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# WORKPLACE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT AS A PANACEA FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN RIVERS STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

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## **Abstract**

*The study empirically examined workplace diversity Management as a panacea to sexual harassment in Rivers State Government Agencies .Three hypotheses were put forth in ascertaining the empirical relationship between the two variables. The research adopted a cross sectional survey design which adopted the use of the questionnaire for data collection. The total population consist of 4291 Workers of nine government agencies in Port Harcourt. The Taro Yamen sample size derivation formula was adopted to obtain the sample size 279 for the study. Each respondent in the sample was selected using the simple random sample technique. The instrument for the predictor and criterion variable were scaled on a 5 point Likert scale. The study adopted the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient with the aid of the statistical package for social sciences in the assessment of the relationship between workplace diversity management and sexual harassment. The test of hypotheses adopted a 95percent confidence interval implying a 0.05percent level of significance. The findings of the study indicate there is no significant relationship between workplace diversity management and sexual harassment.. Based on the findings of the study, we therefore make the following vital recommendations: Organizations should develop stringent policies and programs targeted at discouraging sexual harassment, offenders should be decisively punished , Organizations should at interval engage its staff on training and re-training employees on organizational cultures, values, norms and belief systems.*

**Keywords:** Workplace diversity, Sexual harassment, physical harassment, verbal harassment, non verbal harassment.

## **Introduction**

Sexual harassment in the workplace has existed in the workplace for decades. It was considered a ‘workplace hazard’ until the 1960’s when it was first recognized as an issue that needed to be addressed decisively by organizations and state. This gave victims of sexual harassment the means to fight back with the backing of the law, which is something many had struggled for centuries. Studies has revealed that both men and women fall victim to sexual harassment, although the ratio of women who fall victim are much greater.

According to Wasilwa (2014), sexual harassment can be best described as unsolicited acts (which include physical, verbal and non - verbal acts) of sexual nature affecting women and men's dignity at work.

There are differences in the psychological and sex-based perspectives in defining sexual harassment. In the psychological perspective, sexual harassment is unwanted sexual behaviour at the workplace that is viewed as offensive or threatening one's well-being. The sex-based perspective includes provocation and exclusion that can demean or humiliates another (O’Leary-Kelly et al., 2013). Sexual harassment in the workplace may cause victims short-term and long-term negative effects. It leads to depression and post-traumatic stresses. Individuals may feel humiliated, lose self-esteem, and more. It may also lead to workplace problems like higher turnover, absenteeism, lower job-satisfaction and decreased work-performance (Barker, 2017).

This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health (Collins, 2016) of victims.. There are several negative effects of sexual harassment: illnesses, lack of commitment, absences at work, low quality performance, and employee turnover (William, 2012). Both male and female employees who have experienced sexual harassment feel negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and depression, and a decrease in their self-esteem, job satisfaction and safety.

On the other hand Workforce diversity Management is an important collective research phenomenon of different aspects of diversity such as demographic diversity, cultural diversity, informational diversity, organizational diversity and cognitive diversity. Workforce diversity management refers to the effective coordination of the composition of work units in terms of cultural or demographic characteristics that are salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members (DiTomaso et al., 2017). Changing demographic dynamics in the workforce has led many organizations to re-think and re-design their organizational cultures, values, norms and belief systems (Sung and Choi, 2019). The research in diversity is gaining considerable attention because of socio-cultural changes, economic transformation, globalization and migration of people in search of better opportunities (Roberson,

2019). Moreover, the merger and acquisition of companies for long-term sustainability in international markets has resulted the necessary need to build the global workforce. Why is diversity essential in organizations? It is widely believed that diversity broadens the knowledge, perspectives, and skills that results in creativity, innovation and decision making power (McLeod and Lobel, 1992).

Diversity is essential in creativity, innovation and growth in organizations because it may be very difficult to obtain innovative ideas from homogeneous teams who have the same thought and similar way of working attitude. To achieve the growth and innovations, organizations are required to develop such policies and programs that can be helpful in alliances, mergers and acquisitions of companies without any boundary conditions. Further, these organizations need a diverse workforce to efficiently run the business and that can be targeted by hiring, training and retaining the employees from diverse backgrounds regardless of race, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, functional, educational and disability. Diversity is a very broad topic comprising many dimensions of diversity such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational diversity, functional, tenure, sexual orientation and physical disability. In fact, diversity has always been synonymous with gender or racial/ ethnic diversity (Knight et al., 1999). Researchers have investigated the effects of different types of diversity variables on firm performance (Kirkman et al., 2004; Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). However, there are several dimensions of diversity, which have been encountered in organizations, but their implementation in organizations is a major challenge. It is very difficult to identify which diversity is more beneficial because neither all forms of diversity are applicable in each organization nor every dimension of diversity has a positive impact.

