

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND EMPLOYEE ALIENATION IN RIVERS STATE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES

Dr. Dumo Nkesi Opara

**Department Of Employment Relations and Human Resource Management
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers
State, Nigeria**

Email: dumopara@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between sexual harassment and employee alienation in Rivers State Government Ministries. The study adapted Sexual rudeness while valuelessness, normlessness and self-estrangement are the measures of employee alienation (criterion variable). The study was premised on the assumptions of baseline theories: Karl marx's theory of alienation). The study has a population size of 2856 with sample size of 351 staff drawn from 26 operational Government Ministries in Rivers State. The study adopted quantitative data type with the questionnaire as the only instrument for data collection. The collated data were analysed under four categories which are: demographic, univariate, bivariate and multi-variate analysis. Mean and Standard Deviation were used for univariate analysis of the study. Spearman Rank Order Correlation and Partial Correlation were used for the bivariate analysis and multivariate analysis of the study, respectively. The result of the study revealed that sexual harassment as a strong predictor of employee alienation. Hence, the study recommend among others Government should develop and enforce comprehensive sexual harassment policies that outline what constitutes harassment, reporting procedures, and consequences for violators; Ministries should create and implement a zero-tolerance approach to rudeness, bullying, or harassment; Ministries should create opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration to build trust and reduce isolation.

Keywords: *Sexual Harassment, Workplace incivility, valuelessness, Normlessness, Self-estrangement*

INTRODUCTION

Those in the workforce are often met with numerous difficulties that have detrimental impact on both their working and social lives. One that stands out is the rising issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. It causes much distress and discomfort for those who fall victim to it both physically and mentally (Mental Health America, 2019). 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 by 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. Many decades passed since the passing of these laws, though still today we can see several high-profile sexual harassment cases on the front pages. Yet, much more go unknown as victims are still afraid to come out (Siegel, 2013).

Employees get alienated in a toxic and unsafe organizational setting characterized of uncivil behavioural from leaders, peers and subordinate. The more uncivilized the organization, the more alienated the employees. Employees in most public organizations in Rivers State are completely detached from their organization as a result of the toxicity, harassment and intimidation within their workplace (Moses, 2023) and this constitute a major challenge to employee productivity and the overall productivity of the organization. Employees in most public organization in Rivers state see the workplace as toxic and oppressive as such they most time desire working in isolation and this negatively affects both the employee and the organization (Tekin, 2023). In deed alienation is a scourge and prevailing endemic within most public organizations. This menace does manifest in various form such as withdrawal from work and work team, Feeling of valuelessness at work, a state of purposelessness at work, normless of organizational rules, exhibition of me, I and myself ideology. With all the menace, for sure employee performance at work will be negatively affected if not tamed. The increasing phenomenon of employee alienation as a result of emotional abuse, emotional exhaustion and unhealthy practices has shown that keeping employees effectively and efficiently working is a very demanding human resources problem (Harper, 2012).

No doubt alienation in workplace is increasing (Buhler, 2013; Pearson & Porath, 2015) and its effects are costing organizations unnecessary money and time (Gardner & Johnson, 2021). Work alienation has been a subject of serious attention by academia and management Practitioners in recent time more than ever, this is owing to the increasing rate of alienation among workers as well as its negative multiplier influence on organizational performance and survival. Poor attitude such alienation according to Higwe and Oparanma (2019) is an outcome which results from incivility of leadership. No doubt alienation connote negative workplace experience that demands absolute stoppage. Adebule (2004) also posited that poor attitude of workers could be a function of workplace experiences especially in Government Ministries.

Within the Nigeria context the challenge of alienation is highly evident in employees working mostly as separate individuals rather than part of the organization. Indeed, employee alienation has become the one biggest problem confronting organizations in recent time as it not only affect employee productivity but the environment of an organization also gets affected. One dilemma is that when employees get alienated, it can involve the whole organization as a spiral. Employees suffering from work alienation are likely unable to remain truly dedicated to their work, have sudden mood fluctuations, and may not be as productive as they normally would. Work alienation can result, under extreme circumstances, in damaging affected employees' mental health.

