similar situations and they put those to use (Gottlieb, 1997). Among the numerous frameworks discussed to explain coping strategies, Cortina & Wasti (2005: 187) therefore proposed five categories as a framework that explains coping mechanisms. These include denial, advocacy seeking, social support, confrontational/negotiation, and avoidance.

2.7 Advocacy seeking (Reporting the Harasser)

Vohlidalora (2011) explains that advocacy seeking basically entails employing the open resistance strategy where the victim resolves to seek support from a formal institution and its formal representatives to put into action a direct confrontation with the alleged harasser. Thus, in dialogue, females usually highlight advocacy seeking as the best in some harassment experiences. It has however been observed that when it has actually happened very few opt for this option.

Of most victims who experienced sexual harassment, a minimal percentage only actually took the time and courage to seek formal help using formal institutional procedures (Gruber 1990; Rubin & Borgers 1990; Fitzgerald et al. 1995; Rabinowitz 1996; Kelley & Parsons 2000; Hill & Silva 2005). According to Fitzgerald et al. (1995), this coping strategy is usually taken as the last resort when all other options have either been exhausted or may not assist. The National Sexual Violence Resource Centre (2004) concurs that victims may fear that if the punishment systems of the institution are weak then this may exacerbate, and in a way condone sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence.

In a qualitative study that examined the experiences of sexual harassment of junior female student nurses and female senior managers in two hospitals in Sindh, Pakistan revealed that female nurses were being harassed especially mostly during night duties by junior male doctors, the male patients and the relatives of the patients (Qureshi et al., 2008) These harassments mostly took place in the wards and nearby places that surrounded the hospital (Qureshi et al, 2008). Moreover, there was clear evidence that there is a culture that generally accepts harassing behaviors at the hospitals, this being

combined with the lack of knowledge on how to effectively manage it. The overall study results revealed that the high possibility of under-reporting of sexual harassment is because of lack of policies with clear guidelines to reporting. Advocacy seeking is next to none due to lack of observance of anti-harassment national laws, the policies available at the local level and also the lack of their practice in hospitals.

Reporting (advocacy seeking) responses encompass trying to seek formal organizational support such as reporting or filing a formal complaint of the harassment. Confrontation, however, means that the victim insists directly to the perpetrator that they stop the harassing behavior immediately (Butler & Chung-Yan, 2011). According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model of stress, when concentrating both on reporting or confrontation both these responses are a problem- focused responses (Butler & Chung-Yan, 2011).

Vohlidalova (2011)'s study on coping strategies for sexual harassment in Higher Education revealed that either students generally lack trust in the school management, feared secondary victimization and being blamed for making false allegations. The study being of a qualitative nature employed participant auto selection by advertising for interviews and snowballing to conduct 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews built on the socio-cultural model perspective which explains sexual harassment as a product of society maintaining the socio-gender order where gender inequalities are the order of the day. From this point of view sexual, harassment is as a result of patriarchy, and its aims to subordinate women and keep them in lower positions. This explains why females do not report harassment as a result of this social order that does not cater for that. This perspective is also in line with one of this study's main perspective, which is the Power and Dominance Model, which explains that women are sexually harassed because of the subordinate positions they hold, and these, therefore, do not give them room enough and confidence in the system to report sexual harassment.

Cairns (1997) and Wood (1994) concur that when students decide to report their experiences, they need the reassurance that their cases will be taken seriously and will not be suspected of lying. Students also fear the reported lecturer may retaliate if they

report them for sexual harassment, this may have serious repercussions whereby they end up being subjected to hurt which goes beyond the sexual harassment (Dziech – Weiner 1984; Fitzgerald et al. 1995; Rabinowitz, 1996). A study by Robertson et al. (1988) confirmed that there are some instances where students report lecturers for sexual harassment simply on revenge basis because the lecturer would have failed them in a particular course or module examination. A general distrust in the legal system and how complaints of sexual harassment are dealt with is generally prevalent. Dissatisfaction among the students who complained that the IHL management prioritises defending the members of staff and employees than the student's rights. This is also coupled with the fact that students lack the knowledge on where to get help on campus if the student needed to take assertive action against an experience of sexual harassment. The study further revealed that there is a general 'taboo' or myth surrounding sexual harassment issues as no one at the institution had ever discussed it openly with them, thus when such harassment befell them they generally did not possess the knowledge on where to go for assistance or who to turn to for help.

2.8 Denial (Victim Ignoring the Harasser)

Quina (1996) postulates that most victims of any form of sexual violence, be it sexual harassment or rape typically prefer to remain silent about traumatic incidences that they experience. This does not only refer to non-reporting to authorities, but also the unwillingness to talk about it even with other people around them. Rabinowitz (1996) concurs that the choice to ignore both the harasser and the experience has been found to be a solution by most, even though this behavior may perpetuate the reproduction of harassment as the feelings of impunity may be fostered among harassers. Silence as a result of denial and hence choosing to ignore the harasser is one of the worst decisions in dealing with sexual harassment as silence does not possess the ability to curb or eradicate harassment (Rabinowitz, 1996). Cairns (1997) claims that the choice to ignore the harasser may also come after a thorough weighing of pros and cons by the victim and then finally choosing to be silent about it may be the best way to deal with it according to them, as it may have way fewer consequences to deal with than risking to speak up about it.

In a study that explored the prevalence of sexual harassment, harassment consequences and the reasons why Swedish female students do not report their sexual harassment experiences it was found that a whopping 98.5% of the females did not report their sexual harassment experiences. (Mellgren et al., 2018). The study utilized a sample size of 264 in a quantitative study approach and questionnaires were used to collect data. Basing on other studies conducted results, this was not shocking but a conformation (Lenton et al., 1999; Pina & Gannon, 2012). Most women, when questioned about their coping strategies, revealed denial as they felt that the crime was not serious enough to warrant reporting as they felt it wouldn't make sense to go to the police. Other reasons given for not reporting were that they felt that it did not help the victim in healing even if the matter was reported to the police. They also gave an excuse for the behavior of the harasser that they did not mean any harm.

Dhlomo et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study to analyze perceived sexual harassment among female students at a Zimbabwean institution of higher learning. A sexual harassment questionnaire was administered to 136 female students aged between 19-40 years. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. 31% of the respondents revealed that they had reported harassment incidents, a bigger fraction with 69% of these female students seemed not to be able to identify if sexual harassment had happened to them. A minority (7%) however, reason that they reported because they felt angry and hurt. This is contradictory to this study where the female students, even though hurt or angry did not report still. These results indicate what Shumba et al. (2006) termed as the 'culture and conspiracy of silence.' This contributes towards the problem because the institutions do not educate students on issues of sexual harassment; hence those who experience it are intimidated and discouraged from reporting or even talking about it. Thus, as a way of trying to cope with sexual harassment the female students try to ignore it.

The reluctance to report sexual harassment by female students can be discussed and explained using one of the main theories backing this study. This is the Natural or Biological Model of harassment (Barak et al., 1995; Browne, 1997; Studd & Gattiker,

1991; Tangri & Hayes, 1997). This theory argues that it is not sexual harassment but a natural relationship between men and women since men are the initiators of courtship, they merely would be expressing their biological urges towards females to perpetuate the human race through offspring (Synnevag, 1997). In African culture, sexual harassment seems to be nonexistent. Although sexual harassment may not be regarded as a grave crime in such situations, it however, has traumatic consequences for its victims (Cortina & Wasti, 2005).

2.9 Social Support

As a way of coping with experiencing sexual harassment women look to friends and family for comfort and support. This coping strategy is based on finding better psychological ways to deal with sexual harassment as it is an unpleasant situation (Vahlidalora, 2011). Fisher et al. (2003) concur with this as they explain that generally, females who are sexually harassed prefer to tell someone else and mostly friends rather than reporting to officials in their IHL or the police. According to Fitzgerald et al. (1995), this strategy to seek mental support from family members, and friends is one of the mostly chosen ways for coping by females to cope. Compared to directly confronting the harasser or reporting, this particular strategy mostly emanates from the desire not to stir or cause trouble but with the little resources that the victim has to seek help.

Findings of a study by Vohlidalora (2011) indicate that females preferred to talk to someone than make an official complaint as fear is one of the reasons that downplays this on what will happen when the harasser has found out that the student reported them.

Another research conducted by the Management Association Information Resources (2019) found that there is an impact on victims of sexual violence. When asked questions related to coping strategies some said they miss classes, most respondents said they ignore the harasser. Very few of the respondents believed in directly confronting the harasser. Most students reported lacking social comfort and support

when they had gone through a traumatic experience. Those that chose to remain silent became isolated, but those who revealed their ordeals to their family and friends either were not given social support. Sometimes when students are far away from home, they may feel isolated from their support systems which are family and friends.

2.10 Confrontation/ Negotiation (Victim Blocking the Harasser)

Coping strategies can be classified into two approaches; this being problem focused and emotion-focused. According to Folkman and Lazarus' (1980) conceptualization of coping strategies, problem-focused coping basically is fixed on changing the source of the stress while emotion-focused coping aims at managing the emotions that go with the perception of the stress (Brannon & Feist, 2009). Vohlidalora (2011) argues that results from a study he conducted indicated that some female students dare to choose to take control of a situation and chose to ward off a harasser. This ability to cope and deal with the situation empowers and gives confidence to the female to either, blocks the harasser or cut off possibilities of future harassment (Rabinowitz 1996; Cairns 1997; Vohlídalová 2015).

2.13 Victims of Sexual Harassment

Historically, women have been the most likely victims of sexual harassment than men. Numerous studies confirm that men are most likely to be sexual harassers (Cortina, 2002; Osborne, 1992). Studies indicate that it is women that are largely affected by sexual harassment. Arnett and Hughes (2012) reveal that women are most often than not abused by men that they can identify and know well. Results from a study conducted in Nigeria indicated that it is mostly lecturers and senior students who are perpetrators of sexual violence (Baraki and Leach, 2008)

A study at the University of Venda found that there were numerous incidents which took place at the IHL of sexual harassment of female students studying under various departments and schools between 2000 and 2004 (Dastile, 2004). A female respondent in the study revealed how a lecturer had not only touched but hugged and kissed her

in his office bringing feelings of disgust and trauma as she was reminded of a previous rape by a close family member in her earlier years (Dastile in Kheswa, 2014:2848).

Studies conducted in US college campuses also indicate the pervasiveness of sexual harassment where it is estimated that about 20 to 25% female students in IHL will experience sexual harassment at some point during their study period (Cantor et al., 2015; Conley et al., 2017; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2007; Decker & Littleton, 2017). Another study conducted on female students at a college campus indicates that female students' online harassment has increased over the years (Arafa et al., 2018). 79.8%. Of female students who took part in the study revealed that they had experienced sexual harassment on the internet at least one time in the past six months.

However, some studies show that it is not only women who suffer sexual harassment but, also men also experience it, largely by other men even though women are also perpetrators. (Narcia, 2014) asserts that both men and women can become victims of sexual harassment just as perpetrators can be both genders.

Studies indicate that sexual harassment is still prevalent in Canadian Schools among adolescents of both sexes. This indicates that there is no gender difference in victimization cases (Peterson & Hyde, 2009). Another study by Gruber and Fineran (2007) concurs with the fact that even in high schools sexual harassment of both male and females is indeed rampant, with 79% of males and 81% of females reporting having experienced it. Another study finding conducted by Omred, Collinworth, and Perry(2009) indicates the victimization of boys with 88.4%.

Another group within the male species category that is more prone to sexual harassment is the LGBTI + Q community. Barker and Ricardo (2005) note that men too fall prey to sexual harassment. Petersen and Hyde (2013) state that apart from being victims of sexual harassment, homosexual men or racial or ethnic minorities fall victim to sexual harassment or even those who work in women-dominated environments (Jones, Boocock & Under-hill, 2013). A study on high school going males in Canada revealed that some of these young men got more comments related to their homosexual

orientation and felt very harassed (Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes & Jaffe, 2009). This study, however, largely focuses on the sexual harassment of female students.

2.11 Online Sexual Harassment Studies in Institutions of Higher Learning

Empirical studies indicate that online sexual harassment is a problem that is increasing, especially among youths at universities or colleges (Lindsay&Krysiak,2012). There are, however, not many studies especially focusing on online sexual harassment. This study discusses the issue of online sexual harassment within the context of IHL or colleges. Most studies on online sexual harassment have mainly dealt with it focusing on adolescents and children (Bossler, Holt, & May 2012; Ybarra, Espelage, & Mitchell, 2007).

However, there is very little data on the prevalence of online sexual harassment among adults. A study of New Hampshire college student's sexual harassments through receiving pornographic images found that a greater majority had received these pictures (Finn, 2004).

A study conducted on the attitudes and behavior of Internet users when they search for sexually explicit material online found that some undergraduate students felt sexually harassed in chat rooms they were part of, or felt sexually harassed by men in the gaming world if they know she was a female (Goodson et al., 2001). Women were found out to report sexual harassment on chatrooms. Staude-Muller, Hansen, and Voss (2012)'s study on online victimization showed that 68.3% of respondents aged between 10 and 50 reported having received sexually harassing material online. The study further revealed that women were more vulnerable to online sexual harassment than men.

Baumgartner, Valkenburg & Peter (2010) focused on online solicitation in their study. They found that most male and female participants had been sexually solicited in the past six months. The working definition of sexual solicitation in the study included receiving unsolicited requests to either do something sexual or talk about sex. The study generally revealed that there was a high victimization rate of female youths. A study by the Pew Research (2014) concurs with findings from Baumgartner, Valkenburg & Peter

(2010)'s study as surveyed adult Internet users revealed that they had experienced online sexual harassment.

However qualitative studies cannot be generalized as they do not investigate the prevalence and the working definitions of what and what does not constitute online sexual harassment may be different. However, what is certain is that evidence shows women are affected by sexual harassment more than men and the impact is also greater on females. A study by Lindsay, Booth, Messing, & Thaller (2015) found out female students reported having been sexually harassed by someone they knew, and the sexual harassment had a psychological impact on the victims. A lower percentage reported having been harassed by someone they did not know while a higher percentage reported being harassed by a significant other, and 31% reported having been sexually harassed after they had asked the person to stop. Female students from a US University also reported fear from the sexual harassment that took place online while a study by Bossler, Holt, & May (2012) reveals that a 44% female respondents reported having experienced online sexual harassment in the previous year compared to males.

Online sexual harassment often occurs anonymously, often by someone who may not know the victim but is instead simply harassing people randomly. It can also be targeted at a particular victim by someone the victim does not know, which can occur when the victim is a celebrity or other famous individual. Online sexual harassment can also take place between two people who know each other, in which case the assailant chooses the Internet as a medium for harassment rather than direct contact. Sexual harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment online, typically consists of words, images, and actions that are sexually explicit or provocative and make the receiver feel threatened or strongly distressed. While physical actions may not be possible with online sexual harassment, there is still a great deal of potential for harassment through words and images that can be sent through the Internet. The methods for delivering such harassment can vary a great deal but may include the use of e-mail, online forums and groups, services, online computer and video games, and comments on blogs.

Infomania (2018) argues that over the years' aggressive online sexual harassment has become more disturbing as Pew Researchers have established that 25% of young women reported having been sexually harassed online while 26% having been stalked on the Internet. This figure is way over the one that was reported by men which is 9%. 53% reported having received images of an explicit nature that were unwanted, 11% of these women had been harassed specifically because of their gender in comparison to men whose percentage is 5%.

Siduna (2017) notes research surveys conducted by Saunders, Skye and Eastaerl (2003) divulge that there is a vital role that sexual harassment has in a homogenous role in a largely masculine society that basically sets out that masculinity entails the concept of women being lesser than men and thus men can exercise power over women. This accounts for the vulnerability that women have suffered as they have been sexual harassment victims. Wilson (2016) argues that in the American education sector, sexual harassment has become a big problem even though the country has laws against it. The tertiary level has focused in the ensuring of not only the economic development of youths but their security too. However, these institutions are seemingly biased in their dealings towards students' harassment issues even when this has an impact on the students' learning (Siduna, 2017). Many students experience sexual harassment in its varied forms. This impacts negatively on the holistic educational development of these students, especially the females (UNESCO,2003)

However contrary to many studies that that focus mostly on individuals of higher authority sexually harassing those they have authority over there few scholars have focused on holders of authority who are victims of the less powerful. Munyuki and Vincent (2016) argue that in IHL the world over, sexual harassment is ubiquitous. They note that women are the major victims of sexual harassment, be they students or academics who become victims of their supervisors, peers or their students.

2.12 Online Sexual Harassment in Colleges

On college campuses, sexual aggression remains a predicament (Walsh, Banyard, Moynihan, Ward & Cohn (2010)). In a nationwide survey conducted in the USA, it was estimated that in any particular year, an estimated 5% of women that are in college were sexually exploited (Fisher *et al.*, 2000). The advent of the Internet has enabled easy communication thereby making communication online to be pervasive (Finn, 2004) observes that.