Recent studies within the Nigeria context has sought to address the issues of sexual harassment using other antecedents, such studies as include: Supervisors' harassment and workplace alienation (Higwe 2019), Sexual harassment and work alienation (Hart 2019), effects of work place incivility on mental and physical health (Lim et al., 2008). However, to the best of my knowledge no exact study on Workplace diversity management as a panacea to sexual harassment in Rivers state Government Agencies has been carried out previously hence a gap. Thus, to fill in the gap this study is carried out. The study is a base line study because its simply the first to have investigated the menace of sexual harassment in the light of workplace diversity management. Hence, the we put forth the following null hypotheses which will be analyzed in the later part of this work :

### **Statement of the problem**

Those in public organization workforce are often met with numerous difficulties that have detrimental impact on both their working and social lives, one of such menace is sexual harassment. In deed sexual harassment is a scourge and prevailing endemic within most public organizations. Rivers State Government Ministries in recent time has been characterized of low productivity been identified

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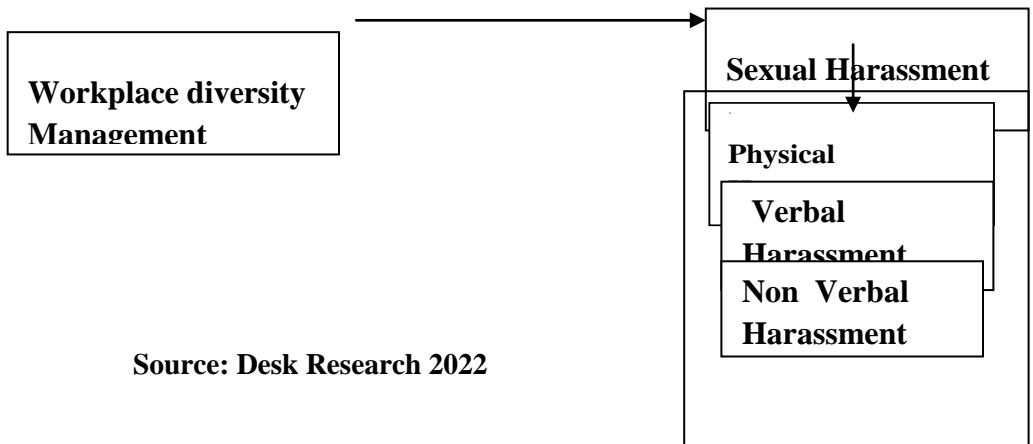
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with a distinct kind of psychological and social ill; in the form of harassment which is gradually permeating all government parastatal within the state . Sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the many difficulties that employees face. It negatively affects people of both genders, though prominently females. It causes much distress and discomfort for those who fall victim to it both physically and mentally.

There are several negative effects of sexual harassment: illnesses, lack of commitment, absences at work, low quality performance, and employee turnover (William, 2012). Both male and female employees who have experienced sexual harassment feel negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and depression, and a decrease in their self-esteem, job satisfaction and safety. According to Kishore (2011) women are subjected more to sexual harassment at workplace due to their gender variance.

Employees suffering from sexual harassment are likely unable to remain truly dedicated to their work, have sudden mood fluctuations, and may not be as productive as they normally would. Sexual harassment can result, under extreme circumstances, in damaging affected employees’ mental health.

**Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Workplace diversity Management as a panacea to sexual harassment.**



Source: Desk Research 2022

**Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

The study is base lined on the assumptions of institutional theory. An institution is a social structure that is made up of a collection of individuals or organizations within which collectives exercise action or orientations in a constrained environment that will continuously be altered over time(Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983;Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Scott, 2001). The ‘institutional perspective’ has been used by various researchers to explain why certain organizational structures and ideals endure, and to study the internal and external influences on

organizational patterns. According to Stephenson (2019), ‘organizations acquire institutional properties by drawing from abstract ideals in a society, such as competition, progress and efficiency. Institutional theory posits that structural and behavioral changes in organizations are determined less by competition and the desire for efficiency, and more by the need for organizational legitimacy (Liang et al., 2007).

### **Concept of Workplace Diversity Management**

Workforce diversity is an important collective research phenomenon of different aspects of diversity such as demographic diversity, cultural diversity, informational diversity, organizational diversity and cognitive diversity. Workforce diversity refers to the composition of work units in terms of cultural or demographic characteristics that are salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members (DiTomaso et al 2017). Changing demographic dynamics in the workforce has led many organizations to re-think and re-design their organizational cultures, values, norms and belief systems (Sung and Choi 2019). The research in diversity is gaining considerable attention because of socio-cultural changes, economic transformation, globalization and migration of people in search of better opportunities (Roberson 2019).