Scholars in recent times are trying to either build or identify the perfect and most suitable work environment for the employees who may have the ability to increase their performance and save them the burden of being exposed to many feelings that might not be good for their good performance. Among these feelings are the feelings of unappreciation, alienation, and disappointment. In this study; we try to investigate the influence of the work alienation on the performance of the employees within the industrial sector in Jordan. The researcher borrowed the problem of the current study from Tummer and Dulk (2011) who argued that there is a relationship between the work alienation and

the performance of the employee from one side, and the commitment of the organization to elevate that alienation from the other side.

Alienated employees are notable of been unproductive due to their disengagement from others. Work alienation, from meaninglessness, Normlessness and self-estrangement, can have a host of negative effects on everything from employees' productivity and decision-making acumen to their mental and physical health. It can also spill over into bad customer relations. Employee alienation has become the one biggest problem confronting organizations in recent time as it not only affect employee productivity but the environment of an organization also gets affected. Employee alienation may create a negative emotional state and consequently decreases the likelihood that work-to-family enrichment. Organizations depend on the discretionary contributions of their members to maintain efficiency and coordination; one has only to witness the disruption that occurs when employees limit their contributions exclusively to what is specified in their job descriptions to realize that this is the case". Hence, it seem that it is paramount for organizations that employees 'go the extra mile'. However, Kinicki et al. (2022, see also Gould-Williams, 2023) argue that there appears to be a growing trend among workers to under-perform, or to exert as little effort as possible

No doubt, the human costs borne by employees as a result of alienation in workplace are quite severe and alarming. In deed alienation constitute huge cost to organization, due to project delays and cognitive distraction from work (Pearson & Porath, 2019). In a related work by Cummings and Manring (1977) they observed powerlessness and meaninglessness as negatively related to self-related effort and performance. Arnold and others (2017) noted a negative relationship between meaninglessness and job satisfaction and work effort. Hackman and Oldham (1976), using their Job Characteristic Model, have argued that experienced meaningfulness of work is positively related to intrinsic work motivation, which is in turn positively related to work effort and organizational commitment.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were used in this work.

- HO₁: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and valuelessness in Rivers State Government Ministries.
- HO₂: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and normlessness in Rivers State Government Ministries.
- HO₃: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and self-estrangement in Rivers State Government Ministries.

Concept of Workplace Incivility

Workplace incivility refers to a low-intensity deviant behaviour that violates norms for mutual respect with ambiguous intent to harm the target, as a reflection of the social exchange relationships that develop among organization members (Andersson & Pearson, 2019). SET suggests that interpersonal interactions are guided by an underlying norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 2020). Uncivilized behaviour is interactive since uncivil behaviours from the instigator(s) would cause attitudinal or behavioural changes in the target(s) (Cortina et al., 2013). Those targets may experience boredom, loneliness, and frustration

at work (Gallus et al., 2014), which could trace back to the reduction of working motivation and enthusiasm and, in the worst case, resulting in a regression within the workforce (Woo & Kim, 2020)

Important definitional elements of workplace incivility that help to differentiate it from other negative interpersonal workplace behavioural constructs are its low intensity (aggression, violence, and bullying are more severe) and its ambiguous (rather than overt or clearly diagnosable) intent to harm. Examples of uncivil behaviour include talking down to others, making demeaning remarks, and not listening to somebody (Porath & Pearson, 2019). According to Wachs (2019) Incivility creates disturbance in the organizational environment and causes aggression among the employees. Today incivility is prevalent in organizations more than ever before. The more common type of uncivil behaviours may involve bullying, harassment ignoring a co-worker, being derogatory and indifferent to workers' opinions. Incivility is at the low end of the workplace mistreatment continuum but when it will be overlooked it may result in deteriorating the conditions in the organization (Felblinger, 2018).

Sexual Harassment

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Studies also reveal that both men and women fall victim to sexual harassment, although the ratio of women who fall victim are much greater (UN Women, 2022). Additional statistics showed despite the laws that this problem has been increasing as more women join the workforce. The motives behind such actions are many, and the consequences faced by the victims (UN Women, 2022). Sexual harassment has only recently been characterised and identified (Glomb, 2017). According to Wasilwa (2012), 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. This problem affects both the physical performance and mental health (Collins, 2020). And the mental health of the employee (Wasilwa, 2022). There are several negative effects of sexual harassment: illnesses, lack of commitment, absences, low quality performance, and resignation (William, 2022). 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.