A Harris (2001) Interactive survey on college students discovered that basically, all senior students utilize Internet services. Over the years, school advises that every student should have their personal computer, with Wi-Fi services that are efficient in colleges everywhere including library computers, computer labs, university residence halls has made it easy to access the Internet for students even for those that do not own personal computers.

College learners frequently e-mail their lecturers, fellow students, family, and friends, using social networking sites that send instant messages that give efficient and immediate feedback. Usage of the Internet has advantages for students as they can benefit academically and socially as they access a lot of knowledge in libraries, websites, online data bases that have many scholarly journals, newsgroups to mention but a few. However, there is proof that Internet usage can also result in a multitude of abuse. Such abuse includes addiction to the Internet, termed cyber addiction, theft of one's identity, being exposed to unwelcome content which may be pornographic or violence, harassment via emails and cyber stalking (Finn & Banach, 2000); Kandell, 1998); Leibs, 1995; Waldron *et. al.*, 2000). However, there are hardly any studies that specifically focus on how to deal with these problems in the universities (Fisher *et al.*, 2000).

Cyber stalking is defined as used to define behavior that involves the use of harassment and or threats using any form of communication-based on the computer and sending of emails in such a way that the receiver of such information intimidates the receiver and makes them afraid of their safety. Kennedy (2000) and Lamberg (2002) postulate that

the effects of cyber stalking can be as real to the victim as the actual effects that an individual feels when they are stalked physically. This can result in physical harm, psychological effects like depression, stress or mental anguish, anxiety and even murder of the victim by the perpetrator.

On the Internet sexual harassment occurs in various ways and many avenues. In a social media survey conducted by the Nielson Company (2017), it was indicated that people spend most of their time chatting on social networking sites compared to other platforms of the Internet, thereby allocating to their mobile phones 30 percent of their time social media chatting while the rest of 20 percent will be spent their personal computer. Sexual harassment on the Internet can happen in a number of ways; mostly this is when a harasser sends unwanted, abusive obscene or threatening messages using instant messaging or email, forums, discussion boards.

Kennedy and Taylor (2010) argue that among college students, the use of social networking sites is widespread. In a study conducted in the Southwest United States University, it was found out that over 80% of the study participants were utilizing some form of social network or had used a social network in their lifetime, of which between 8.7% - 75.1% of that time they were using Myspace and Facebook. Most of the participants reported that they provided their personal information on social network sites.

Most students posted many pictures of them online, and they shared some personal and private information. For example, they stated their present school, their town or city where they reside and place of employment. The students also stayed in touch with their old friends and made new friends with individuals they had met online. Among these students, only 15.1% reported ever having fears about their safety using social media sites. This courage to protect themselves came as a result of knowing how to protect themselves. 29% stated that they blocked those individuals they did not wish to chat with anymore while 2.9% said they changed the information they gave on their sites. For example, changing addresses, or phone numbers to avoid being harassed by the harassers they met online (Kennedy and Taylor, 2010).

The pervasive nature of Internet use by college students means that colleges have to come up with ways of addressing online sexual harassment as this has become a platform that has brought about new forms of sexual harassment problems that were previously none existent. In a study conducted by Finn (2004) results indicate that an estimated 1 in 10 students at the University of New Hampshire has been through the experience of being threatened repeatedly, insulted or harassed via email or instant messaging. The perpetrators were largely from strangers, acquaintances, and partners.

2.12 Studies on Online Sexual Harassment in Institutions of Higher Learning

Although some studies on sexual harassment in South African IHL have been conducted few if any have focused on sexual harassment directed at the youth online. A study by Growing up with media Survey in a national cross-sectional online survey of 1588 youth indicated that Fifteen percent of all of the youth reported an unwanted sexual solicitation online in the last year; 4% reported an incident on a social networking site specifically. Thirty-three percent reported online harassment in the last year; 9% reported an incident on a social networking site specifically. Among targeted youth, solicitations were more commonly reported via instant messaging (43%) and in chat rooms (32%), and harassment was more commonly reported in instant messaging (55%) than through social networking sites (27% and 28%, respectively) (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008).

A study investigating the nature and the extent of adolescences' experience of cyberbullying, a survey of 177 students in an urban city was, and the results showed that almost 54% of the students were victims of traditional bullying and over a quarter of them had been cyber-bullied. Almost one in three students had bullied others in the traditional form, while almost 15% had bullied others using electronic communication tools. Almost 60% of the cyber victims are females, while over 52% of cyber-bullies are males. The majority of the cyber-bully victims and bystanders did not report the incidents (Qing, 2007).

A survey conducted in New Hampshire in 2000 found that about 6% of youths had the experience of being harassed online Thorp (2004). A survey conducted in Canada shows that one-quarter of young Canadian Internet users reported that they had the experience of getting messages telling hateful things about others (Mnet, 2001).

Katz (2002) found that many adolescents experienced sexual harassment over the Internet. Other researchers reported that one-third of undergraduate students reported being stalked over the Internet (Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002). Text-based name calling, use of coarse language, profanity, and personal attacks have been discovered in

computer-mediated communication environments (Kiesler & Sproull, 1992; Thompsen, 1994). Fin (2004) 's study indicated that many students are harassed via emails, and those particular students who also view themselves as the LGBTI seemed to be more likely to be harassed twice as much as normal heterosexual students. So far there exists a gulf in the literature on LGBTI 's online sexual harassment experiences.

2.14 Sexual Harassment Policies in Institutions of Higher Learning

Frederich as cited in Gustama (2013) defines a policy as a wide guide which is utilized in the presentation and furthering of decisions that are carefully chosen from certain conditions which emanate from various alternatives, the confirmed action plan(s) assigned to implement or carry out the desired action (s) or an estimated program comprising of desired goals (objectives). It is with these definitions in mind that this section in the study discusses policies enacted by other selected IHLs worldwide, in South Africa and lastly the specific IHL where the study is conducted to assess how the sexual harassment policy in place has curbed sexual harassment. Buluma (2009) asserts that for sexual harassment a transparent policy framework is needed which not only defines it but also prevents perpetration by anybody. When this is done, there is a risk that any other efforts that may be made are just insignificant as there will be more problems in preventing this pernicious problem. Without a law to prevent a predicament from taking place the chances of sexual harassment taking place are very high.

Omale (2000) posits that developing countries lack either adequate policies or the existing ones are not enough to be effectively reinforced in school set-ups and the workplace. Omale (2000) argues that there remains a gap when it comes to plausible sexual harassment policies in schools.

Institutions have made suggestions on what is to be done in terms of preventing online sexual harassment. Strategies have been put in place to tackle it through educating students and staff on online sexual harassment, social support, teaching on privacy tools on social media for youths to protect themselves to mention but a few. Hatcher

(2000; WHOA,2002) argue that quite some guidelines have been provided by some organizations to assist in the prevention and stopping of cybercrimes which include sexual harassment. However, these are not available in South Africa. Scholars have noted that it is only a handful of IHLs that have put in place solid measures to prevent cyberstalking and sexual harassment.(Finn, 2004; George Mason University, (GMU) 1999; Olsen, 2001; Wellesley, 2017).

2.15. 1. George Mason University and University of Maryland-College Park Cyberstalking and Harassment Policy

Finn (2004) and Carlson (2002) argue that IHLs like the University of Maryland-College Park have invented a way to intervene in campus computer cybercrimes. The Wellesley College and George Mason University have put policies that are specific to addressing harassment and stalking. The GMU policy defines stalking as any behavior or activity that occurs more than once and ends up instilling fear in the victim, either threatening their safety and health whether mentally or physical (Finn, 2004; Carlson, 2002). These behaviors may include unwanted communication, be it face to face, calls on the telephone, emails, voice messages to mention but a few. It can be noted that the policy includes online sexual harassment and it further clearly states the consequences for those who are to be found guilty of such crimes. As these affect the operations of the IHL and its learning environment (Finn, 2004; Carlson, 2002).

2.15. 2. University of South Australia (UniSA) Sexual Assault and Harassment Policy and Procedures

The University of South Australia's 2004 policy clearly states its purpose to promote a safe, respectful and inclusive environment at the IHL, which is free of sexual harassment and sexual assault. It also endeavors to foster and protect the rights of complainants in its decision-making process to meet the requirement of upholding fair procedures in the handling of reported sexual harassment cases of one university member against another or a third party at the IHL. The policy specifically identifies who applies to and in what circumstances and the relevant authorities to handle the complaints assessment Team (CAT) with the Students at Risk Committee (SARC) to assist. It also discusses at

length the general principles, which include that sexual harassment information will be held with outmost confidentiality in accordance with the IGL's policies and procedures in accordance with the requirements of the law. The response when a complaint of sexual harassment or assault has been made is discussed, clearly stating this process and its outcomes. The staff that has a role to respond to reported cases are also named in the policy and contact details are also provided. The process of disclosure and reporting supported with flowchart diagrams is provided showing the structure of where and how students can report are attached in the policy. Issues dealing with the provision of reporting the matter to the police or seeking a 3rd party provider, the withdrawal of a reported case are also clearly discussed and what manner they should follow.

2.15 Sexual Harassment Laws in South Africa

South Africa also legislated several laws in an endeavor to curb sexual harassment in work places. In 2011, the Protection from Harassment Act was passed and became the 1st legislation to address sexual harassment in the whole of Southern Africa (Gender Links for equity and justice (2012). This legislation gives provision for an individual to seek a protection order against a perpetrator or harasser from the Magistrate's court, that is nearby to their place of residence. Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (2015) and the 1995 Labour Relations Act are other legislative pieces in South Africa that focus on the eradication of workplace sexual harassment. Section 203 in the Code of good practice provides measures suitable for dealing with sexual harassment and its prevention and its reoccurrence also. It also supports and urges the developing of procedures and policies that build sexual harassment-free workplaces (Kabaya, 2016). These pieces of legislation also apply to the protection of students in schools and universities to be protected against sexual harassment in their educational environments. The institutions also have a responsibility to enact institution based policies to protect students and members of staff against sexual harassment deriving from the nationwide legislations.

2.15 Policies against Sexual Harassment in South African Institutions of Higher Learning

Williams *et al.* (1992) note that a substantial body of knowledge has been amassed by researchers on the topic of sexual harassment. As a result, Universities and colleges have taken heed of this research on sexual harassment and have enacted policies to prohibit it, developed grievance procedures, victim support services and programs that are educational. A number of laws were enacted in South Africa to protect the people against sexual harassment in workplaces (Kabaya,2016). The Labour Relations Act of 1995 is the main Act that tackles the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. It provides for a Code of Good Practice on Sexual Harassment that recommends ways to deal with sexual harassment complaints. Commission for Conciliation Mediation and Arbitration (2015), Kabaya (2016) notes that section 203 of the code of good practice supports and urges the development and creation of procedures that make the workplace sexual harassment free. The Protection from Harassment Act of 2011 came after the Labour Relations Act of 1995, but it is recognized as the first legislation in Southern Africa to tackle sexual harassment (Gender links for Equity and Justice (2012).

However, these sexual harassment measures do not specifically discuss how sexual harassment which happens in a school set up should be tackled if it happens. The same also applies to sexual harassment that takes place over online or social media platforms. Deriving from these national laws, universities and colleges went on to enact their laws to address the problem of sexual harassment to their constituencies. Singh, Mudaly, and Singh-Pillay(2015) concur that the duty of university campuses is not only to provide but also maintain a conducive and safe environment for all and sundry's schooling and working on campus. Despite this sexual violence has remained rampant worldwide (Singh et al., 2015, Kabaya, 2016). Buluma (2009) argue that there is a need for a sexual harassment policy framework that is clear and not only defines but prevents and specifies explicitly the penalties for the perpetration of such acts. Problems arise when this is not done as all other efforts become fruitless (Buluma, 2009). Unlike developed countries, developing countries may not have clear specific and reinforced sexual harassment guidelines in places of work and especially schools (Omale 2000; & Buluma, 2009). While in the workplace, sexual harassment has successfully been

recognized; there still is a void in terms of specific policies in the education sector (Omale 2000; & Buluma, 2009).

2.15. 1. University of Cape Town Sexual Harassment Policy on Sexual Harassment

The University of Cape Town's 2008 Sexual Harassment policy defines sexual harassment as is unwelcome non-verbal conduct which encompasses indecent display and exposure through the electronically sending of pictures which are sexually explicit and or objects. The policy emphasizes that they should be responsible for ensuring that awareness is raised among students and the rest of the IHL community in order to eradicate sexual harassment. These managers are the Vice-Chancellor, Deans, HODs, Executive Director and Students Affairs. The policy addresses issues on education and training of the university community in its implementation and thus preventing sexual harassment. It also addresses the IHL 's response to sexual harassment complaints when it is made, who specifically handles it and how the formal and informal procedures.

2.15. 2. University of Johannesburg Sexual Harassment Policy on Sexual Harassment

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) Policy on sexual harassment of 2015, is guided by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa which promotes the upholding of everyone's rights. Borrowing from the Employment Equity Act, it prescribes that any environment of work should be free from any forms of sexual harassment and practices that are discriminatory. It states the university's stance on non-tolerance to all forms of discrimination and clearly defines as sexual harassment. Among other forms of sexual harassment, the policy acknowledges and includes sexual harassment that takes place within and without the IHL 's campus on various platforms, including in technologically facilitated sexual harassment on digital platforms of social media.

2.15. 2. University of Venda Policy on Sexual Harassment

At the University of Venda, which is the location of this study, the Department of Human Resources Management, in 2009 put in place a policy in line with the requirement for institutions to enact policies to protect their members of staff and students against

sexual harassment. This policy defines sexual harassment as ‘unwanted, persistent and unwelcome sexual approaches, be it verbal or gestures which are non-verbal, visual or physically made with the promise of rewards, favours or unacceptable requests in the conditions of a working environment.’ The policy was put in place to provide guidelines on the handling of sexual harassment cases perpetrated at the University. It addresses various sexual misconducts but does not include Internet sexual harassment. The procedures of reporting encompass informal and formal procedures.

The informal gives provision for a victim, be it a member of staff or student to informally discuss the incident with the perpetrator. If an understanding is not reached then the victim may seek a third party to mediate, this individual then is required to assist within ten working days. If this is not successfully done or if mediator fails to provide a solution, it is then that the case may be formally lodged as a written complaint to the Department of Human Resources. The Department will require the mediator to provide a report, and the harasser is required to submit a written response to the allegations leveled against him or her. A review of the policy revealed that although the policy may sound straightforward at face value it has loopholes. For instance, it does not specifically mention online sexual harassment considering the fact that the world we live in is now dominated by the Internet. Specifics for students to report are also not included in the policy that is clear cut as to where exactly at the HR department and to whom, in which office exactly they can lodge their complaints. This is definitely needed because of the sensitivity of such cases which demand confidentiality and reassurance when a student has been harassed. Against this backdrop, the policy is lacking in specifics to the extent that students may end up failing to report online sexual harassment at the institution.

2.16 Theoretical Framework for the Study

This study has drawn from four main sociological theories to study the online sexual harassment experiences of students in a South African IHL. While the first two theories (Power and Dominance Model and the Biological model) provide explanations on why sexual harassment happens from the traditional point of view; the last two (Online disinhibition effect model and Social identity model of deindividuation effects) would help understand how the Internet provides the “appropriate” platforms for this abuse to occur.

In general, these theories would also help provide explanations why such victims (female students) are able to assimilate, internalize and develop coping strategies to deal with such experiences. They would also sufficiently capture all the nuances and the different perspectives around online sexual harassment experiences as formulated in the research problem.

2.16.1 Power and Dominance theory

This theory was first propounded by Fitzgerald et al. (1994) when they connected the existence of sexual harassment in work places with the impact of the power structure in the human society's organizational social systems. In their view, sexual harassment occurs directly as a result of two antecedents. Firstly, the fact that work is primarily dominated by co-workers and supervisors that are largely male. This, in essence, means that the environment of the organization is dominated by the job-gender context (Gutek & Cohen, 1987). Secondly, the climate of the organization largely has a tolerance for sexual harassment experiences. Incidences of sexual harassment are lower in organizations that discourage and are non-tolerant towards it as they have policies, rules, and procedures to curb it (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1997; Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1999, Drasgow and Magley, 1999; Burker & Cooper, 2010).

Furthermore sexual harassment that takes place negatively influences the psychological well-being of employees, their health and also other attitudes that are job-related. Fitzgerald (1994) explains that harassment has consequences that are deep reaching as it is not only frightening to its victims, but also degrading, sometimes even physically violent and frequently when it's extended over a long period of time its results can also be health or job related, and psychological. Lastly, Fitzgerald *et al.* (1994) proposed that there generally are two classes of moderators that in general influence sexual harassment behaviors, namely: the victim's personally vulnerability characteristics and the coping mechanisms or style or response to sexual harassment. Given that employers feel a sense of power and dominance, they always feel empowered to take advantage of their vulnerable employees. Even in organisations

such as the military, the academia and in corporate businesses, where you would expect the employers to comport themselves better, these still happen (O’Leary-Kelly, 2009).