Diversity refers to differences between individual characteristics and attributes that lead to a perception among others that next person is different from self (Williams and O’Reilly, 1998). Basically, diversity varies with different dimensions in terms of age, gender, race/ ethnicity, nationality, religion, tenure, educational background, functional background, task skills, knowledge, attitude and finally ranging from local preferences to boundary-crossing preferences. However, diversity research has primarily emphasized on age, gender, race/ ethnicity, tenure, functional background and educational background (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Pelled, 1996; Williams and O’Reilly, 1998).

Jehn et al. (1999) explored three specific types of workgroup diversity: Social category diversity; Informational diversity; and Value diversity. Social category diversity refers to differences in readily detectable attributes such as age, gender and race/ethnicity, whereas informational diversity refers to differences in knowledge and perspectives related to job-oriented attributes such as tenure, functional and educational background (Jehn et al., 1999; Tsui et al., 1992). Value diversity occurs when group members differ in terms of values, beliefs and thought processes about their real task and goal (Jehn et al., 1999).

### **Concept of Sexual Harassment**

According to Wasilwa (2012), sexual harassment is defined as unsolicited acts (which include physical, verbal and non-verbal acts) of sexual nature affecting women and men’s dignity at work. This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health (Collins, 2010). And the mental health of the employee (Wasilwa, 2012). There are several negative effects of sexual harassment: illnesses, lack of commitment,

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absences, low quality performance, and resignation (William, 2012). Both male and female employees who have experienced sexual harassment feel negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and depression, and a decrease in their self-esteem, job satisfaction and safety. A gap exists in the literature regarding how an employee's perception of workplace sexual harassment climate has an impact on an employee's working performances and health status. In addition, one limitation of extant research on sexual harassment in the workplace is that no research has been conducted to date considering the moderating nature of the sex of the employee on sexual harassment in the workplace

**Physical Harassment**

According to Wasilwa (2014), physical harassment can be best described as unsolicited physical assault, touch of sexual nature affecting women and men's dignity at work. This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health (Collins, 2010).It is one of the menace ravaging most organizations today.

Both male and female employees who have experienced abuse feel negative emotions such as embarrassment, shame, and depression, and a decrease in their self-esteem, job satisfaction and safety. There are several negative effects of physical abuse: illnesses, lack of commitment, absences, low quality performance, and resignation (William, 2012). It may also lead to workplace problems like higher turnover, absenteeism, lower job-satisfaction and decreased work-performance (Barker, 2017). According to Kishore (2011) women are more subjected to sexual harassment than their male counterpart.

**Verbal Harassment**

This refers to the unwelcome and uncalled for remarks or comment with sexual connotations or insinuations which invariably amount to sexual harassment. Complimenting any person about the age, body, dress, work etc. Unwelcomed and repeated request for sexual favors amounts describe sexual harassment(Green et al 2001). Verbal harassment doesn't leave physical bruises, but it can cause deep and lasting mental scars.

There's a famous saying that goes: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never harm me." But ultimately, it's often words that can do the worst damage. Other people's words have an incredible power to affect how we see and feel about ourselves.

Indeed, the verbal abusers' goal -- whether conscious or not -- is to obtain exclusive control over the victim. When thwarted, verbal abusers may repeatedly remind victims of their shortcomings, make uncalled-for pronouncements as to what they are (or are not) achieving in life, then act out with angry blow-ups or punish with stony silences.

It's not surprising, then, that victims of verbal harassment often end up depressed, or even questioning their sanity, says Evans, who adds that the literature points to a high correlation between verbal abuse and feelings of powerlessness and

depression. Over time, the unremitting assault on individuals' autonomy and sense of identity can erode their confidence and self-esteem. When dealing with a verbal abuser, victims may be reminded over and over again that what they believe to be true is not correct.

### **Non Verbal harassment**

Our body language and actions can lead to harassment. Some common examples of non-verbal harassment include staring or gawking, sending unsolicited pictures, and unwanted physical touch. Non verbal abuse is a wide range of belittling gestures or body language used to disrespect another such as rolling eyes, smirking, whispering, ignoring, violating personal space or hands on hips. These are often insidious and passive or passive-aggressive power displays which may be hard to identify. Non verbal harassment also include display of derogatory posters, cartoons, drawings, sexual explicit picture, screen savers, indecent exposures all fall within the ambit of non verbal sexual harassment. Similarly, Lascivious looks, and sexually aggressive gesture to derive sexual pleasures by humiliating others also falls within what constitute non verbal form of sexual harassment (Green et al, 2010)

H01: There is no significant relationship between workplace diversity management and physical harassment .