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., 2019). 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). Sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the many difficulties that employees face. It negatively affects people of both genders, though prominently females. This study will work towards extending on existing studies by taking into consideration both the male and female employees and delve into understanding the affects sexual harassment in the workplace has on their mental health and working performance of those affected.

Workplace harassment is the belittling or threatening behaviour directed at an individual worker or a group of workers. Matters of workplace harassment recently gained interest among practitioners and researchers as it is becoming one of the most sensitive areas of effective workplace management. Sexual harassment in workplace impacts both physical and mental health of employees, and preventive measures against it. According to Kishore (2011) women are subject to sexual harassment at workplace due to their gender variance. The case of sexual harassment of women is on rise because of number factors such as poor status of women in the society, more number of working women, lack of knowledge. Kumar (2012) posited that in gender based harassment, women are the victim of harassment i.e. sexual harassment at workplaces. Many a times such kind of harassment remains unreported because of the fear of being imputed by a social circle and above all ignorance of legal remedies play a pivotal role in worsening this situation. In case of sexual harassment, the harasser is in a position of power or authority. It is necessary in present day situation to protect women and provide speedy redressal. In the context, verbal harassment, nonverbal harassment and physical harassment are discussed as the indicators of sexual harassment.

Verbal Harassment: Verbal harassment doesn't leave physical bruises, but it can cause deep and lasting mental scars. When it comes to domestic abuse, we think of the external signs: black eyes, broken bones, bruises or bleeding. But research demonstrates that the long-term effects of verbal and emotional abuse can be just as devastating, if not more so, than the long-term effects of physical violence 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. While positive words of encouragement might vary in nature but they're equally devastating. The abusers have a very low self-esteem and want to bring you down to the state in which they're in, 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 abuse 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 unrelenting 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. Attempts to explain that the attacks hurt or to counter insults are often met with those time-worn disclaimers, the ones every good verbal manipulator has to excess in his or her ready arsenal: "You're over-reacting. "You're too sensitive."

Nonverbal 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. Nonverbal 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. Nonverbal harassment also include display of derogatory posters, cartoons, drawings, sexual explicit picture, screen savers, indecent exposures all fall within the ambit of nonverbal sexual harassment. Similarly, Lascivious looks, and sexually aggressive gesture to derive sexual pleasures by humiliating others also falls within what constitute nonverbal form of sexual harassment (Green et al, 2010)

Physical Harassment: Physical Abuse 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 by 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.

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Employee Alienation

Alienation is related to the despair and loneliness of the individual as a result of his social and cultural distance from his close environment. In general, the concept of alienation can be defined as the decrease in the harmony of the individual with his social, cultural and natural environment and especially the decrease in his control over his immediate environment, causing loneliness and hopelessness (Kongar, 1979). Literally, alienation refers to the alienation of individuals from themselves and a particular environment or a process. Alienation can be defined as a feeling of alienation from other people, from

society and its values, and from the self, particularly those parts of the self that attach itself to others and to society in general. According to Fromm, alienation is the most serious problem of modern times (Fromm, 2014). An alienated person is unhappy and tries to save time; however, he also has a desire to kill the time he is trying to save. Although alienation is caused by social factors, it occurs within the person. Groups that think or are thought to be alienated from the society suffer either from not being able to realize their individual qualities or from not being allowed to exhibit these qualities even though they are in line with the social value system. Signs of alienation; alienation, indifference, inability to be deeply attached to anything, not attached to work, withdrawal, disconnection in relationships and isolation (Erjem, 2005).

Alienation grows among workers as a condition in which the individual loses interest in his work, inhibits self-expression and loses control over his/her professional wellbeing. The employee acts unlike his/her normal self at the work place. The complex phenomenon of work alienation observably emerges from various external changes linked to the industrialization process, which may include the construction of large factories with complex corporate and administrative hierarchies, sophisticated job specialization, and strict work supervision done by a formal authority. The intricate reciprocal interaction among the factors described above lead an employee's life goals and priorities away from those of his personal and family life.