In the last decade, many scholars have begun to use this model to study online sexual harassment. In a study of sexual harassment between university staff and students in the US, Chantal (2014) particularly postulates that the Power and Dominance Model gives a background on how victims get to be sexually harassed online by perpetrators. Since online sexual harassment is a form of cyber-crime and to a certain extent, a level of bullying, the model explains that in the context of a University, there is the existence of power imbalances between students and faculty staff (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Thomson & Morrison, 2013). The model employs a Power and Control wheel which discusses the different elements that make up abuse. These elements include threats and intimidation, social standing, harmful language, exclusion, harassment, and technology to forward unwanted messages; these all take place within a relationship over which a perpetrator has control to a certain extent over a victim. Since online sexual harassment is classified under cyber bullying when there is manipulation by an individual of power over a victim, thus cyberbullying best explains this behaviour at the University level (Bauman et al., 2013; Englander; 2008, Cowie et al., 2013; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2014; Akbulut & Eristi, 2011; Minor et al., 2013).

The most common forms of cyber bullying in the university environment may include sexual coercion, threatening, harassing, degrading and intimidating behaviors that are technology based. The sending of sexual material to a student from a lecturer or a senior student as the results of the study indicated is best explained by the Power and Dominance Model as these individuals who hold positions of power intimidate students into submission.

This model may explain that in an environment where female students have an inferior status to their harasser the harasser has opportunities to take advantage of that and misuse their power. Even though this model has strengths in explaining how the relationship that exists between the victim and the harasser may perpetuate sexual harassment and this can be inferred even to online environments. Its weakness, however, is that, although it explains why some individuals in positions of power may

decide to sexually harass mainly from the job-gender context in a work environment it does not discuss characteristics of the personality of the harasser. This gap is then explained by the Biological model.

2.16.2 Biological Model

The biological model explains that the sexual attraction between people that comes naturally may be what others interpret as sexual harassment. The main point of this model is that men biologically have more sexual drive than women, and as such are less able to put their sexual appetites in check than women. That being the case, they are prone to sexually harass their co-workers, their students, and subordinates.

In the last decades, this idea has increasingly been supported by those who study sexual harassment. Stock & Becker (1994) in Tangri et al (1982) propounds that because of the naturally greater sex drive that men have more than women, it is this biological motivation that drives them to pursue women. Therefore, the behavior interpreted as harassing is not necessarily meant to discriminate or offend women but is resultant from biological urges. The model has a basic premise that there exists a natural mutual attraction between men and women and since men possess the stronger sex drive than women their role is to be the sexual initiators. Since men have a physiologically strong makeup in sexual urges, they may tend to exert pressure and coerce women to fulfill their sexual needs. Another standpoint is that both men and women have a mutual sex attraction and are thus both responsible for their sexual acts in the workplace. This simply infers that an individual may not have the intention to harass sexually but because of the naturally attributed sexual attraction they still would engage in the act. Thus this behavior may not be interpreted necessarily as discriminatory or offensive. This, therefore, means that as per the biological model the notion of sexual harassment based on the availability of interactions between both sexes which may be viewed as courtship is, therefore, a mistaken one.

A crucial strength of the biological perspective is that it embraces the fact that inborn human instincts are the ones that potentially drive behavior that is sexually aggressive (Tangri et al., 1982; Kapila 2017). It is on this understanding too that the study utilizes

this model to support the fact that harassers who are mostly men are pushed by their strong sexual urges to send unsolicited material online to female students because they are attracted to them and hope for a positive response, however this results in the female students feeling uncomfortable and traumatized. However, it is also noteworthy that this model has been greatly criticized because of its basic assumptions that have lack depth in the exploratory sense of research as it may be nearly impossible to have studies that test these core assumptions of the theory (Kapila, 2017) argues. This has then caused the framework to have very limited influence on sexual harassment mainstream thinking.

Following the understanding within the biological model, it is interesting to point out that there has been a drawn-out debate on whether sexual harassment behaviors are influenced by personality traits or the environment. Within this context, Lewin's socio-psychological equation and Person X Situation model of sexual harassment make perfect sense. Lewin's (1951) equation $B = f(P, E)$ in the last decade has become a reference point. The argument in his equation is that what determines human behavior (B) is not just their personal traits (P) but also the situation or environment (E) within which the human behaviour takes place. He thus rejects the 'either-or' binary approach of both the personality traits advocates and situationists and give these two factors equal weight as they interact and affect behavior in a dynamic manner. Using Lewin's model as its theoretical basis Pryor, Giedde and Williams (1995) then developed the Person X situation model of sexual harassment which, as in the case of Lewin above, explained how social factors [equated to Lewin's E] and personal characteristics [same as Lewin's P] are a predictor of sexually harassing behaviour. The key thesis here was that "when individuals with a proclivity for sexual harassment are placed in social situations that permit or accept this sort of behavior, the behavior is most likely to occur" (Pryor, Giedde and Williams, 1995).

Obviously, the power dominant model and the biological model are very useful for understanding why sexual harassment occurs in online platforms, and how its victims can internalize and develop coping strategies to deal with such. Adopting the theoretical paradigms within these models, the researcher would not easily comprehend the peculiar context upon which phenomenon happens; she would also be able to

understand the inherent attributes that motivate aggressors to harass their victims. Providing the socio-psychological factors that drive human behavior, this model is also able to connect human behavior as not only as a social factor but also as a socio-psychological factor.

2.16.3 Online Disinhibition Effect Model

Online disinhibition model simply refers to the belief that people often feel a lack of limitations or restraints when they are communicating in an online platform, as opposed to when they are communicating in-person. This idea was first used in the literature of online sexual harassment by John Suler, in an article in 2004, where he argued that Internet provides people with the opportunity to self-disclose or act out more frequently or intensely than they would in person (Suler, 2004). Although Suler was not the first to have used the term “disinhibition”, as the term was already in existence before Suler (2004) came up with his model, it was him who popularised it by developing a well-accepted framework of how it applies to online behaviors. To explain this, Suler (2004) explores six factors that interact with each other in creating this online disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity, invisibility, asynchronicity, dissociative imagination, solipsistic introjection, and minimization of authority. For the purposes of this discussion, we will focus the first four characteristics, because of their specific relevance and direct relevance to this current study’s research questions.

2.16.3.1 Dissociative anonymity

This is a key factor that explains the online disinhibition effect describing how being anonymous online provides a feeling of protection from the consequences of behaving in an antisocial or harmful manner. One thus easily disassociate from their identity when online, ascribing how they behave there to an online identity that has no link or relationship to their offline identity.

2.16.3.2 Invisibility

Even in cases where one is no anonymous person to whom they are communicating with, the fact that they are not visible physically lowers their inhibitions, as they do not have to worry about both verbal and other bodily cues. They may thus still say or do things they would not have the guts to say or do if they were in a face-to-face situation. Of course this may be different in instances of video communication.

2.16.4.3 Asynchronicity

Some communication online does not happen in real time but happens at different times between the sender and the receiver, say in the case of emails or chat platforms such as WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger. Here one can just send an email or leave a message on the chat platform even though the receiver may be unavailable to respond at that same time. This brings in disinhibition in the sense that one can communicate things they would not communicate if this were a real-time communication event where one's persona is being drawn into the communication with real time discomforts and or consequences. Rather, one just drops a message or chat and has no pressure at all emotionally or psychologically because a response will come only later and they will still have a chance to deal with it as and when they want; at their own time.

2.16.4.4 Dissociative Imagination

The non-physical nature of online spaces leads some people to think that the normal social etiquette rules that apply in face-to-face everyday life do not apply in this virtual space. Online environments, therefore, become places where one can escape into to act out that which they would not dare do in the physical environment as governed by the rules thereof. Therefore, if one has some personal traits that are toward sexually harassing they may then log in to act this out as they cannot do so when logged off. The availability of an online platform, therefore, becomes a vehicle that facilitates sexual harassment.

Other scholars have also supported this view. In analyzing the effect of the Internet on sexual harassment, Wendie & Carmody (2016) for example, describe the technological attributes of online environments that distinguish them from face-to-face physical environments. Such attributes are access, affordability, anonymity, acceptability, and aloneness. Having affordable and easy access to a pool of people, one can connect with increases the potential number of perpetrators and victims. The ability to anonymize one's identity means that deviant behavior may be engaged in without fear of repercussions. Acceptability describes how by nature, online environments are places where any behavior is and can be acceptable to various groupings no matter how offensive the behaviour may be. The attribute of aloneness describes how the absence of negative social cues such as eye contact or facial expressions, present in face to face interactions, allows people to do things they wouldn't do in settings where there is a physical presence. This is different from the traditional forms of sexual harassment where the victim and harasser must be in the same physical space, time and location for harassment to take place.

2.16.4 Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects

Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) is a technology theory that describes the social effects of computer-mediated communication focusing particularly on the effects of anonymity and identifiability on group behavior. This model was first introduced by Reicher, Spears, and Postmes (1995:174) in their paper titled 'A social identity model of deindividuation phenomena.' In the paper, the scholars postulate that the theory straddles the fields of social psychology and communication studies. The case made by these scholars is that online environments suppress personal identity while amplifying social identities. This is because as one assumes social identities and standards, they dump or trade their own identity and standards for those of the group (Barak, 2005). Deindividuation, in this case, implies the loss of self-awareness that happens as one is immersed in the culture and behavior of a larger social entity in a given environment. Thus, in environments that are male-dominated such as online platforms, the usual toxic, male social tendencies or norms of behaviors become more apparent and either subjugate personal proclivities or if similar to the group's, highlight

them. Barak (2005) succinctly describes how SIDE explains online sexual harassment stating that people “while in cyberspace might follow typical male-dominating, power-based, masculine attitudes, and behaviors toward women.”

SIDE was found to be relevant in this study as it was assumed that in universities, there is prevalence in the adoption of social identities of the various groupings or social circles that students belong to. Moreover, because these institutions are male-dominated spaces, the existence, and expression of deviant male norms of behaviors are likely to be high. The same is assumed to be also the case with the various online social groupings that may exist within such communities. Because harmful behaviors are apparent and acceptable in the online communities that students are exposed to those students whose personal identity would not have led them to sexually harass anyone, become potential harassers. Aided by online individual anonymity and merging self with the social group one feels not responsible as an individual for their behavior assigning accountability to the group as the entity responsible for dictating and setting norms. Thus, if one takes away the technological or online attribute of anonymity and the social factor of group identity the individual concerned is less likely to engage in sexual harassment or act out their personal proclivity to sexually harass.

2.17 Summary

This chapter has set out to provide a theoretical justification for understanding the sexual harassment experiences of female students in an online platform. It discussed significant literature about sexual harassment, both in general and in an on-line platform in the different IHL around the world. First, it starts with a conceptualization of sexual harassment in general followed by a discussion of online sexual harassment, its different forms, as well as the different platforms (Facebook, Whatsapp, and Twitter) they occur online. The chapter also addressed the different coping strategies that victims of such abuse adopt, in the IHL where they occur. Through these discussions, the chapter identified literature on sexual harassment that has mostly neglected the experiences of female students in IHL. Some of the studies have not really focused on the victim; rather,

they have concentrated on the perpetrators. To address this gap, the chapter introduced and discussed four main theories as for the theoretical framework with which to better address the sexual harassment experiences of female students in a South African IHL. Within such models, it is easier for the researcher to identify not only why such phenomenon occurs or why the Internet provides the “appropriate” platforms for it, but also how such victims can assimilate, internalize and develop coping strategies to deal with such experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and technique(s) employed for the gathering of the research data utilised in this study. A research methodology provides a description of the precise techniques that were used, the measuring instruments, as well as the sequence of activities that were involved in carrying out the research. It provides an explanation for both the research components and the specific steps employed in conducting the study. Some of such components include but not limited to: the research approach, the research design, the sampling techniques, methods of data collection, the procedures used, the population of the study, the ethical considerations involved; and the description of the methods used in the analysis of the data. The chapter discusses these components in terms of how they are used to address the problem in the research. This chapter concludes with, a diagrammatic representation of the discussed important concepts of the methodology is provided.

3.2 Research Approach

Since the main objective of the study is to explore the online sexual harassment experiences of female students at a South African Institution of Higher learning, a qualitative research approach was employed. Gay and Airasian (2000: 627) define qualitative research as the collection of data in a 'naturalistic setting, in order to gain insights not possible using other types of research' The approach seeks to understand a wide array of realities on a particular subject of inquiry; particularly, its peculiarities and nuances within the contexts such realities exist. Using this approach, it is easier for the researcher to draw an in-depth data set, which may be unique and most relevant for exploring online sexual harassment experiences of female students in the institution of learning. Rather than merely logical and statistical procedures (as most quantitative researchers would do), qualitative researchers can use multiple systems of inquiry for such study of human phenomena.

Another objective of qualitative research is to safeguard the reliability of narrative data while also attempting to utilize the data to exhibit core themes that are not usual in contexts. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont (2013) define it as a method involving the interpretive and natural ways in approaching the matters of respondents. This approach gave leeway for the researcher to conduct an inquiry of situations in their natural settings and also study underlying motivations together with opinions. The researcher was able to communicate with the participants and view their facial expressions as they talked, capturing body language that showed awkwardness and sadness and confusion as they responded to various questions about the topic under study.

Qualitative research focuses on presenting information in a narrative, descriptive way whereby words rather than statistics are utilized in this social inquiry form of research where the focus is on the way people make sense of the world they live in and their experiences. Such is the importance for this study. As the sexual harassment experiences of female students is a very sensitive subject and often personal to the individuals involved, the study used this approach to explore this as it is tailored to understand harassment issues of female students because the harassment type which is of a sexual kind is a highly sensitive topic. Green and Thorogood (2018:6) explain that the qualitative research utilises naturalistic approach because it is focused on 'understanding a phenomenon, rather than measuring it'. The materials used namely are case studies, life story interviews, personal experiences, observations, visual texts and interactional texts that describe meanings and experiences in individuals' lives (Setsiba, 2012). As a previously unexplored topic at the institution of higher learning, the choice of a qualitative research approach emanated from the need to acquire in-depth understanding of this unexplored phenomenon which is loaded with value.

3.3 Research Design

Following the research objectives, this study has adopted an exploratory research design that goes beyond a simple description of the correlation between variables. Exploratory research, as the name implies, does not aim to provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions, but rather to explore the research topic

with varying levels of depth. It is often conducted in order to determine the nature of the problem, while also getting a better understanding of it also. (De Vos *et al*, 2013).

In general, research design is a set of logical arrangements from which prospective researchers can select one which is suitable for their specific research goals (De Vos *et al.*, 2013). In this sense, a good research design incorporates practical and theoretical components, which help the researcher to achieve his research aims. In choosing the research design the researcher takes into consideration, the objectives of the research, the population, samples and the other elements that are vital for achieving good results for the research.

Creswell *et al* (2016:72) also concurs that a research design “is a plan or strategy that moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the particular selection of participants, also the data gathering methods to be used and the data analysis to be done.” Thus, research design basically stretches from incorporating merely the description of the population, to the sample and the sampling technique used in conducting the study.