H02: There is no significant relationship between workplace diversity management and verbal harassment

H03: There is no significant relationship between workplace diversity management and non verbal harassment

### **Methodology**

The cross sectional design was adopted for this study. The population of this study consist of all middle and lower staff of nine Rivers state owned Agencies. The total population consist of 4291 Workers. The Taro Yamen sample size derivation formula was adopted to obtain the sample size for the study. Each respondent in the sample was selected using the simple random sample technique. The instrument for the predictor and criterion variable were scaled on a 5 point Likert scale. The study adopted the Spearman rank order correlation coefficient in the assessment of the relationship between workplace diversity management and sexual harassment. The test of hypotheses adopted a 95percent confidence interval implying a 0.05percent level of significance, 3 hypotheses were tested to determine the extend of relationship the predictor and the criterion variable.

**Data Analysis and interpretation**

**Correlation Matrix for workplace diversity Management and Sexual harassment**

**Correlations matrix for workplace diversity and Sexual harassment**

			Workplace Diversity	Physical Harassment	Verbal Harassment	Non verbal Harassment
Spearman's rho	Workplace Diversity	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.180	.137	.203
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.260	.393	.202
		N	279	279	279	279
	Physical Harassment	Correlation Coefficient	-.180	1.000	-.015	-.185
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.260	.	.927	.246
		N	279	279	279	279
	Verbal Harassment	Correlation Coefficient	.137	-.015	1.000	-.025
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.393	.927	.	.878
		N	279	279	279	279
	Non Verbal Harassment	Correlation Coefficient	.203	-.185	-.025	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.202	.246	.878	.
		N	279	279	279	279

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in table above indicate that there is no significant relationship workplace diversity and physical abuse, there is no relationship between workplace diversity and Verbal harassment, there is no significant relationship between workplace diversity and harassment. workplace diversity is not significantly correlated to physical harassment ( $r = 0.180, p = 0.260 > 0.01$ ). Also, workplace diversity management not significantly related to Verbal harassment ( $r = .137, p = 0.393 > 0.05$ ). Workplace diversity is not significantly related to Non Verbal harassment ( $r = .203, p = 0.202 > 0.05$ ). There is no significant relationship between workplace diversity and all the measures of Sexual harassment at the level of 0.05 significance. Going by this result, hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were rejected .

**Discussion of findings**

**Workplace diversity management and sexual harassment**

The findings in this study indicate workplace diversity management as not a predictor of sexual harassment be it physical, verbal and non verbal harassment. This implies that to achieve a sexual harassment free workplace, the organization must effectively manage the individual differences within its work settings through regular training and sensitization on organizational norms. Managing diverse employees in a multicultural environment proves challenging to managers; yet, increasing diversity in the workplace is very beneficial for an organization. Diverse employees will provide a wider array of talents and will relate better to varied customers. Because managers have



more influence than rank-and-file employees, it is imperative that managers commit to diversity of the workforce, harnessing their individual differences into organizational differences as this will reduce the occurrences of sexual harassment within the workplace.

. To achieve a sexual harassment free work place , Organizations need to ensure that they effectively communicate with employees on organizational stance in respect to the menace. Policies on what constitutes sexual harassment and its penalty should be duly communicated to employees voiding any form of assumptions about employees from different backgrounds. A unifying standard and rules should be set for all groups of employees regardless of background. Ensure that all employment actions, including discipline, follow this standardized criteria to make sure each employee is treated the same. Effective diversity management in today's modern multigenerational, culturally diverse workforce adds to the success of an organization and helps to promote a much more cordial, sexual harassment-free culture.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study does affirm an inverse relationship between diversity management and workplace sexual harassment. This implies that the antecedent of diversity management does discourage sexual harassment in work place. Hence, workplace diversity management is not a predictor of sexual harassment

### **Recommendations**

Drawing from the above conclusion, we therefore make the following recommendations.

1. Organizations should develop stringent policies and programs targeted at discouraging sexual harassment, offenders should be decisively punished.
2. Organizations should at interval engage its staff on training and re-training on organizational cultures, values, norms and belief systems so as to give everyone a sense of sanity and appreciate the beauty of diversity.
3. Its been observed from the empirical evidence in this study, that there are more men as offenders of sexual harassment this is because they majorly occupy top management position hence, we advocate more women should be allowed into top management position so as to avert the trend.

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