Alienation implies the experience of separation, from a person, object, or social situation. Perhaps the most profound level of alienation is estrangement from one's self. The modern individual's experience of 'self' can range from a sound sense of clear personal identity, meaningful purpose, and committed involvement in work and social life to the loss of self and state of inauthenticity, futility, discontent, depersonalization, or dissociation. The term alienation in that sense refers to the relation that forms between an individual and himself, the individual and his relation with others, with nature, and with human work. To BinZahi (2017) the sensations of helplessness, isolation, lack of standards and being lost are the most prevailing feelings in our world. Add to that the vague perspective of the future, the lack of belonging and alienation are results of the changing world that we are living in. To Ceylan and Sulu (2011), work alienation is viewed as a multidimensional idea. However, two principle measurements of work alienation are considered: powerlessness and meaninglessness. People who show symptoms of alienation will often reject loved ones or society. They may also show feelings of distance and estrangement, including from their own emotions.

Sex Harassment and Employee Alienation

Sexual harassment in the workplace undermines an individual's sense of safety, respect, and belonging. Alienation, a psychological state characterized by feelings of estrangement and disconnection from work or colleagues, arises when employees feel marginalized or demeaned. Harassment contributes to this through several mechanisms:

- i. Violation of Trust and Boundaries: Harassment disrupts trust in colleagues, supervisors, or the organizational structure, leaving victims feeling isolated.
- ii. Psychological Distress: Victims of harassment often experience anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem, which can alienate them from their work and workplace relationships.

- iii. Stigma and Retaliation: Victims may fear being stigmatized or face retaliation if they report harassment, reinforcing feelings of helplessness and alienation.

According to Society for Human Resource Management (2020), workplaces characterized by widespread or unchecked sexual harassment often have systemic issues contributing to employee alienation. Harassment fosters a hostile or toxic work environment, which alienates not only direct victims but also witnesses and bystanders. When employees feel alienated, they are less likely to engage with their tasks and colleagues, leading to decreased productivity and team cohesion. Alienated employees are more likely to seek alternative employment or take frequent leave to escape a hostile environment.

Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation (1844)

Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation describes the estrangement of people from aspects of their human nature (*Gattungswesen*, 'species-essence') as a consequence of the division of labor and living in a society of stratified social classes. The alienation from the self is a consequence of being a mechanistic part of a social class, the condition of which estranges a person from their humanity. Karl Marx's theory of Alienation suggests that workers get alienated from their species under capitalism, to the point that we cannot function according to our species-being, we are alienated from our existence. The capitalistic society does not profit the working class rather only the bourgeoisie class. It can be seen everywhere in the world how alienation as an experience and exploitation affect the mental health of the working class.

Karl Marx's theory of alienation, central to his critique of capitalism, addresses the estrangement individuals experience in a capitalist society. This theory is foundational to Marx's broader socio-economic analysis and rests on several key assumptions. Here is an exploration of these assumptions:

- i. Marx assumes that humans are inherently creative and productive, deriving fulfillment from meaningful labor. This capacity for "species-being" (the intrinsic nature of human creativity and communal existence) is what distinguishes humans from animals. Labor, in its ideal form, is not merely a means of survival but a way for individuals to express their humanity and connect with others. In capitalism, this creative potential is stifled as workers are forced into repetitive, alienating tasks to serve the needs of the market rather than their own personal or communal fulfillment. "*The worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working, he does not feel himself.*" (*Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*).
- ii. Marx argues that the introduction of private property leads to class divisions, where the means of production are controlled by a minority (the bourgeoisie) while the majority (the proletariat) sells their labor power to survive. This economic structure creates alienation by reducing workers to commodities within a system that prioritizes profit over human needs. Private ownership separates workers from the products they create, as they no longer own or control their output, which is appropriated by capitalists.
- iii. Marx assumes that capitalism inherently involves exploitation. The value created by workers exceeds the wages they receive (surplus value), which is appropriated by capitalists. This extraction of surplus value is a primary source of alienation, as

workers see their labor converted into profit for others, deepening their estrangement. The market economy furthers this alienation by commodifying every aspect of life, reducing social relations to transactional exchanges.