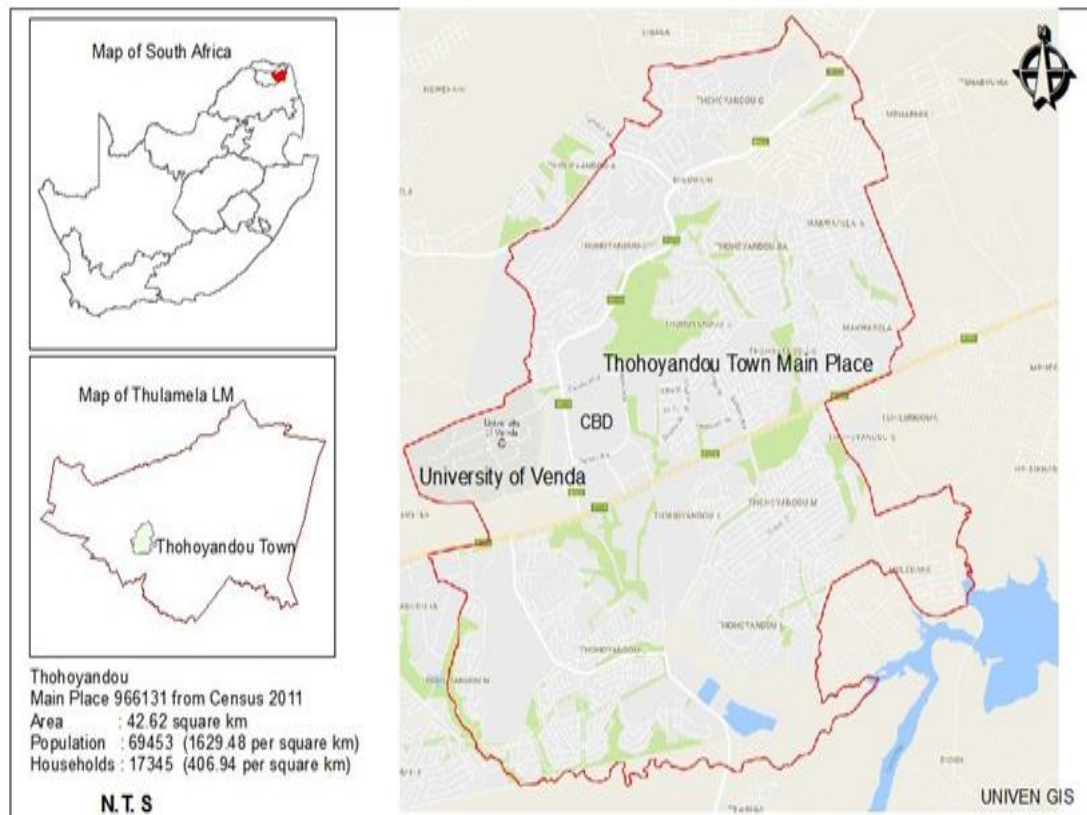
Given that this study aims to explore the online sexual harassment experiences of female students at an Institution of Higher learning, it has adopted an exploratory research design. Since there are not many studies on this area in the literature, the study aims to help provide more insights into the experiences of sexual harassment in the South African IHL. In conducting the research, the researcher aimed not to provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions, but merely to explore the research topic with varying levels of depth (Eugene and Christine, 2017)

3.4 Study Area

This study was conducted at the University of Venda, which is located in the Limpopo region of South Africa. The University is in Thohoyandou which is in Vhembe District, under Thulamela Municipality in Limpopo Province, South Africa. The University of Venda (Univen) was established in 1981 as a branch of the University of North currently known as the University of Limpopo (Turfloop). The branch became independent in November 1981 when the University of Venda Act (Act 19 of 1981) was passed by the

then Venda Parliament. Univen is situated in the fast-growing town of Thohoyandou in the Limpopo province on the Southern Side of Soutpansberg Mountains. It is based in a remote rural area and recruits its students mainly from historically disadvantaged rural backgrounds where schooling is poor.

Figure 3.4.1 Indication of the exact study location of the University of Venda



As per the Ranking Web of Universities (2018), the University of Venda is ranked 3348 in the world and 18 in South Africa. The university consists of eight schools which

include a foundation center for matric students with low marks to enrich their grades. The schools offer a range of under- and postgraduate academic programmes in various classifications of educational subject matter. As a comprehensive institution, the University of Venda offers a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields of study. These programmes lead to qualifications in undergraduate certificates diplomas, first and professional bachelor degrees, postgraduate diplomas, honors, masters (both by coursework and research) and doctoral degrees.

Currently, the University has one campus which is based in Thohoyandou indicating that Univen is predominantly an undergraduate higher education institution.

3.5 Entry into the Study Area

Owing to the fact that the study required the participation of female students, the researcher sought permission to undertake the study from the Registrar of the Institution and permission was granted. The Institution's Higher Degrees Committee gave ethical clearance for the study.

3.6 Population of the Study

The main population of the study is female students from the University of Venda. Population here has a much broader meaning than everyday use, where it is used to designate a country's or the community's head count. As Silverman (2013) explains that population means the number in total of specific class or individuals, places, objects, and events which are selected because they are pertinent to the pending research question. A population is perceived as a sampling frame and the totality of events, persons, case records and other sampling units which the specific research problem is concerned with (Mc Burney, 2001). Lapan et al (2012) concur that the population of the study are what the study is basically focusing on. So examples of these can be primary school learners, aged people in a community etc. In order to define a research target population, a researcher specifies the unit being experimented, the exact geographical location, and the temporal boundaries of the population. Furthermore, a population

refers to a group of people with common features that a researcher is interested in (Salaria, 2012). It can also be individuals in a particular group or restricted aspect of the group. Mertens (2015) the population is the group of individuals to whom the researcher wants to apply the research information and results

Thus, from the Institution of Higher Learning, the population that was utilized for the study is students from the University of Venda. Using this population, the study was able to explore the online sexual harassment experiences of female students at the IHL.

3.7 Respondents' Demographic Information

This section presents the demographical information of the respondents related to age, sexual orientation, level of study and access to Internet services of the respondents that were interviewed.

Participant number	Age	Access to internet services	Level of Study	Sexual orientation
1	35	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Ph.D. student 2 nd year	Heterosexual
2	20	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 2 nd Year	Heterosexual
3	23	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Undergraduate student 3 rd Year	Lesbian
4	20	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 1 st Year	Heterosexual
5	21	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 3 rd Year	Lesbian

6	27	Cellphone, Data use	Masters student 1 st Year	Heterosexual
7	29	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Masters 2 nd Year	Heterosexual
8	19	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate 1st Year	Heterosexual
9	30	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Ph.D. student 1 st year	Heterosexual
10	22	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 3 rd Year	Heterosexual
11	23	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Undergraduate student 3 rd Year	Heterosexual
12	20	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 1 st Year	Heterosexual
13	26	Cellphone, Data use	Postgraduate Honours student 1 st Year	Lesbian
14	32	Cellphone, Data use	Masters student 1 st Year	Heterosexual
15	30	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Masters 2 nd Year	Heterosexual
16	25	Cellphone, Data use	Postgraduate Honours 1 st Year	Heterosexual

17	33	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Ph.D. student 2 nd year	Heterosexual
18	31	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 4th Year	Heterosexual
19	28	Cellphone, Wi-Fi mostly	Postgraduate Ph.D. student 3 rd Year	Lesbian
20	19	Cellphone, Data use	Undergraduate student 1 st Year	Heterosexual

3.7.1 Age

The researcher interviewed 20 respondents, all of them female students between the ages of 19 to 35 years.

3.7.2 Level of Study

While 10 participants were undergraduates, 10 were postgraduate students.

3.7.3 Sexual Orientation

Of the 20 students, 16 identified themselves as heterosexual, while four said they are lesbian/gay.

3.7.4 Access to Internet Services

In this study, all the female students possessed personal smart phones, had access to Internet services and they were all active social media users. Three accessed the Internet on Wi-fi while the rest accessed it while using mobile data.

3.8 Sampling Technique

A sample is a “subgroup of the population that a researcher is interested in” (Kurmar;2014: 230). Having identified the population, the qualitative researcher can hardly study the entire population. To do this, he/she had to select some participants from the set of the population chosen. In other words, he/she has to select a (sample),

which is a smaller set of the population. This sample is chosen also depending on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful” and so on. (Creswell et al ,2016:84). Thus, this was the case in this study. Having identified the female students from the University of Venda as the population of the study, the study was able to select 20 registered female students for the 2018 academic year. I selected these individuals using purposive sampling and critical case;

3.8.1 Purposive Sampling

Crossman (2017) defines a purposive sample as a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study. Laerd (2012) explains that this type of sampling is a different kind of non-probability sampling technique which is not like other types, as the selection of units to be studied basically relies solely on the researcher’s judgment. Purposive sampling is also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling. This type of sampling can be very useful in situations when you need to reach a targeted sample quickly, and where sampling for proportionality is not the main concern Crossman (2017). Laerd (2012) further explains that usually, the sample size under investigation for this technique is relatively quite small compared to other probability sampling techniques. Hence the respondents that were particularly selected for this study have the relevant information. Paxton (2002) in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpport (2005) agrees with this view stating that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative studies. Polit and Beck (2004), Mason (2010) purport that the sample size is determined by the quality of data collected, its richness, detail and complexity than just the mere statistical logic.

This is necessitated by the need in qualitative research to build an analytical narrative which is convincing based on these qualities. It is with this background in mind that the researcher chose to utilize this technique.

The main objective of purposive sampling, as explained by Laerd (2012) is that it focuses on a population of interest’s characteristics that enable a researcher to answer the questions of the study. The sample under study may not necessarily be a representation of the whole population, though, in a qualitative study, this may not

necessarily be a weakness to the study. There are however weaknesses to this type of sampling, and one of them is that irrespective of the type of purposive sampling used it is highly prone to researcher bias. The idea that a purposive sample has been selected based on the judgment of the researcher is not a good defense when it comes to alleviating possible researcher biases, especially when compared with probability sampling techniques that are designed to reduce such biases. However, this judgmental, subjective component of purpose sampling is only a major disadvantage when such judgments are ill-conceived or poorly considered; that is, where judgments have not been based on clear criteria, whether a theoretical framework, expert elicitation, or some other accepted criteria. The subjectivity and non-probability based nature of unit selection (i.e., selecting people, cases /organizations, etc.) in purposive sampling mean that it can be difficult to defend the representativeness of the sample.

The total number of respondents for the study was determined by data saturation. According to Elmusharaf (2012), the general rule in qualitative research is that you continue to sample until you are not getting any new information or you are no longer gaining new insights, and this is termed 'saturation.' Hence the researcher interviewed respondents until data saturation was reached.

3.8.2 Critical Case Sampling

This type of sampling is a special type under purposive sampling where critical cases are used. A critical case is one that allows for analytical generalizations to be made (Laerd, 2012). Simply put, this explains that under the conditions of a critical case, if a theory can work, then it most probably may work anywhere else.

Critical case sampling can be utilized particularly in exploratory qualitative research, where a small number of cases can be decisively used to explain a certain phenomenon of interest. This quality of critical case sampling is its most important aspect (Laerd, 2012). These cases can only be utilized to help make logical generalizations and not statistical ones (Laerd ,2012). These logical generalizations should, however, be made with much care.

It is with this in mind that the researcher chose female students with the desirable characteristics which were critical for the study. These are part of student female support organizations operating at the Institution of Higher Learning, namely, She Reigns, and She Conquers. It is noteworthy that this is not a case study of these organizations or the students but merely the experiences these students have had, and they took time to seek counseling and support from these organizations. These students sought help after having experienced other forms of gender-based violence, ie sexual assault, rape, physical violence, and physical, sexual harassment at first. Thus the researcher having this background knowledge, approached them to find out if they had also experienced sexual harassment on the internet and they consented. It is this that makes them the desired candidates to participate in the study. The Researcher initially met the leaders of these organizations at a Gender-Based Violence Workshop hosted by the Institution in the 2nd semester in 2017 during the first year of her Master's Degree and engaged them in a dialogue about their objectives and later sought permission to interview participants who are part of these organizations.

Laerd (2012) supports this view by stating that the researcher may use their judgment to sample units for the study, these may be people, organizations/ cases, pieces of data or events that are not merely selected with the intent to make statistical inferences or generalizations. Hence, in this study, the researcher chose to select respondents who were survivors of other forms of gender-based violence. Since they were sampled from the student-led support organizations, the researcher first asked them if they had experienced sexual harassment on the Internet too, when they consented to this, it is then that they were chosen to be part of the respondents for the current study as they possessed this rich information for the study.

3.9 Data Collection

In collecting the data, the study largely used one-on-one semi-structured interviews. This method of data collection, in general, entails an administration of a series of questions to the participants, in the form of interaction. As Rabin in Kerstin (2011) and Wyse (2014) rightly observed, this method of data collection also had a leeway to help

the researcher get clarification and in-depth information on issues which ordinarily would be difficult to be accessed. This is mainly because, being in such settings, the researcher can display connectivity with the respondents (through body language, eye contact and other non-verbal communication techniques), which makes it easier for the respondents to be more relaxed to answer difficult questions. Connecting with the respondents in this manner, he/she also has the possibility to vary the sequence of questions, to probe for specific answers. This is very significant on the quality of data. Wimpenny and Gass (2000), further confirm that open, unstructured interviews in a phenomenological study are intended to be in-depth. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) argue that 'in a semi-structured interview, the research may follow the standard questions with one or more individually tailored questions to get clarification or probe a person's reason.

Furthermore, face to face interviews have the distinct advantage of enabling the researcher to establish rapport with potential participants and therefore, gain their cooperation. Thus such interviews yield the highest response rates (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010). The researcher asked open-ended questions to the interviewees to allow free expression of the interviewees' feelings, experiences, and ideas without limitations. Open-unstructured interviews employ an informal style to gain knowledge concerning the respondents' personal experiences, their values and decisions including their knowledge in terms of their culture among other things (Johnson, 2002). Babbie (2014) concurs that with these interviews the researcher can better be able to relate and understand the participants' thoughts and feelings on the topic under study. Check, and Schutte (2012) argue that semi-structured interviews are an advantage in research as they assist in minimizing the interviewer bias and effects.

The unstructured method is advantageous to the current study because it allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions in case of misunderstandings to the questions by the interviewee or emerging new information beneficial to the investigation. Using this method, the researcher approached the respondents with the hope of understanding their online sexual harassment experiences. Often, the researcher started by stating the aim of the study and went on to ask specific questions about their respective online

sexual harassment experiences, as it relates to the objectives of the study. The respondents were also asked about what they thought the university authority could do to help victims of online sexual harassment, and what they thought was the best way to educate and handle issues of online sexual harassment. By doing this, the researcher was able to access in-depth information, both on online sexual harassment in general, as well as on the particular case of Univen female students.

All interviews were conducted in the English language. This is because this is the language that the researcher and participants were familiar with. Given that all the participants understood and were familiar with the language, the interview process came quite natural. Using a questionnaire guide (the interview guide is attached as Appendix 1 and two at the end of this document), the interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable environment.

3.10 Data Recording Procedure

Data recording was conducted by the researcher in the in-depth individual interviews. Greeff (2005) stated that interviews allow the researcher to understand the world from the participants' point of view and uncover lived experiences. Before the data were collected, the researcher met with participants separately and made appointments and obtained permission to conduct the study. Appointments were made with the participants and arrangements were done to meet with the participants at conducive times for data collection. The researcher arranged before the interview times that they would take for roughly 20 to 30 minutes with the respondents. The researcher also managed to create a good rapport with the respondents. Even though the topic under study is extremely sensitive the respondents gave their consent to participate and share their experiences. Conducting these interviews while also recording was essential as it gave the participants reassurance that the topic under study is important and that their responses were being taken seriously. (Blanche et al., 2009).

“Sociology has become the science of the interview” (Hughes 1971:507). The interview had become the favored digging tool for mining into people's lives and the tape-

recorders in the sociologist's bag evidence of a vocational disposition akin to the place of the stethoscope in the professional persona of a medical doctor (Rice 2010, 2008). It is against this background that the researcher used a digital recorder during the interview process. The recording method allowed the researcher to concentrate on the non-verbal actions of the respondents and allowed the researcher to have eye contact with the respondents during the process of the interview. According to Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (2006), collecting data using a digital recorder allows the researcher to concentrate on the process of the interview and be able to give necessary eye contact. Wagner (2005), notes that recording may be done to support audio transcription to text, recording interviews, conversations and meetings to listen to later, log or transcribe, annotate or code, in order to achieve the correct, unaltered responses given by the respondents. Digital recording was done, and the researcher sought prior permission to record the dialogue. Creswell et al. (2016:94) note that a researcher needs to 'make a written record (transcript) of what was said for the purposes of data- analysis.'

3.11 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Here, the goal is to identify themes, i.e., patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use them to address the research or say something about the research problem under study. This is much more than simply summarising the data. A good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of the data in a way that provides answers to the research questions.

Using this method of data analysis, I started by a thorough examination of the literature, blending it with ideas and concepts from the theory. First, the data were transcribed and coded. To avoid situations whereby data collected becomes chaotic and disorganized, I arranged the codes and quotes systematically, along the main themes of the research questions. From here, matrices were created. All transcripts were read and re-read to identify common words, phrases, and perceptions that were coded. These codes produced patterns, which were categorized accordingly under themes. In

the end, these themes were further relayed back to the literature, to establish what they meant in the previous literature.

3.12 Reliability and Validity of the Measuring Instrument

Although the terms reliability and validity are used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of research (Galofshani, 2003). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Seale (1999:266) asserts that while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlighted that there can be no validity without reliability; a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]. Healy and Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm’s terms. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed that in qualitative paradigms the terms credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are the essential criteria for quality.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were adhered to in this study. Ethical issues are the concerns and dilemmas that arise over the proper way to execute research, more specifically not to create harmful conditions for the subjects of inquiry which are humans in the research process (Van Deventer, 2009). The researcher sought to protect participants from physical and psychological harm during the research process and took steps to protect her own physical and psychological well-being during the research process (Resnik, 2011). Ethics are a set of principles that are suggested by an individual or a group. These principles serve as rules and behavioral expectations about the correct conduct towards experimental subject or respondents, employees, sponsors and other researchers, assistants, and students (De Vos *et al.* 2013).

