Comparison between Boys' and Girls' Experiences of Peer Sexual Harassment

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Samevatting

Die meeste Suid-Afrikaanse en internasionale navorsing oor seksuele teistering in skole fokus op die voorkoms van hierdie tipe gedrag. Daar is egter 'n toenemende aantal studies wat geslag as 'n risikofaktor in seksuele teistering geïdentifiseer het. Ten spyte van 'n omvattende literatuurstudie kon ons geen navorsingspublikasies opspoor wat Vrystaatse seuns en dogters se ervaring van portuurgroep seksuele teistering vergelyk nie. Die doel van hierdie studie is om genoemde leemte in die Suid-Afrikaanse seksuele teisteringliteratuur aan te spreek. 'n Vraelys is deur 474 graad 8-12-leerders voltooi. Ons data het, in teenstelling met die meeste navorsingsbevindinge, getoon dat veral seuns die teiken vir seksuele teistering in skole is. Resultate van die't'-toets toon statistiese beduidende verskille tussen seuns en dogters

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se blootstelling aan nie-verbale en fisieke teistering. Cohen se 'D'-toets toon voorts aan dat daar 'n geringe prakties beduidende verskil tussen seuns en dogters se blootstelling aan bogenoemde twee vorme van teistering is. Resultate van 'X^2'-toetse toon dat seuns aan beduidend meer insidente van teistering as dogters onderworpe is, veral tydens skoolpartytjies en by die kafeteria (snoepie). Die prakties beduidende verskil tussen seuns en dogters met betrekking tot teistering by skoolpartytjies, sportbyeenkomste en die kafeteria is klein. Die studie toon aan dat seksuele teistering gewoonlik in klein groepe plaasvind. Aanbevelings oor hoe om portuurgroep seksuele teistering aan te spreek, word ook verskaf.

1. Introduction

Learners in South Africa have a Constitutional and legal right to an educational experience in which they feel valued and respected; where they are actively supported by fellow-learners and educators (Prinsloo, 2006:308). Sexual harassment, however, infringes on learners' constitutional right to human dignity (Section 10), the right to freedom and security of the person (Section 12) and the right to education (Section 29) (RSA, 1996). Sexual harassment is also an infringement of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000 (RSA, 2000). De Wet and Van Huyssteen (2005:33) furthermore name the following legislation, most of which has been amended since its original promulgation, which deals with the legal consequences of sexual harassment: The National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996, South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, The State Liability Act 20 of 1957, Child Care Act 74 of 1983, Child Care Amendment Act of 1996, The Sexual Offences Act 23 of 1957, the Film and Publications Act 65 of 1996 and the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1997. The Department of Education (1998:11) lists the following learner transgressions, which may be directly or indirectly linked to sexual harassment – as offences which may lead to the suspension of a learner: conduct which endangers the safety and violates the rights of others; immoral behaviour or profanity; hateful graffiti, hate speech, sexism, racism; disrespect, objectionable behaviour and verbal abuse; criminal and oppressive behaviour such as rape and gender-based harassment; victimisation, bullying and the intimidation of other learners.

The Bible condemns all forms of sexual harassment. Christians are told not to intrude upon the rights of others by violating sexual boundaries (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). Young men are specifically commanded to treat young women in a moral and honourable way – as "sisters" (1 Timothy

5:2). Ephesians 5:3-4 furthermore condemns all offensive humour.

From a reading of newspaper articles (e.g. Prince, 2007:3; Raubenheimer & Rademeyer, 2007:1; Davids, 2006:13) it seems as if legislation, as well as condemnation by the Word of God are not enough to rule out sexual harassment in schools. There also seems to be a culture of silence and acceptance surrounding this behaviour in schools. According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) (2001), many schools vigorously discourage victims of sexual harassment from informing anyone outside the school or of approaching the justice system. In severe cases, schools even hide the existence of gender violence and fail to assist authorities. Failure of school authorities to react to sexual harassment allows perpetrators to go unpunished and thus reinforces sexual harassment in schools. The HRW (2001) also believes that if schools allow sexual harassment to occur uncontested or cover instances of abuse, there is no accountability.

In an effort to break the aforementioned culture of silence the broad aim of our research project was to expose the nature and extent of this problem in Free State schools (cf. De Wet, Jacobs & Palm-Forster, 2008; De Wet & Palm-Forster, 2008). Whilst the foregoing articles inform on findings pertaining to the influence of demographic variables on educator and peer sexual harassment (De Wet *et al*., 2008), and findings from the qualitative data, this article will compare boys' and girls' experiences of sexual harassment in depth. The reason for our gender specific focus will come to the fore in the subsequent literature review.