- iv. Marx assumes that alienation is not a timeless condition but is specific to particular historical and economic contexts. Under feudalism, alienation existed differently, and Marx predicts that communism, a system without private property, would overcome alienation by reuniting individuals with their labor, products, and community.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study consisted of 2856 employees working in 26 functional State Government Ministries operational in Rivers State. However, responses were drawn from employees at lower cadre (from grade level 9 downward) across these various ministries. The study sample was 351 respondents. In determining the sample size, the use of Taro Yamane's formula was adopted to ascertain the sample size of the entire population. In this study we only used the nomothetic or quantitative instrument of data collection (which basically focused on the use of questionnaire). In this study we employed both descriptive analytical and inferential tools to analyze the data generated from copies of the usable and useful questionnaire that was retrieved from respondents. Here we tested the significant relationship between dimensions of our predictor variable and measures of our criterion variables; the hypothesized variable relationship through the application of the Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient tool, using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 23) to test if there exist a relationship between the dimensions of our predictor variable (Sexual harassment, Rudeness and Intimidation) and the measures of our criterion variable (Valuelessness, Normlessness and Self-estrangement)

Association between Sexual Harassment and Employee alienation

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and valuelessness.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and normlessness

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between sexual harassment and self-estrangement

Correlation Matrix for Sexual harassment and Employee alienation

Correlations

		Sexual Harassment	Valuelessness	Normlessness	Self Estrangement
Spearman 's rho	Correlation	1.000	.514**	.437**	.601**
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
	N	284	284	284	284
	Correlation	.514**	1.000	.802**	.366**
	Coefficient				
Valuelessness	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.004
	N	284	284	284	284

Normlessness	Correlation	.437**	.802**	1.000	.344**
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.007
Self Estrangement	N	284	284	284	284
	Correlation	.601**	.366**	.344**	1.000
	Coefficient				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.004	.007	.
	N	284	284	284	284

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Research Data, 2024

The results in table 1 indicate that there is a significant association between sexual harassment and valuelessness, sexual harassment and normlessness, sexual harassment and self-estrangement. Sexual harassment is significantly correlated to valuelessness ($r = 0.514$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Sexual harassment is significantly correlated to normlessness ($r = .437$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$); and sexual harassment is also significantly associated to self-estrangement ($r = .601$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). The association between sexual harassment and the measures of employee alienation is found to be very significant at the level of 0.05 significance. Going by this result, hypotheses one, two and three were rejected at .05 alpha level. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between sexual harassment and Employee alienation.

CONCLUSION

The availability of empirical evidence in this study indicates a significant relationship between sexual harassment and employee alienation under the moderating influence of organizational culture. This work to the best of my knowledge is a baseline study because it is relatively the very first study on leadership incivility and employee alienation in Rivers state Government ministries context. The findings in this study posits that workers get alienated from others under capitalism, this is because the capitalistic society does not profit the working class rather only the bourgeoisie class. Indeed, this is absolutely in the same direction with the findings of this study as employees who constantly get harassed and intimidated, were observed as constantly exhibiting all the manifest indicators of alienation such as valuelessness, normlessness and self-estrangement. Owing to this therefore, organizations need to put stringent measures in places so as to curtail act of incivility among its citizens as incivility has been observed in this study as a menace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the outcome of our study we therefore make the following vital recommendations.

1. Government should develop and enforce comprehensive sexual harassment policies that outline what constitutes harassment, reporting procedures, and consequences for violators.
2. Government should conduct regular, mandatory training sessions on sexual harassment prevention and workplace conduct for all employees.
3. Government should create peer-support groups where employees can share experiences and seek advice without fear of stigma.

4. Ministries should create and implement a zero-tolerance approach to rudeness, bullying, or harassment.
5. Government Ministries should conduct training sessions to educate employees and leaders about professional communication and emotional intelligence.
6. Government should foster collaboration and camaraderie through structured activities that improve trust and reduce alienation
7. Ministries should create opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration to build trust and reduce isolation.

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