Participation was strictly voluntary, which, implied that participants who wanted to discontinue for any reason would be allowed to do so. All information provided by the participants for this study is treated in strict confidence and for academic purposes only. The identities of the participants were not recorded as part of the findings to be reported. No one, including the researcher, should be able to identify any respondent after data collection (De Vos *et al* 2013). Anonymity is the guarantee that the identity of the research participants will remain discreet (Bless *et al.*, 2006). Babbie and Mouton (2010) add that a respondent may be considered anonymous when the researcher does not match a given response with a given respondent. The data collected should always be confidential with the respondent's knowledge or without, and the responsibility towards the success of this principle lies strictly with only the researcher. Confidentiality is an agreement between people that limits others to access private information (De Vos *et al*, 2013). The researchers identified violation of privacy as part of the ethics to be considered in this study, cautious that every individual has a right to privacy and to decide, where, when, with whom and to what extent his/her beliefs will be exposed (De Laat, 2008).

Permission to conduct the study from the Department of African Studies, the Human Resources, and the Higher Degrees Committee of the Institution of Higher Learning was sought before engaging with respondents at the University. Participation was purely voluntarily and this being purely academic research, no incentives were given to respondents. The presentation of the study was done at the School of Human and Social Sciences and Higher Degree Committee. Thus Ethical clearance was requested from the Department and the University of Venda Higher Degree Committee. Furthermore, permission to conduct the study was requested from the Head of Department of Education Limpopo Province as well as the mentioned participants. The following aspects were also applied to ensure adherence to ethical considerations:

3.13.1. Informed Consent

Gray (2009) states that informed consent is the obtaining of voluntary participation in a research project based on a full understanding of the likely benefits and risks of participating in the study. Monette *et al.* (2008) concur, adding that informed consent refers to telling the potential research participants about all features of the research that might practically influence the decision of participating. Informed consent is a statement, usually written, that explains aspects of a study to participants and asks for their voluntary agreement to participate before the study commences (Neuman, 2010). The researcher explained to the respondents about the study or what the research is about and asked them to freely participate in the study. The respondents were given consent forms to sign before the interview was conducted. The researcher ensured that the signed consent forms were treated with the utmost discretion and stored away in an appropriate manner. The researcher did not coerce participants into participating in the research project. Participation was purely voluntary (Nueman, 2011). The researcher also provided adequate time for participants to ask questions before the interviews commenced. Informed consent was applicable in this study because the researcher agreed with the potential participants in the study. The researcher observed this ethic, by informing the potential participants about the background and goals of the study, and the benefits that could accrue during the study.

3.13.2. Right to Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained by not disclosing names or by avoiding reporting long quotes from participants on responses to questions. Information was not shared with others without authorization from participants. All the raw data were kept confidentially in a secure place.

The respondents were assured of strict confidentiality in their responses and interviews were carried out in a confidential manner to eliminate biases and other confounding variables. Argyris & David (1989) argues that the right to freely choose belongs to the participant in research whether to subject themselves to the scrutinizing eye of research or not to. Wiles *et al.* (2006) contend that a researcher has the duty to make sure that a

respondents's identity is protected by all means, this can be achieved when particular processes that anonymise them are followed.

Thus, the researcher did not use the participant's names in an endeavor to keep the identities of the respondents unknown but, assigned numbers to the respondents.

3.13.3. Right to Self-determination or Autonomy

In this study, the researcher provided participants with all the information about the purpose of study without any external control. Participants were given the right to decide whether to participate in the study or not. They also maintained the right to withdraw from the study without the risk of penalty. Hence in this study, the participants' identity is not linked to their responses (Burns & Grove, 1997) and participation was strictly voluntary, which, implied that participants who wanted to discontinue for any reason would be allowed to do so. All information provided by the participants for this study is treated in strict confidence and for academic purposes only. The identities of the participants were not recorded as part of the findings to be reported. No one, including the researcher, could identify any respondent after data collection (De Vos *et al.* 2013). Anonymity is the guarantee that the identity of the research participants will remain discreet (Bless *et al.*, 2006). Babbie & Mouton (2010) add that a respondent may be considered anonymous when the researcher does not match a given response with a given respondent. The data collected should always be confidential with the respondent's knowledge or without, and the responsibility towards the success of this principle lies strictly with only the researcher. Confidentiality is an agreement between people that limits others to access private information (De Vos *et al.*, 2013). The researcher lastly identified a violation of privacy as part of the ethics to be considered in this study and was cautious that every individual had a right to privacy and to decide, where, when, with whom and to what extent his/her beliefs will be exposed (De Laat, 2008).

3.13.4 Anonymity

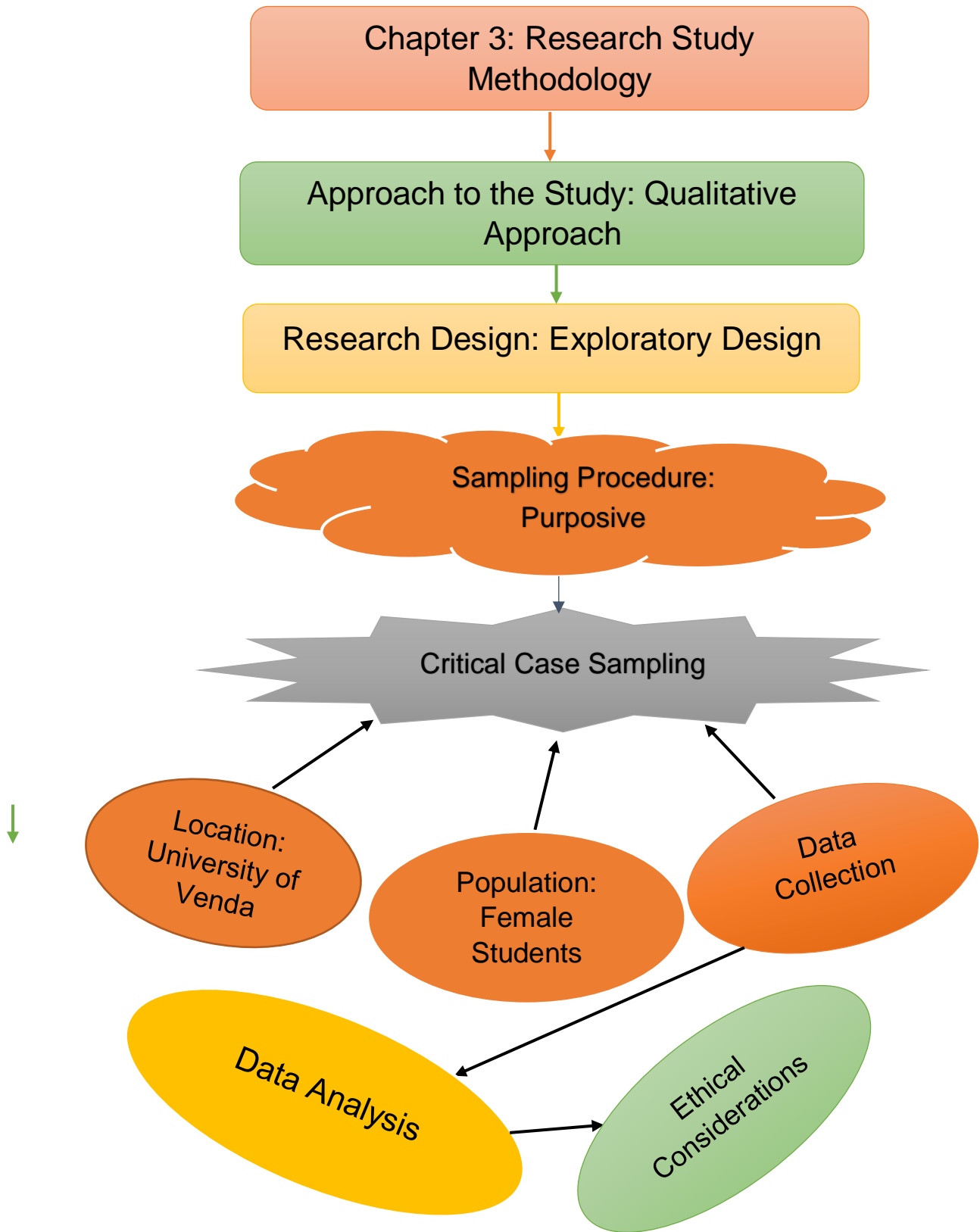
The researcher kept the participants' identities secret. According to Brink, Vander Walt and Rensburg (2012) even the researcher should not be able to link a participant with his or her data. In this study, participants' identities have been hidden through the use

of numbers assigned to them. The participants' names were not written down anywhere or recorded, and that is why voice recordings were done and not videos of the participants to ensure that the anonymity of the participants was safeguarded since the topic under study is very sensitive.

3.13.5 Privacy

The researcher has maintained the ethical consideration of respecting the right of privacy of the participants. The participants maintained the right to determine the extent to which, and the general circumstances under which his/her private information was being shared with others. In this study, the researcher protected the privacy of the participants by not using hidden apparatus such as video cameras without their consent. Participants were informed of the use of the voice-recorder by the researcher, and they gave permission.

3.14 Diagrammatic Repression of the Research Study Methodology



3.14 Summary

This chapter has discussed the research methodology employed in this the study. It explained that the research was based on a qualitative method that was largely oriented in an inductive, interpretive and constructive approach. It explained that the study used mainly one-on-one semi-structured interviews to collect primary data for the study. It also explained that female students of the University of Venda were the main population for the study. Sampling techniques such as purposive sampling and critical case were adopted to identify the 20 participants used in the study. The chapter also justified why these procedures were employed in the study. Through discussions about reliability, validity and ethical considerations, it also justified the kinds of data and the steps taken in the research to collect and analyze the data for the study. It concludes with a discussion of what specific steps were taken in the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings. The chapter is prefaced with a diagrammatic representation of the findings, arranged along the study's three main themes:

- forms of online sexual harassment
- social media platforms upon which sexual harassment occurs
- coping strategies used by the female students to deal with online sexual harassment.

This is followed by a systematic analysis of the data. Here, a conscious effort is made to support the findings (as represented by the themes and subthemes), with direct quotes from the study participants. This concept is supported by Cohen et al., (2011), Blanche et al., (2009) and Kabaya (2016) that the analysis of qualitative data basically involves arranging and giving enlightening reasons for the collected data. In this sense, how the respondents define and conceptualize the variables in the research is very important. However, in order to protect the identity of the participants, I have assigned numbers to their responses. The idea is to try as much as possible to make the findings reflect the experiences of the participants without much adulteration. Another importance of the direct quotes is that they give the responses of the participants an added emotional value. Aligning such values to the analytic lenses from the already mentioned theories in chapter 2, the findings are further interpreted in relation to what was already known within the field.

4.2 Diagrammatic Representation of the Themes and Sub-themes

Below is a diagrammatic representation of the themes and the sub-themes, in accordance with the three main research questions. The relationships between the themes and the sub-themes are further discussed below in the preceding sections.

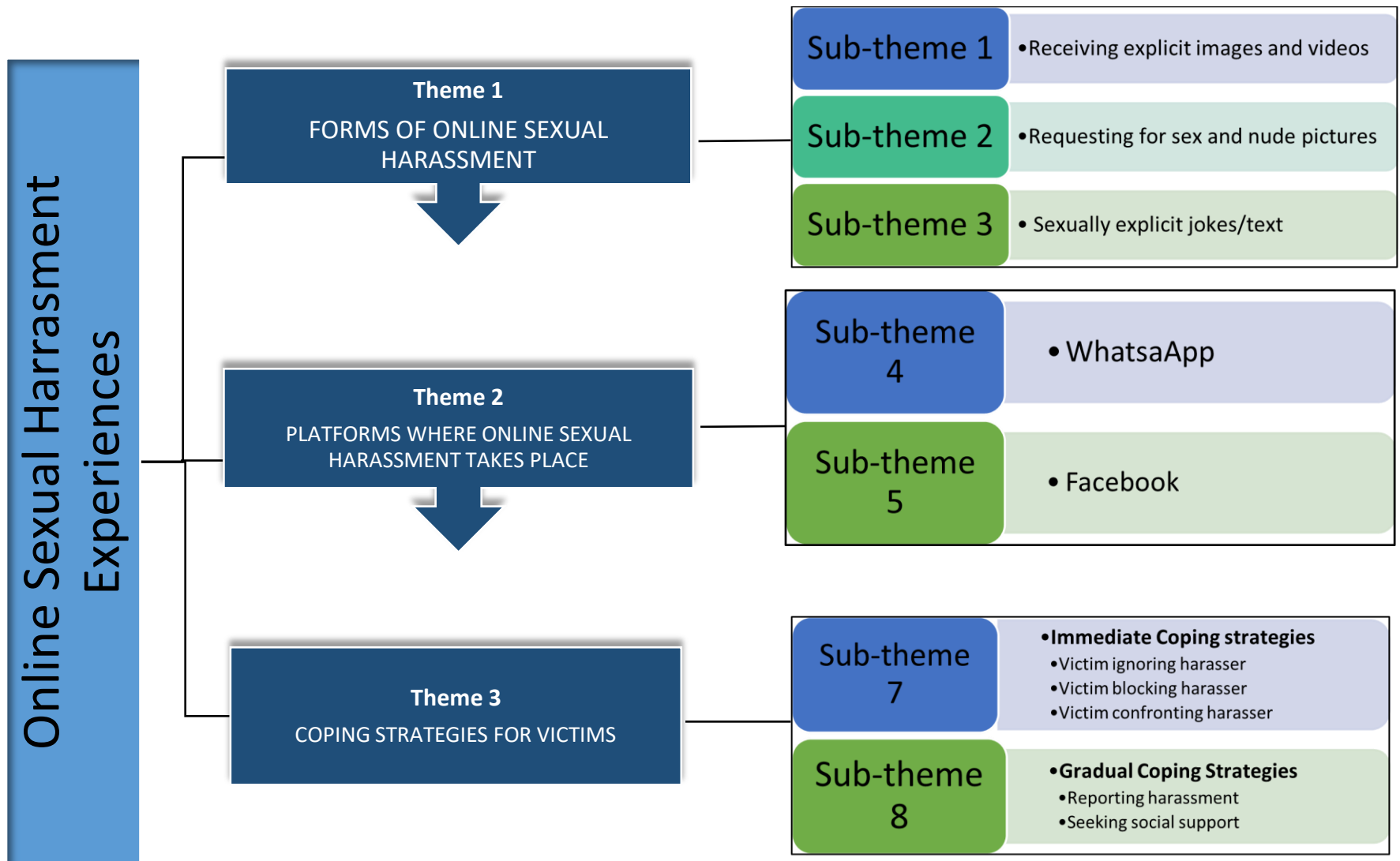


Figure 4.2 Diagrammatic presentation of Themes and Sub-themes

4.3 Theme 1: Forms of Online Sexual Harassment

In discussing with the participants, it was found that sexual harassment online at the South African IHL has mostly occurred in three main forms:

1. Sending and reception of explicit random images and videos to the victims
2. Sending and requesting of nude images from the victims, and
3. Sending of sexually charged jokes to the victims

4.3.1 Sending and Reception of Explicit Images and Videos

Data revealed that most cases of online sexual harassment on the participants have mostly occurred in the form of reception of unwanted sexually explicit images and videos. Most of the participants expressed that this was the most common form of sexual harassment they received. Using this form, the harassers in some cases sent pictures of their genitals or abdominal muscles (six-pack). Their hope with this is that such images and videos would in the long run either impress the victim or arouse them to want to have sex with them (the harassers). This is how some of the respondents expressed it:

“One guy kept on sending me disturbing and embarrassing pictures... He sent me pictures of his penis, and when I saw it, I was so shocked, and I immediately deleted them. He probably thought I would fall for it”

.....

.....**Participant 2**

*It was also the same situation for Participant 4 who stated that. “The guy kept sending pornographic videos of himself, I don’t know what he wanted me to say or think when he sent them”.....***Participant 4**

A third participant also expressed a similar disgust. However, instead of pictures of his genitals, the harasser sent disturbing pictures and videos, including that of a teenage girl masturbating.

“It was different videos, a one of them was a video on WhatsApp. Remember that time when some teenage girl took a video of herself masturbating? It was trending last year.

Yes, he first sent that video to our class group and again to my inbox. I was so disgusted”

.....**Participant 3**

The fact that some of these images are readily available and shared in different social media groups makes them easily accessible. Hence having such videos in their different social media groups, the harassers could easily use them to intimidate or sexually harass their victims in other social media groups. Given that such images were unsolicited, it often leaves the victim with serious feelings of surprise, shock, and in most cases complete disgust.

In looking at these responses, it was obvious that the act of sending such images and pictures are cases of sexual harassment. By sending pornographic images and videos over the Internet to these female students, with the intent to entice or induce sex, the harassers, without doubt, put the victims in a sexually uncomfortable position. Even though the victims in most cases do not respond or reciprocate the gestures, the act of sending such images and videos have already violated and disrespected the victim.