2. Research on sexual harassment

Although sexual harassment was generally recognised as a problem in the workplace and in colleges in the 1970s, it was not until the 1980s that attention focused on younger school-age children (Grube & Lens, 2003:174). Fineran and Bennett (1999:626) note that a reason for this relative lack of attention is the belief that sexual harassment is normal for teens. According to them it is "even an expected element of adolescent behaviour" (Fineran & Bennett, 1999:626). Stein's unpublished seminal survey (1981, in Fineran & Bennett, 1999:626) among 71 members of three high school learner councils and a vocational high school was probably the first systematic attempt to investigate the prevalence of sexual harassment in schools. The 1992 poll by the American Association of University Women (AAUW), *Hostile Hallways*, was the first comprehensive study conducted in schools. Prior to this date retrospective studies of (mostly female) university students attempted to shed light on the problem in American schools (Grube & Lens, 2003:174). The first

noteworthy research on sexual harassment in African schools was carried out in Zimbabwe by Leach and Machakanja (2000) (cf. Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani & Machakanje, 2003:1). Since the publication of the Zimbabwe report a major study of violence against girls in South African schools entitled *Scared at schools: sexual violence against girls in South African schools* has been produced (HRW, 2001).

The majority of international research in the area of sexual harassment in school has been concerned with establishing the prevalence or the incidence rate of this behaviour (DeSouza & Ribeiro, 2005:1018-1027; Winters, Clift & Maloney, 2004:177-194; Leach *et al*., 2003:44-144), the impact of the negative behaviour on the victims (Timmerman, 2002:397-404) and the gendered nature of unwanted sexual behaviour (Dunne, Humphreys & Leach, 2006:75-98; Timmerman, 2005:291-304; 55-57; Harber, 2004:95-110).

Research on sexual harassment in the South African context focuses on the prevalence of educator-to-learner harassment (De Wet *et al*., 2008:118; Prinsloo, 2006:313-315; Deane, 2003:16-19; HRW, 2001), peer sexual violence (De Wet *et al*., 2008:118; De Wet, 2007:23-31; Deane, 2003:16-19; Fineran, Bennett & Sacco, 2003:387-401), sexual harassment as a violation of the human and constitutional rights of learners (De Wet, 2007:19-20; Prinsloo, 2006:305-312), and the gendered nature of harassment and sexual violence (Brookes & Higson-Smith, 2004:110-129; Fineran *et al*., 2003:387-401 & 2001:211-221; Morrell, 1998:1998-225 and 2002:37-45; Van Vuuren & Jacobson, 1997).

There is however a growing number of international studies identifying gender as a risk factor in sexual harassment (Timmerman, 2005:292; Fineran, Bennett & Socco, 2001:214). Several researchers (Klein, 2006:149, 163; Timmerman, 2005:292; Klusas, 2003:94-95; Fineran *et al*., 2001:214; Hand & Sanchez, 2000:740-742; Hallam, 1994:1-4) indicate that girls and boys both report perpetrating and experiencing sexual harassment, girls are found to be victimised more frequently than boys, while boys perpetrate sexual harassment more frequently than girls. Despite an extensive literature review on sexual harassment in South African schools no study could be found that compared Free State boys' and girls' experiences of peer sexual harassment. The aim of this article is to fill this hiatus in the South African sexual harassment literature.

3. Conceptualisation

In the literature there is a confusing and inconsistent range of behaviours that are labelled as sexual harassment with definitions that are too vague,

too limited or too extensive (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Grube & Lens, 2003:175). Timmerman (2002:398) and Prinsloo (2006:306-307) agree that the term "sexual harassment" is very broad and may include very light to very serious forms of undesired sexual attention.

Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993:5-27) distinguish between three clear dimensions of sexual harassment, namely unwanted sexual attention, sexual coercion and gendered harassment.

- *Unwanted sexual attention* is viewed as undesired, unreciprocated verbal and non-verbal behaviours.
- *Sexual coercion* is the forcing of sexual collaboration, such as molestation and rape (includes oral sex and rape with objects) in return for benefits such as money and better grades (Unterhalter, 2003:15; HRW, 2001).
- *Gendered harassment* refers to insulting behaviour that is not sexual in character, but has gender-based connotations (Timmerman, 2002:398). Meyer (2006:43) describes gendered harassment as any behaviour that serves to police and reinforce the traditional gender roles of heterosexual masculinity and femininity, such as bullying, name-calling, social ostracism and acts of violence. Gendered harassment also encompasses verbal and non-verbal behaviours that communicate offensive, hostile and humiliating attitudes about a person's sexual orientation. This may include provocation, slurs, gestures and the exhibiting or display of sexually explicit materials (HRW, 2001).

Two types of sexual harassment have been defined by courts in Canada and the US, namely *quid pro quo* sexual harassment and hostile work environment sexual harassment. *Quid pro quo* sexual harassment occurs when a person is threatened or forced to perform sexual favours in return for benefits or to avoid a negative outcome (Winters *et al*., 2004:178). Hostile work environment is recurring unwelcome sexual behaviour that creates an offensive environment and hinders a person's ability to obtain an education. Hostile environmental behaviour includes behaviours such as sexually oriented remarks, demeaning language, displaying pornography, coarse jokes, continued sexual taunting or a "poisoned environment", for example comments, pictures circulating rumours about a person or threatening or bullying someone because of their sexual orientation (Winters *et al*., 2004:178; Hand & Sanchez, 2000:718-719; Woods, 2002:20).