This form of online sexual harassment is in line with Henry & Powell (2015) and Griffiths (2000)'s findings of the forms of sexual harassment that women are subjected to on the Internet. In Griffiths (2000) study 41% of female Internet users reported that they had been sexually harassed through pornographic material, which was normally unsolicited or unwanted. Some of the women were also sent sexually explicit comments, images, text messages or emails. Some reported receiving “upsetting unwanted dick pics and repeated sexual requests.” More than any other form, the act of sending pornographic and inappropriate materials are more rampant when it comes to sexual harassment on the Internet than any other form. Using this means, harassers (mostly men) can hide behind the anonymity that the Internet provides to act out their sexual tendencies, and in an environment where there are no adequate punitive measures against this, they continue to harass women with impunity.

4.2.2 Sending and Direct Requesting of Nude Images or Sex from the Victims

The study also found out that the harassers requested the respondents to send them nude pictures of themselves, to strip for them or the harasser out rightly requested sex. Two respondents said:

“He was sending pornographic videos, and he would request that I should show him my breasts and to strip for him”

.....**Participant 12**

The harasser’s requests for such material over the Internet shows that the cyberspace provides a platform where an individual can boldly engage in deviant behavior as the Internet somehow hides a person’s identity. **Participant 5** also reported being solicited for sex on the Internet by a person who not only was communicating with her on Facebook, but had also seen her online.

Then he said, “I want sex from you, I’ve seen you on campus and on Facebook and all that, ‘uya’understander moos?”

Participant 5

In their 1999 Youth Internet Safety Survey Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak (2001) found that most youths chat to strangers while they are online and are solicited for sex by these harassers or have discussed sex when it was unwanted by the youth.

In line with the online disinhibition, effect Model says that the Internet is a ‘safe haven’ for deviant behavior to be performed. (Jewkes, 2002) concurs that the anonymity provided by virtual reality is the cause of many users feeling ‘safe’ performing ‘private’ behaviour (even if its semi-public or public spaces afforded by the internet) they may never attempt in ‘real life.’ Axelrod (2009) argues that the Internet environment encourages diversity and freedom. He further argues that on the Internet the one type of sexual behavior that has been found to be harassing for both adults and children is a sexual solicitation.

4.2.3 Sending and Requesting of Unwanted Sexually Charged Jokes to the Victims

The study established that the respondents were also sent unwanted sexually explicit jokes and messages that one respondent in particular termed as ‘naughty’. This depicts the explicit nature of the message and the respondent’s state of being uncomfortable in receiving that particular material. One respondent stated that:

“It was jokes about sex, I remember when he sent one about a man that was having sex with a donkey and a man that was passing by got jealous...blah...blah... it was just irritating”Participant 6

Another respondent who experienced a similar incident said:

“At first I thought that maybe it’s a mistake, I..I..I.. (stammering) took it with a good approach, a moral approach to say, listen you’ve sent me a video before, you are sending me messages, naughty messages, are you really texting me, or you are texting another person, you just mistakenly texted me? Then he responded by saying No, Im texting you. Then I was like, fine...you are texting me such messages why? What do I do with this?”Participant 17

The above extracts indicate that the forms of harassing sexual material that was sent to female students were unwelcome jokes of a sexual nature that were not welcome. Sproull and Kiesler (1986) conducted a research which found out that there is more profanity in messages sent online together with negative content compared to in-person communication where individuals are face to face. In a study conducted by Biber et al. (2002) it was found that women who had been sent sexual jokes and other sexual material online found these to be sexually harassing. This, therefore, concurs with the results of this study. One way which constantly emerged as the form through which female students were sexually harassed online was the reception of explicit images and videos. I categorized this as sub-theme 1.

4.3 Online Platforms Where Sexual Harassment Occurs

Two main social media Apps were identified as the platforms where sexual harassment occurs and these being: WhatsApp and Facebook.

4.3.1 WhatsApp

WhatsApp was identified as the platform where sexually harassing content was sent the most. While twelve out of the twenty participants for the study, indicated harassment towards them occurred on WhatsApp, eight described said that they had been mostly harassed on Facebook.

“He sent the videos to my WhatsApp inbox”.....Participant 3

“We had exchanged contacts, so we were chatting on WhatsApp”.....Participant 6

WhatsApp was mostly used by perpetrators who had a face to face relationship with the victim as most of the material shared with the individuals should have each other’s contact details or at least the sender should have the phone number of the receiver, which in this instance is the victim. This subtheme thus indicates the close relationship between the harasser and the victim and how this creates a space that allows for inappropriate or sexually “harassing” messages or communication to be conveyed. Probed further on how the harasser had access to send the victim WhatsApp messages the participants responded in the following manner;

“ Mmmh! The guy was a student last year, but he has since graduated, We were friends.....Participant 14

*“Person is a lecturer and a colleague here at the University, we are in the same department, he is a bit close because we would say ‘hie’ ‘hie’ to each other, and we would share other problems, not particularly sexual problems”
.....Participant 1*

“We do a module together, and we know each other through a WhatsApp group at school for a module that we do together”Participant 3

“Okay, the friend that I met this guy through, was just finishing here at UNIVEN, meaning she couldn’t now be the one to help me to process my application, and I have a sister who was here, she was not yet here, the first week. So she introduced me to this guy, saying this guy can help you process your application and even to check your forms when they have been submitted, if they have been accepted and processed and everything, so I met the guy through a friend, and he actually was very helpful from the beginning, so it was then that we got used to each other”.....Participant 19

The above extracts indicate that the harassers were either close companions or men they considered as friends or colleagues. The responses from the interviews demonstrate that the relationship between some of the perpetrators and victims of online sexual harassment is that of friendship. Some of these harassers also have a face to face relationship with their victims besides communicating online also. An example is students attending the same classes, or though not attending the same classes they attend school on the same campus. This use of social media by students to communicate with their colleagues and friends is a widespread one. Kennedy and Taylor, in their 2010 study also indicate that the use of social media platforms to the network is not a new phenomenon among college students. Their study indicated that 80% of the college students who participated were currently using one platform of online communication or another to communicate and this is where they mostly experienced sexual harassment.

Qin (2015) concurs with this view in that some individuals tend to act in ways that they would normally not because they believe the Internet affords them the benefit of anonymity. This is also perpetuated by a belief that the victims will not consider this behavior as sexually harassing because it did not happen face to face and the perpetrator's identity is not clear and specific.

4.3.2 Facebook

The study established that the respondents actually had prior chats with the harasser up to the time when they started receiving harassing messages from these individuals. Participants indicated this from their responses described below;

“We chatted normally via Facebook Messenger”**Participant 5**

“At first we were chatting just fine and on a normal level but then he started sending all these horrible things to my Facebook inbox”
.....**Participant 8**

Powell & Henry (2015) assert that both the mainstream and academic research have dedicated progressive attention to what they term ‘online invisibility.’ Which in essence is a concept where people tend to do or say things under the anonymity and distance that the Internet provides that they would never have said or done in person. This is explained by the Online disinhibition Effect model which says that the absence of a face to face interaction between individuals makes the Internet a safe haven for someone to say or send something that they normally would not if they were facing the receiver face to face. The Internet thus provides a fertile platform for abuse when there is no personal relationship between two people who are mere online friends particularly on platforms such as Facebook as the study results established. When asked about their relationship to the harassers on Facebook, participants responded thus:

“We don’t have a relationship, we are just Facebook friends, and since I’m a public figure, I would just make conversation with him on Facebook after I accepted his friend request, and since you can send me a messenger while we Facebook friends, have its allowed, not knowing that the person is coming with another approach, a silly approach to say I want to... you know...”**Participant 20**

The response from participant 5 indicates clearly that the harasser was a stranger who just befriended them under the auspices of an online friend but with the intent to solicit the victim for sex. Another respondent said:

*“There was this other guy from Libya, or somewhere in East Africa, he sent a lot of stuff, like almost every day, he would send like 2 pictures of some sexual materials in a day and at first I said nothing until it got to be too much for me, and I blocked him, so now I blocked him”***Participant 6**

“Aaah, it was just a guy that I really did not know but he claimed that he used to stay near my home and he saw me growing up when I would pass outside his home going to school, so then the guy got to know my name, added me on Facebook, when we were Facebook friends that’s when he started all these things.” **Participant 8**

The results of the study therefore clearly indicate that harassers use online platforms to perpetuate criminal acts taking cover from the online invisibility nature of the Internet to harass females that they do not know face to face and have never met. Other studies concur with the results of this study. For example, a study conducted by Schouten et al. (2007), and another by Qin (2015) revealed that adolescents preferred to talk more on online platforms about sex and love issues than in face to face communication. Sulen (2004)’s study also indicates that because of the online disinhibition effect harassers may tend to think that sexual harassment that happens online is less severe than that in person or face to face communication.

The study also revealed that while in some instances the victim knows the harasser there are some instances where the harasser, even if they may be a Facebook friend with the female student, they initially have never met face to face. A study by Francis & Taylor(2015) concurs with the results of this study in that Facebook friendships encompass a vast category of social relationships; these may include school, friends, colleagues, family, and classmates (Vitak, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2011; Zhang & Leung, 2014). Thus, being online friends on Facebook does not not necessarily mean that it is a friendship with a strong bond as friendship ties are defined in everyday means (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Youths connect with diverse people they may be friends with on Facebook friends, but they classify them from ‘friends’ to “no friends’ (Van Cleemput, 2010).

4.5 Theme 3: Coping Strategies for Victims of Online Sexual Harassment

Having understood the forms of online sexual harassment and the platforms upon which they occur, the study investigated the different coping strategies that have been developed by the female students who undergo this abuse. How do they manage to deal with this? How do they deal with the frustrations and debasement that come with such online abuse?

Several themes emerged. I have divided these themes into two categories, namely: Immediate coping strategies and gradual coping strategies. What follows is a discussion of these subthemes along the two categories, but basically the difference between immediate and gradual coping strategies is that when the victims were harassed, either reacted to the harassment immediately by either confronting, block, or deleting the material sent or after a harassing act had reoccurred by the same harasser they chose to ignore the harassment but later gradually confided in a close person the ordeal they had gone through.

4.5.1 Immediate Coping Strategies

At the event of sexual harassment, three main strategies were used by the students to deal with the harassment as a way of immediately coping. The first was that they either completely ignored the harassment out of either shock or comforting oneself that online harassment was better than experiencing physical, sexual harassment.

The second reaction was to block the harasser so that the harassment does not continue further or take the third route which was to at first take a passive stance and try to ignore the harassment, but when they felt that it was getting out of hand they finally confronted the harasser.

4.5.1.1 Completely Ignore the harasser (Passive Attitude towards the Harasser)

The research indicates that more often than not, after a harassment incident that clearly leaves the victim disturbed as they feel helpless and either just take a passive decision to try and ignore the harassment or do not know how to respond. One respondent compared traditional sexual harassment with the online harassment that she was experiencing and chose to ignore the harasser because although it was uncomfortable, it was better than being physically harassed. Four respondents' replied in the following manner:

"I was shocked, cause at first I honestly didn't think he was sending to me, I thought maybe it was a mistake, he was intending to send to maybe the girlfriend, so I ignored it, I thought it was a mistake and then he typed my name, that's when I saw that he is serious but after that I chose to keep quiet and ignore the messages because I did not know how to respond to them ".....

.....**Participant 3**

"I didn't respond I didn't say anything I think he just calculated that I don't like it and he stopped sending when he sent me a message a greeting again I just kept quiet for him to see that I didn't like it and he just stopped like that".....**Participant 7**

*"No, I just kept quiet coz I honestly didn't know what to say, and before that, we used to chat well on Facebook....."***Participant 8**

"Well at least he doesn't touch me, WhatsApp videos are not as bad as physical harassment"**Participant 4**

These responses indicate that after they had received sexually harassing material most victims did not know how to respond. This was mainly because of the shock because of the change in the communication that had dramatically changed from normal chats to receiving unsolicited sexual material. Other respondents chose to ignore the harasser because they took comfort in the fact that the sexual harassment was at least not as bad as if it had been done physically. A study by Qin (2015) concurs with the findings of this study in that the, nature of the Internet when communicating using it is bound to

have a result of people thinking that the harassment that takes place there is less severe.

4.5.1.2 Blocking Harasser from the Victim's social network Account

There is only so much abuse that any individual can take, thus after having been patient with the harassers the respondents revealed that after they felt they couldn't take it anymore, they decided to block the harasser that was sending the unwanted material as a way to end the sexual harassment. Two respondents said:

"And I asked him why? he did not respond, but later that day he sent another pornographic video. It was then that I decided just to block him because he clearly did not want to act civil. So I ended up blocking him"

.....**Participant 2**

"After I realized that the situation was getting worse I just got disgusted, I never responded to him, what I just did was just block him, because I didn't want the communication to continue like that"

Participant 16

These participants' responses indicate that some victims had the courage to finally regain their power back and block the harasser as a coping mechanism when they see that the harasser is continuing to send unsolicited sexually harassing material. Rosen (2006)'s study findings on the prevalence of sexual harassment on social networking sites are in line with this study results in the observation that a great number of Internet users who had reported having been solicited for sex and harassed ended up blocking the harasser as a way to end this harassing communication.

4.5.1.3 Victim confronting perpetrators

The study established that some respondents after having tried to endure the harassment finally stood up and had the courage to stand up to the harassers and confront them face to face to enquire why they were sending the unwanted sexual material to them. Some harassers defended themselves by indicating that they had been joking with the victim, others, when confronted, did not give any reason.

Furthermore, some victims threatened to report the incidents as a way to stop the harasser sending material of that nature. Some of the responses illustrating the above are stated below:

“After trying to ignore him, I saw that he was clearly not going to stop even with no response from me so I asked him to stop and he stopped instantly”

.....**Participant 1**

“I physically approached the person and asked him why he was sending such material? And he responded by saying, no I was just playing, that’s how I play with some of my friends, and I told him strictly that I don’t really entertain such kind of behavior and Im not comfortable with such, I had tried to be patient but he clearly was getting out of hand by the day”.....

.....**Participant 3**

“I thought it was actually disgusting and I told the guy that Im gonna send him to legal affairs because it’s against the school’s code of conduct to be forwarding each other pornography especially in this setting so when he saw that this was a serious issue then he started apologizing”

Participant 18

These results indicate that some victims of sexual harassment online end up choosing to stand up for themselves and not suffer in silence. Thus they confront the harassers and ask them why they sent such material that they had not asked for and were clearly uncomfortable to receive such. Furthermore, they told the harasser to stop sending such sexually offensive material.

4.5.2 Gradual Coping Strategies

The participants identified two main strategies here, namely: reporting the sexual harassment or seeking social support. In essence, the reporting was discussed as an ideal measure that could have been an option but because of a clear lack of trust in the system of reporting this prevented the victims from taking this route. Thus, the results

clearly indicated that most found solace and social support from close relations such as friends. This was the main coping strategy that they were gradually taken by the victims.

4.5.2.1 Reporting harassment

The study established that students do not report online sexual harassment due to various reasons. Project de Shame (2017) asserts that there are a number of things that victims of online sexual harassment may go through that leads them to react in a certain manner after harassment incidences. In order to cope with the trauma some may not report, especially among marginalized groups. This may be a result of the lack of knowledge on where to report, general lack of sensitivity by authorities where one can report (this may also lead to re-victimization of the sexually harassed victim), concerns for confidentiality, accessibility and isolation and also fear of further victimization because the harasser will be in a position of power. This study established that victims just chose to share the incidents with friends, to remain silent, or merely threaten to report the incident without necessarily following through on their threats even in the cases where it continued after the initial threats.

This was illustrated by responses such as;

“No I just shared with some of my friends, I wanted to find out if they also were receiving such videos from other people because I was really surprised that how can a person send such information or material to me? And I really wanted to find out from my other friends that do they ever receive such material from this lecturers too and how do they respond to them if ever you do? And also how do they treat such if ever they receive them?”**Participant 1**

“I didn’t think of reporting him, even if I wanted to, I mean where would I report? I feel it useless anyway... but I was afraid to meet him on campus when I was alone so I would avoid places where I would see him, so that was that, then the next time I saw pictures of his graduation and I have never seen him or heard from him since”**Participant 2**

“I did tell my friends if there was somewhere trustworthy to report I would have because after I told him to stop sending he still kept on sending, that was very harassing to me”

.....**Participant 13**

“Yes, if they can't really help someone being beaten up literally if I were to report that someone is sending me uncomfortable videos on WhatsApp won't they tell me that I am crazy? It's just not useful to report from what I am seeing”

.....**Participant 8**

“I just need to study in peace, get my degree and go in peace, anyways even if you report these things; there is never anything tangible that ever comes out. I know of a friend who had an abusive boyfriend that she stayed with here on campus who would beat her up, and the security man who would come and intervene when he would be beating her would advise her to go and report at maintenance, at first she would report until she stopped because when she would go there, they would start making her feel like it's her fault and sometimes they would ask her why she didn't leave the guy, but it's not simple just to leave I understand her, so I feel reporting is useless somehow”

.....**Participant 20**

It was clear, therefore, that a general lack of trust in the system is the major reason why victims of online sexual harassment do not to report harassment incidences rather than them lacking either the courage to do so or knowledge of where to report. It stands to logic to understand this victims' disenchantment with the system because if they have knowledge of perpetrators of physical violence, which is assumed to be a more grievous offense, going scot-free then surely they cannot imagine there is any chance of them getting any justice on a lesser evil of “mere” online harassment.

Another reason why victims do not report sexual harassment is that of fear. Victims of online sexual harassment, because of the nature of this crime are sometimes afraid to report, especially if the harasser is in a position of power, the fear may also be because

they are not sure if they will be believed or taken seriously if ever they were to report the harassment and also afraid to strain relations with the harasser as it may turn out sour for them as students. Some of the respondents alluded to this thus:

“My friends, who know him were shocked that he can do that, but then one of them asked me uri did it get to me nah so that we can get to report him to his superiors? I said no it didn’t get to me even though I didn’t like it but then I only said that because I was afraid what would happen if I report and since he is a lecturer what if no one believed me, also on the other hand I also didn’t want him to lose his job at the same time”

.....**Participant 4**

Jewkes’s (2002) study also concurs with the findings that victims of sexual violence may not report because they fear that they may not be believed. This is because of claims that mostly women lie about sexual assault, especially rape. Torronen & Roumeliotis (2013) argue that some victims may not report incidences of sexual harassment because they empathize with the harasser and fear he may lose his job. This is line with the study findings. Furthermore, the same argue that this is a result of the relation of femininity with empathy, passivity, nurturance and emotionality. This then causes females that are victimized not to report such experiences.

Respondent 7 replied in the following manner when asked why she did not report these incidences of sexual harassment;

“What made me keep quiet was honestly I was afraid that I didn’t want to make him feel ashamed and at the same time I didn’t want him to feel like he has power over me, so I kept quiet so he keeps wondering what am I thinking?”

.....**Participant 7**

The victim’s response clearly indicates that fear was the reason why they kept quiet when they clearly did not like being sent such material by the harasser. This may also show that they did not want to have trouble with the harasser who was in a position of authority. Bell et al (2014) concurs with these results that the feeling of not wanting to cause trouble made them not to report.

Even when this route of reporting wasn't taken by any of the respondents, some victims actually knew where to report online sexual harassment and had knowledge about the Institution's code of conduct that restricts students from sending pornographic content to others. Only one respondent out of 8 in the study expressed herself after being sexually harassed online by a fellow student.

"At first he was laughing and saying, man this video is all over South Africa, everyone has seen it , she took the video knowing what would happen to it , and I said No I don't think that the little girl took the video knowing that it would reach Univen for you guys to laugh at it, it might be funny for you but it's not funny for everyone else, then I told the guy that Im gonna send him to legal affairs because it's against the school's code of conduct to be forwarding each other pornography especially in this setting so when he saw that I was offended and it was a serious issue then he started apologizing"

.....**Participant 3**

4.5.2.2 Seeking Social Support

The study established that victims find it easy to confide in close relation, either a family member or a friend about a harassment incident and whatever advice or reaction that they get from the confidant is the route of action that they are bound to follow as there is a relationship of trust with that individual. If that person takes the issue lightly, then the respondent most likely will not pursue it further, but if the confidant takes the matter seriously, then it was dealt with as such. The respondents gave the following replies:

"Sharing yes, but reporting it, was not in my mind. The only thing that I did was just to share with my sister, and she took it as a joke and she actually laughed about this"

.....**Participant 4**

"I did share with my friend to say, look at this, this person is doing this, and this and this... and for me, according to my culture, it's a taboo for a person you are not involved with to be sending their naked pictures to you and pornographic videos too when you are not their girl or boyfriend" **Participant 11**

“Yah! The advice that I got was you need to stop the guy immediately because he may spoil your relationship as well because ‘what if your man finds out that such information is shared to you? And I really had to say no, so I had to finally approach the guy after he had sent such material several times to say, ‘please don’t do this again”.....**Participant 1**

“I shared it with my Mum; then she is the one who advised me to block the guy”
.....**Participant 2**

Fisher et al. (2003) concur that most times, when women are sexually harassed they do not report, either to their campus officials or police but tend to seek social support by telling other people and in most instances, friends and close family members that they trust. The individuals that they choose to confide in are most often than not the ones that give advice, which greatly determines a victim’s final course of action as a way to gradually cope with the trauma of the harassment for the victim.

4.6 Summary

The chapter has provided a comprehensive presentation of the data used in the study. It starts by providing a diagrammatic representation of the data. These data were arranged according to themes, along with the three main research questions. It was highlighted and discussed under different themes, using mostly direct quotations of the participants’ to buttress it. Influenced by the need to protect the identity of the participants, no name of the participant was mentioned. Instead, the study assigned numbers to the different direct quotes of the participants. Although full discussions are done on the themes of the study, the researcher deemed it important to link the quotes to the theories that underlie the study and, also to what is already known in the field about the topic of online sexual harassment.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

This study sought to investigate the online sexual experiences of female students from a South African IHL (University of Venda), in order to develop coping strategies to help students deal with online sexual harassment. On that basis, it formulated three main research questions; thus:

- What forms of online sexual harassment do female students experience at the IHL?
- On which social network platforms do such students experience sexual harassment?
- What coping strategies do victims of such abuse use to deal with the abuse when it occurs?

To answer these questions, the study draws mainly from the analytic paradigms of four main theories, namely, power and dominance model, the biological model, the online disinhibition effect model, and the SIDE model. Within these models, it is easy to understand this phenomenon not only from the perspective of the abuser but also from that of the victim.

Below is a summary of the findings in the form of tables where results from the study are compared and contrasted with previous studies.

5.2 Forms of Online Sexual Harassment experienced by female students at the Institutions of Higher Learning

The study identifies three forms in which sexual harassment occurs in the IHL. These include:

1. Sending of explicit random images and videos to the victims
2. Sending and Requesting of nude images from the victims, and
3. Sending of sexually charged jokes to the victims

5.2.1 Sending of Explicit Random Images and Videos to the Victims

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Evidence in the literature consulted reveals that regular female users of the Internet have reported being sent unwanted pornographic materials, being stalked and harassed in general (Schenk, 2008), (Griffiths ;2000) The forms of online sexual harassment these female users experience range from comments about their bodies, offer to watch the harasser masturbating on webcam, offers to have cyber-sex and offers to see the harasser's genitals (Sifferlin, 2018; Schronk & Boyd (2015). Powell (2015) and Griffiths (2000) further termed these unsolicited pictures that are sent to victims by the harassers as 'upsetting unwanted dick pics.'</p>	<p>Of all the different forms of online sexual harassment, the study finds sending and reception of random pornographic images as the most common ways by which victims at the IHL were harassed. Here, the victims, which are mostly girls receive unwanted sexual materials which are not only embarrassing but also gross. Such unsolicited and unwanted sexual materials range from upsetting pictures of sexual organs to unsettling pornographic videos. The participants explained that after they had received such materials, they are really disturbed by</p>	<p>These findings are very similar to the findings from previous literature. Like in the previous literature, the reception of sexual materials from strangers or "friends" on line is one-way girls get sexually harassed on line. This is often very inappropriate and upsetting. The female victims in the current study not only attested to this; they also explained how unpleasant receiving such materials could be. These materials came in the form of videos that are pornographic, random sexually charged materials, and pictures of the harassers' own sexual organs or that of another individual known by the victims. When this happens, it often results in dismay, shock, disgust and most importantly, extreme</p>

	<p>them. While some of the participants explained asking the harassers to stop in such situations, others said that they did not have the courage to ask the harasser to stop, in such cases. Hence the harassment often continued. In such situations, the next action had always been to stop responding to the harassers while others completely ignored the harassers or blocked them from the social network pages.</p>	<p>embarrassment. The fact that the victims do not ask for these materials often makes it even more upsetting. Given that the Internet provides the harassers with the “conducive” virtual platform, they are able to perpetrate such activities, which in a normal situation, they may find difficult to do.</p>
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5.2.2 Sending and Requesting of Nude Images of the Victims

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Literature has revealed that female students have been solicited for sexual images. Mitchel et al., in Barak (2005) conducted a study on teenagers in America and the results indicated that mostly, females had at least been requested for sex online at least once in the previous year.</p> <p>Other studies also indicate that besides youths being sent nude pictures, they may be pressured into sending nude pictures to their partner of themselves (Li, 2005). Also, students who take up time to engage in the viewing of pornography, sexual solicitation and sexual messages texting become victims of online sexual harassment themselves too (Kamaku and Mberia, 2014). The same further argue that these students send partial or complete nude pictures of</p>	<p>Other than sending explicit random images and videos to the victims, the study also finds requesting and solicitation of nude pictures from the victims as another way students are sexually harassed online. The study participants recounted being asked to send their nude pictures as a way of soliciting sex from them. Most harassers were not ashamed to send nude pictures of themselves or outrightly requesting for sexual conduct with them. Basically,</p>	<p>There is a similarity between some previous literature and some of the findings of the study whereby students are solicited for sex and or asked by harassers to send pictures of themselves when they are completely naked or where victims are requested to send pictures of their breasts. However, there is a difference between the study results and some available literature in that; previous literature reveals that students who end up getting harassed online may have been the initiators of the abuse in a way. This happens when a female sends nude pictures of herself to a partner, but unfortunately, somehow those pictures end up being sent to other people on social media without their consent. This was not part of</p>

<p>themselves or sex messages to a girl or boyfriend, This backfired up when these pictures or sex messages get publicly sent to other people on social media without their consent. That is another form of online sexual harassment (Project De Shame, 2018).</p>	<p>harassers send messages soliciting for the students to send nude pictures of themselves or the harassers requesting for sex from the victims. The findings revealed that none of the victims felt pressured to comply or actually complied, but these requests from the harassers were unwanted and they reported to be harassing to them.</p>	<p>the study findings, mainly because the operating definition of sexual harassment online of the study did not entail material that the victims themselves had sent but only unwanted sexual material they received from the harassers.</p>
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5.2.3 Sending of Sexually Explicit Jokes/ Texts

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Literature from scholars such as Okeke (2011) reports that sexual harassment takes many dimensions, ranging from sexual comments, jokes, gestures, being touched or pinched in a sexual way. A Growing Up With media survey indicates that many youths reported having received sexually harassing messages via instant messaging (Ybarra and Mitchell, 2008). Fin (2004) further reveals that some students are harassed via emails. Some of the students who reported having experienced this were of a homosexual orientation.</p>	<p>The current study findings reveal that female students experience online sexual harassment in the form of receiving unsolicited harassing messages of a sexual nature and jokes by harassers on social media that they did not want and had neither asked for. Some female students' respondents who identified themselves as lesbians revealed that they felt victimized further because they felt that the harassers were sending such material to them as a way of spiting their homosexual sexual orientation.</p>	<p>The literature from other studies and the findings of the current one are similar as they reveal that another form that online sexual harassment is through females receiving unwanted sexual jokes or comments that are unwanted and unsolicited. Females of a homosexual nature reported that they felt victimized because of their sexual orientation. However, the results of the present study indicate fewer forms of text-based online sexual harassment or sexual messages than previous literature as the literature reveals that students are sent sexually embarrassing messages via email or cruel comments on their Facebook pages These were not part of the research findings.</p>

In sum, the study identified three forms of online sexual harassment used by harassers against victims in the IHL. These include: sending and reception of explicit images and videos, direct sending and requesting of nude images of self or that of the victims and finally, sending of sexually infused jokes and comments to victims. The data revealed that the harassers sent this material in ways that try to raise sexual interest in the victims. The harassers did this because of the online disinhibition effect which explains that harassers who are mostly men send material on the Internet that they would ordinarily send or say face to face. This is because the Internet provides an environment that in a way makes the harasser feel anonymous and hide behind this anonymity to act out their sexual tendencies. Since this environment does not necessarily provide adequate punitive measures, these criminals continue to harass women. This is supported by Axelrod (2009) who argues that the Internet provides a free and diverse environment for harassers to express themselves by divulging private behavior in a public space like the cyber-space.

The implication of these findings is that online sexual harassment is as much rampant on campus, as it is in other social environments. The use of the Internet has made it even easier to occur (Henry and Powell, 2015). Because of the anonymity of the Internet and the efficiency of its technology, the posting of sexual materials, images and videos have become easier. The three main forms of online sexual harassment that are rampant at the IHL are not unique to such institutions. Given the same opportunity and a conducive environment, harassers can exploit such forms in other social settings to carry out such heinous activities on their innocent victims.

5.3 Social Network Platforms Under Which Students Experience Sexual Harassment

Two main social network platforms were identified, namely, WhatsApp and Facebook.

5.3.1 WhatsApp

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Evidence in the literature reveals that places that are most common for female students to get sexually harassed are in restaurants or clubs. This is probably because of the lifestyles of female students who attend universities and colleges (Hart, 2001; Krebs, Lindquist, Warner, Fisher, & Martin, 2009; Mellgren et al., 2017). This literature is, however, not specific about places or platforms that female students get harassed online but in general.</p> <p>Since the advent of social media and youths being able to access platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Emails, YouTube and others (Kamaku and Mberia, 2014) sexual harassment has been found to take place on these, and the rate of increase in the sexual harassment is alarming.</p>	<p>Findings from the study revealed that the most common form of online sexual harassment among female students was WhatsApp. This is most probably because it is the most common social media platform in South Africa that most students can easily access to chat with other individuals, be it family members, friends, colleagues or</p>	<p>There is a very huge difference between some literature findings and findings from the present study in that whereas previous literature identifies restaurants and clubs as the most common places for harassment of female students, primarily because of their lifestyles, the students are found in these places. Contrary to previous literature, the present study revealed that the most common place of online sexual harassment was WhatsApp. While previous literature focused on the traditional form of sexual harassment, the present study dwelt more on online sexual harassment. Furthermore, the difference in the study results is also that WhatsApp is the most used, unlike previous literature which indicates platforms</p>

	complete strangers.	such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and others as the platforms where female students get sexually harassed.
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5.3.2 Facebook

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Evidence in the literature consulted indicates that studies on online sexual harassment confirm that the most popular social media sites that youths use are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, and this is where sexual harassment has shifted from the traditional face-to-face or verbal communication which takes place within physical space to this virtual form (Lindsay and Krysik, 2012; Kamaku and Mberia, 2014)</p> <p>Other literature reveals that Facebook, Twitter, and My Space were the leading online social media platforms that young people use for social networking (Lenhart et al. ,2010).</p>	<p>The most common social media platforms used by females students which is also where the highest percentage of sexual harassment took place was WhatsApp with Facebook as the second most used media platform. The nature of Facebook gives leeway for even strangers to have access and chat with the female students even strangers have access to communicating with a female. This platform affords individuals who are strangers in the real world but are friends in the virtual world to chat and because of the online disinhibition effect, which is one of the theoretical frameworks grounding this work, that harassers, solicit the victims for sex or send sexual material that</p>	<p>The study findings concur with the available literature in that Facebook is one of the most used social media platforms by youths. Hence this is where sexual harassment also takes place where female students are either solicited for sex, requested for nude pictures or sent pornographic videos and pictures by harassers. These harassers may be strangers to the victims but just 'online' friends which does not necessarily embody a close relationship between them.</p>

<p>A Pew American Internet and Life Project revealed that most youths have access to social media (Lenhart et al. 2010).</p>	<p>is not welcome to the victim because of the ‘invisibility’ that the Internet offers to the perpetrators.</p>	
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Study findings revealed that two main social media platforms are mostly used by harassers in the identified IHL, namely WhatsApp and Facebook. However, the study does not conclude that the forms of sexual harassment rampant in this IHL do not happen in other social media platforms. The conclusion rather is that in this particular IHL, these two social media applications are the main platforms on which female students experienced sexual harassment. My take is that sexual harassment happened in these platforms mainly because they are the most popular platforms used by students within the institution.

The two platforms are readily available and often used by almost, if not all the students of the IHL. The harassers understand this and often use them as avenues to hunt for victims. They go to WhatsApp, for example as this platform is most popular among students of the IHL. Using this platform, they send unwanted sexual materials to victims (female students), something which they would find difficult in face-to-face situations. The study found that although a harasser may have had a victim’s phone contacts before this, they hide behind the guise of WhatsApp which makes it easier for them to express such extreme sexual appetite. Despite their victims being someone they know (close colleagues, senior students, and students), they find it much more convenient and opportune to express their pathetic sexual appetite to female students.

Similarly, Facebook provides a similar opportunity. Here, the female students are often harassed by strangers who did not necessarily have a close relationship with them. In some cases, they are mere “Facebook friends,” which does not necessarily indicate closeness or real friendship in the ‘real world’ (Van Cleemput, 2010). Hence, the anonymity the platform accords the harassers makes it easier for them to use this platform. Not necessarily knowing the victims, the harassers could send explicit nude

and embarrassing materials, with the hope that they may entice the victim and make them want to engage in sexual activity with them.

5.4 Coping Strategies used to Deal with Online Sexual Harassment

The study identified several coping strategies used by female students in the identified IHL. These were divided into two namely; Immediate coping strategies and gradual coping strategies:

5.4.1 Immediate Coping Strategies

There are three main immediate coping strategies used by the victims to deal with online sexual harassment, namely, total disregard of the harassers (Victims ignoring the harassers), active social network blocking of the harassers or confrontation of the harassers.

5.4.1.1 Victim Ignoring Harasser

Previous Studies	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
Evidence from previous literature by Magley (2000), Schenk (2008) indicates that avoidance of some Internet sites or activities as a coping strategy are employed by victims. Victims described having to stop using some sites to avoid “freaks” and “perverts.” This was mostly done on social media platforms that have chat rooms where a	The results from the study revealed that after having experienced sexual harassment, some victims chose to ignore the harasser as a coping strategy. This was a deliberate passive reaction that a victim made as a result of simply being shocked and not knowing how to respond or what to do	The literature contrasts with the findings of the study which established that instead of victims completely avoiding the social media platforms where they had experienced sexual harassment the study indicated that the victims preferred to ignore the harasser as a coping strategy. This is because

<p>harasser can simply make a comment which leaves the receiver of the comment feeling vulnerable, awkward or victimized such as 'you are hot' or a harasser instant messaging a victim and asking them if they wanted to have cyber-sex. Thus victims then engage in avoidance behavior as a coping strategy.</p>	<p>after receiving disturbing material from a harasser. According to the results, victims chose to ignore the harasser even after reception of unwanted sexual material from a harasser as they compared physical harassment with this online harassment.</p>	<p>of shock and not knowing how to react to this form of online sexual harassment or that they comforted themselves that at least this harassment is less severe unlike other forms of traditional harassment that take place face to face.</p>
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5.4.1.2 The Blocking of the Harasser from the Victim's Social Network Page

Previous Research	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Literature indicates that when facing sexual harassment victims either choose to utilize direct, indirect, assertive or non-assertive ways to cope with the harassment. These either include the victim ignoring or avoiding the harasser or approaching them (Ladebo and Shopeju, 2004). Schenk (2008) suggests that</p>	<p>The study results indicate that after reception of some unsolicited material of a sexual content victims simply chose to block the harasser after having been patient and hoping the harasser would stop or after asking them to desist from such behavior but the request not been adhered to.</p>	<p>Literature findings and the results of the study are similar in that some victims after having to bear harassment finally took matters into their hands and made a courageous decision to stop the harassment from continuing by blocking the harasser.</p>

<p>after victims had experienced unwanted sexual attention on social media platforms like AIM and Facebook, were at first tolerant, but as the messages got worse, they eventually blocked the harasser .</p>		
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5.4.1.3 Victim confronting Harasser

Previous Research	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
<p>Literature on students' coping strategies indicates that students who have experienced sexual harassment most often than not do not submit formal complaints or report to the IHL, but rather choose to personally deal with the matter. In such instances the decision chosen can be to have courage and confront the harasser and ask them to stop such</p>	<p>The results of the study found out that after receiving unwanted sexual material from a harasser on social media some female students at first did not take any action, but when this action was repeated by the harasser they had courage and chose to be assertive enough to approach the harasser and asked them to stop. In some instances, the harassers when they were</p>	<p>The previous literature sexual harassment of females concurs with the findings from the current research in that they both show that some students confront harassers after the reception of unsolicited sexual material and asked them to stop. In some cases, the harassers stopped immediately but in other instances did not, thus the victims took further action to block the harasser, thus</p>

<p>behaviour (Ladebo and Shopeju, 2004). Other literature findings indicate that after having experienced sexual harassment in places of work some victims withdrew from the organisation (Pinna, 2010; Gruber, 2003; Magley, Hulin, Fitzgerald & DeNardo 1999; Schneider et al., 1997) either interms of completely withdrawing from the job or avoiding work tasks or being late or neglectful (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991; Pinna, 2010).</p>	<p>approached they stopped the harassive behavior immediately but in some instances the harassers did not stop until the victims took further action by blocking the harasser.</p>	<p>putting an end to the harassment.</p>
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Having understood both the different forms of online sexual harassment and the different platforms within which this phenomenon occurs at the IHL, the study further investigated the various coping strategies that are developed and utilized by female students who experience this form of abuse. These strategies were either implement immediately or gradually. On the immediate strategies, the data reveals that after receiving disturbing material from a harasser that makes them uncomfortable the victims chose a passive attitude towards the harasser whereby they completely ignored them. This mostly occurred when the victims considered such harassment as less severe. In such cases, the victims had always thought that they could handle the situations by either confronting, blocking or totally ignoring the harassers. Even though, the victims in most cases indicated that they were shocked or embarrassed at first, most of them in

such situations felt that they could handle the situation through the above named strategies. They explained that they felt a feeling a regaining their power back from the harassers. In other words, these strategies were very empowering to the victims.

5.4.2 Gradual Coping Strategies

Apart from the immediate coping strategies, the research identified two more strategies, namely, reporting harassment and seeking social support. The researcher refers to these as gradual because such strategies involve more active and systematic structures. It mostly happens in cases where the victims felt powerless in dealing with the problem on their own.

5.4.2.1 Reporting Harassment

Consulted Previous Literature	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
Literature indicates that largely cases of sexual harassment do not get reported (Swedish Council, 2008; National Academies Press, 2018). USMSPB, 1995; Charney & Russell, 1994; Pinna,2010) concur that grievance report filing and reporting remain relatively low). Most reports if made are handled within a particular	According to findings from this study the respondents chose not to report the harassment experiences they had gone through because of various reasons, ranging from lack of trust in the reporting system currently being implemented at the IHL, fearing to report, comparing online sexual harassment with other forms of traditional sexual harassment and seeing	There are similarities and differences between the literature that was consulted and the results of the study. Students in the literature and the respondents of the study both indicated that they did not report their harassment experiences. However, the reasons for not reporting differed slightly between the literature and the study results. This is because

<p>organisation and the cases do not go public (McDonald, 2012; Rubin & Rodgers 1990). Reporting can however be made easier for victims, for instance by directly involving external organisations outside the institution. Literature from other studies showed that one of the reasons why students do not report sexual harassment is lack of knowledge of the IHL's grievance procedures in dealing with sexual harassment. The literature suggests that aggrieved students should report at the student Affairs Office if their claims are strong enough to warrant an investigation (Ladebo and Shopeju, 2004).</p>	<p>online sexual harassment as less aggressive thus not warranting reporting or that if they report the authorities would not take them seriously. Furthermore, the results indicate a difference in the literature because the literature implies that the lack of involvement of external forces deters students from reporting as the matter is only dealt with internally. The present study, however, revealed that empathetic feelings of female students in not wanting a lecturer to lose their job is one of the reasons they chose not to report even after the lecturer had sexually harassed them online.</p>	<p>literature reports that students do not know the grievance procedures for dealing with sexual harassment in the IHL in. The results of the study indicate that the students know where to report but they lack trust in the grievance procedures because of previous experiences on how other forms of harassment or abuse like physical abuse had been dealt with.</p>
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5.4.2.2 Seeking Social Support

Consulted Literature	Previous	Results of the Study	Interpretations derived from the Study
Evidence in the literature consulted indicates that female victims find it better to confide or report to another woman than to formally report (Rubin & Rodgers, 1990; Swedish Research Council, 2018). The seeking of social support from close persons like coworkers or friends seems to be a commonest coping strategy (Livingston, 1982; Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Pinna, 2010)		The results of the study revealed that all the respondents chose not to report. However some chose to confide in close family members or friends about their experiences. These confidants are the ones that mostly gave advice on what the victim should do, and in most cases, the victims took this advice and implemented it.	The available literature of on sexual harassment experiences is similar to findings from the present study in that females are most likely to seek social support friends' family, friends or co-workers because they feel close to the confidants, and get support and comfort from these people.

Gradual coping strategies are often used by victims in extreme cases. In most cases, victims are reluctant to use any of these two approaches. The data reveal that victims only use these when online sexual harassment appears too difficult to handle. Often, the students tend to deal with these situations on their own through other aforementioned strategies.

Another important factor that hinders students from using this strategy is the lack of trust that characterizes the student's relation with the authorities. Many of the victims

explained that they did not report cases of online sexual harassment because of a general lack of trust in the system of reporting. This lack of trust deterred the victims from going and reporting, because of their past experiences with the institution failing to properly handle other forms of abuse cases or fear of victimization that no one would believe them if they reported lecturers prevented reporting (Jewkes, 2002). This is because since lecturers are in positions of power, the victims fear that reporting them will strain relations which will later have negative repercussions for the students. Another reason for not reporting harassment as the study findings revealed is because of sympathy whereby the victim feared that the harasser might lose his job if she reports the harassment. In this study, this mostly applied to the non-reporting of sexual harassment by lecturers. Torronen and Roumeliotis (2013) concur with the finding that females usually have empathy towards perpetrators resulting in them failing to report online sexual harassment.

Essentially, the victims of sexual harassment find it easy to seek social support from their families or close friends because of trust. Such confidants are mostly the ones who help advise victims of the final course of action to take in ultimately dealing with the sexual harassment experience.

Even though the current study findings cannot be generalized, they can, however, be inferred to other IHLs. The logical reasoning is that if female students are experiencing online sexual harassment chances are that other female students may be experiencing the same phenomenon given that the environment in which these IHL operate are the same.

5.5 Summary

This study investigated the online sexual harassment experiences of female students at a South African IHL. It sought to identify the different forms in which online sexual harassment occurs, the different platforms upon which it occurs and the coping strategies employed by the female students to deal with it in the IHL. The study found that online sexual harassment is now a major problem for female students since the advent of social media and online communication. The forms of sexual harassment that female students experienced at the institution of higher learning came mostly through

the reception of unsolicited pornographic materials, unwanted pictures of the male private anatomy, sexual solicitation and receiving unwanted jokes of a sexual nature. These forms of online sexual harassment occurred mostly on the two most popular social network platforms, namely WhatsApp and Facebook. Through their virtual and anonymous character, these platforms provide perpetrators with the conducive platform to act out their embarrassing sexual appetites. However, given that this phenomenon negatively affects students, they have always found certain immediate and gradual coping strategies that have assisted them in dealing with the situation.

5.6 Limitations of the Study

There were three main limitations of the study. First, the inability to deal with the different dynamics of online sexual harassment. Given the broad nature of the subject of sexual harassment, it was difficult to incorporate the different aspects of this phenomenon into the current study. However, to limit the scope of the study, the study had from its definition of online sexual harassment automatically excluded other forms of sexual harassment which were not part of the current study. Such aspects are simply not within the scope of this study.

Secondly, the inability to access more varied data owing to the sensitivity of the topic meant that most female students were not comfortable to express their views on the issue. For instance, respondents who had been sexually harassed by their lecturers, when asked how they reacted they claimed that they did not do anything and yet their body language conveyed contrary messages that they were uncomfortable. The other limitation was that the critical sampling strategy used in the study implied that the researcher only targeted students who were known to have been victim to other forms of sexual harassment by either fellow students or their lecturers, but when they were approached and requested to participate in the study some denied indicating that they had never gone through online sexual harassment. This was a clear indication of fear to participate in the study even after they were given assurance on the confidentiality of their participation and the information they would give.

Thirdly, the non-availability of fresh sources, particularly recent publications on online sexual harassment of female students, prompted for the study to utilize old sources on sexual harassment of female students in general. Also, the qualitative nature of this study meant that a small sample of students from one Institution of higher learning was used. This means that generalization of the results is not possible as the sample is not meant for representation. Future studies could consider widening the scope of the study and could focus on the aspects discussed below.

5.7 Suggestions for Future Research

- ❖ The study dwelt more on emotional and physically actionable coping strategies; it may be of interest for future research to explore specific online based sexual harassment coping strategies that students may undertake since the harassment would have occurred on the Internet, Internet-based coping strategies may then be explored for future research.
- ❖ An in-depth study to investigate other forms of online sexual harassment is required. Such a study could include aspects like revenge pornography and others among students at the IHL and how it impacts students emotional, psychological and academic life may be explored for future research.
- ❖ Another aspect that may be considered for future study is a thorough assessment of the current policy framework and the current implementing authorities at the Department of Human Resources that deal with reported cases of sexual harassment. The specific help procedures and protocol currently utilized to assist students who report sexual harassment since the existing one is not specific may be subjected to future research.

5.8 Recommendations

Based on the findings, there are a number of recommendations that are relevant for considerations in the South African IHL.

- ❖ IHL should have specific policies that address online student harassment in detail, including where and how victims of abuse could report and seek assistance.
- ❖ IHL should have legislations and possibilities to adopt specific policies to protect students from online sexual harassment on campus.
- ❖ IHL should have specific framework programs designed to assist students with online sexual harassment
- ❖ IHL should have a clear definition of what constitutes online sexual harassment included in the definitions of sexual harassment and educate both students and members of staff so that reporting of this offense should be taken seriously.
- ❖ IHL should have more campaigns that are constantly that advocate for the eradication and fight against sexual harassment, and these should be accessible to students with peer friendly staff too.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

1. In your case, what type of unwanted sexual material were you sent?

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2. Explain the details of the content you received?

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3. To which online platform were these material sent?

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7. In your case, since you did not report this incident what coping strategies did you use to deal with this traumatic experience?

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH



Appendix 2: Informed Consent

School of Human and Social Sciences

Department of African Studies-Sociology

Date: 2 August 2018

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Sehlule Thambo, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: _____,
- I have also received, read and understood the above-written information (*Participant Letter of Information*) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials, and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant	Date	Time	Signature
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I,	
.....			

Sehlule Thambo herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully

Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Sehlule Thambo

Date.....

Signature.....

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

.....

Signature.....

Date

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)

.....

Signature.....

Date.....



Appendix 3: Letter of Information

School of Human and Social Sciences

Department of African Studies-Sociology

Date: 2 August 2018

Dear participant

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Assessing the online sexual harassment experiences of Female Students at a South African Institution of Higher Learning.

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: Sehlule Thambo, MA

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : Dr R Tshifhumulo

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

Thank you very much for your time. My name is Sehlule Thambo. I am a Master of Sociology student (17015784) at the University of Venda, South Africa and I am conducting this research for academic purposes. This document serves to provide you with all the relevant information that you might need in order for you to make an informed decision on whether you would want to participate in the study or not. The aim of this research is to assess the online sexual harassment experiences of Female Students at a South African Institution of Higher Learning.

Outline of the Procedures:

The researcher will make use of a Semi-structured Interview guide for data collection. The questionnaires shall comprise of open-ended questions as this will give you the flexibility to give open-ended responses and therefore provide in-depth and exhaustive experiences of the participants on their experiences of sexual harassment. The researcher shall make use of face-to-face questionnaire administration, where an interviewer presents the items orally to the interviewees. The aim of this research is to assess the online sexual harassment experiences of Female Students at a South African Institution of Higher Learning. As a result of your relevant experiences as a female student in an institution of higher learning, you have been purposively selected to provide an in-depth experience of this phenomenon being studied.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:

There are no evident underlying risks to you which may be occasioned by your direct participation in the study. Regardless, the researcher undertakes to not put you in situations where you might be at risk of harm, physical or psychological.

Benefits: The subjects shall benefit from this research in the sense that their shared experiences will contribute to literature and evidence that the institution lacks a specific policy to address sexual harassment issues specifically for students hence it will contribute to policy formulation by the institution.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: While your full participation is highly valuable and appreciated, please note that you need not provide any information that you do not want to and you should feel free to withdraw your participation at any point in the interview without any adverse consequences. Also, note that you will not be required to furnish reasons for your withdrawal.

Remuneration: The research is being undertaken for academic purposes, for the fulfillment of a Master's degree and therefore there will be no compensation and/or incentive for your participation in this research. Your participation in this study is however greatly appreciated as it will help offer a better understanding of the experiences of social media sexual harassment of female students at an institution of higher learning.

Costs of the Study: Participants will not be required at any stage to cover any costs towards study.

Confidentiality : All data and confidential communications between us will be protected. To that end, you will be allocated either a coded name or a number to ensure your anonymity. If ever there is a need to reveal identifying information, such information will not be made available to anyone not directly involved in the study.

Research-related Injury: In the unlikely event that the participant suffers a research-related injury or adverse reaction there be compensation for such injury.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Should you have any questions or problems, you can contact me by phone on 060 663 9300, or e-mail sehlisehlu@gmail.com. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. R Tshifhumulo by phone 078 458 95987 or by email at rendani.tshifhumulo2@univen.ac.za or the University Research Ethics Committee Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges.Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