For the purpose of this study peer sexual harassment is defined as unwanted or unwelcome behaviour, such as making sexual comments,

jokes, gestures or looks; showing sexual pictures, photographs, illustrations, messages or notes; writing sexual messages or graffiti on bathroom walls; spreading sexual rumours; calling someone gay or lesbian in a malicious manner; spying on someone dressing or showering at school; "flashing" or "mooning" someone, touching, grabbing, or pinching in a sexual way; pulling at clothing in a sexual way; intentionally brushing against someone in a sexual way; pulling clothing off or down; blocking or cornering in a sexual way; forcing a kiss or forcing other unwelcome sexual behaviour; and attempting to have or having unwanted sex with someone (cf. Fineran *et al*., 2001:211; Timmerman, 2005:304).

4. Empirical investigation

4.1 Research instrument

After an extensive literature study on sexual harassment and scrutiny of sexual harassment questionnaires, a self-reporting questionnaire, based on Fitzgerald's Sexual Experience Questionnaire (Larsson, Hensing & Allebeck, 2003:40-46) and Timmerman's (2005:304-306) questionnaire on unwanted sexual behaviour in secondary schools, was compiled. The questionnaire consisted of an open-ended question, as well as several closed questions.

Section A of the questionnaire provides demographic details of the respondents (cf. Table 1). In Section B, questions are asked about the respondents as possible victims of peer (Table 2) and educator sexual harassment during the preceding 12 months, as well as questions pertaining to the context, such as where (Table 4) and in whose presence (Table 5) the harassment took place. In Section C, an open-ended question attempts to obtain qualitative data on respondents' experiences of sexual harassment. The participants were invited to describe an incident of unwanted sexual behaviour that they have experienced (cf. De Wet & Palm-Forster, 2008:109-131). A concurrent mixed method approach, in which the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study were conducted simultaneously, was thus followed (Onwuegbuzie, 2002:526).

The authors avoided the use of the term "sexual harassment" in the construction of the questionnaire, because of its association with the overt and serious forms of unwanted sexual behaviour. According to Timmerman (2005:293), young people seem to be inclined to associate sexual harassment with severe forms of abuse, such as rape or attempted rape. Unwanted sexual comments or physical comments or physical contact with sexual connotations are less frequently considered as sexual harassment. The terms "unwanted sexual behaviour" and "sexual violence" were

therefore used in the questionnaire. We also felt that, rather than having learners endorse items that use legal definitions of sexual harassment, it would be clearer for them if we provided a list of example behaviours ranging from relatively mild (e.g. "spread sexual rumours about me") to extreme (e.g. "raped me") (cf. Table 2).

According to Goddard and Melville (2001:47), criterion-related validity, as well as construct validity, may be increased if use is made of an existing instrument. Thus, items from existing instruments (Fitzgerald's Sexual Experience Questionnaire and Timmerman's questionnaire on unwanted sexual behaviour) were combined and adapted for the South African context (e.g. township schools) and used. As such, the validity of the study was ensured. Another aspect of validity, namely content validity, is also applicable here. Content validity is obtained by consulting the viewpoint of experts when compiling the instrument. The questionnaire should thus be representative of existing knowledge on the issue (Goddard & Melville, 2001:47). An in-depth literature study was undertaken prior to the empirical study and it confirmed that the questionnaire covered existing knowledge on the issue of sexual violence in schools. Content validity was thus ensured.

The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the items on verbal, non-verbal and physical sexual harassment were calculated at 0,72, 0,61 and 0,69, respectively. The overall Cronbach alpha coefficient was calculated to be 0,83. The authors concede that the internal consistency reliability scores for the items on non-verbal and physical sexual harassment are slightly below the recommended internal consistency score of 0,70 and higher (Bernardi, 1994:767). The sensitivity of the items may have contributed to the relatively low scores (cf. Hulin, Netemeyer & Cudeck, 2001:55-57). The qualitative information about the respondents' experiences provided an extra check for reliability. Triangulation (i.e. the convergence and collaboration of results from the qualitative and quantitative data) was thus ensured through the use of the mixed method approach (Onwuegbuzie, 2002:525).

4.2 Sample, procedure and data analysis

The studied population was Grade 8 to 12 learners from schools in the Free State. A stratified sample of 80 of the 335 secondary, combined, intermediate and senior secondary schools in the Free State was drawn from an address list supplied by the Free State Department of Education. Ten questionnaires were sent by post to each of the selected schools. Principals were asked to randomly select ten learners from his/her school

to complete the questionnaires. Of these 800 questionnaires, 483 were returned of which 474 were suitable for processing. Table 1 summarises the demographic data of the respondents.

Table 1: Summary of demographics of respondents (n = 474)

	n	%
CATEGORY OF SCHOOL		
Secondary	278	58,65
Combined	28	5,91
Intermediate	73	15,40
Senior secondary	78	16,46
Other	10	2,11
Category of school not indicated	7	1,48
SCHOOL SIZE		
1 – 250	21	4,43
251 – 500	52	10,97
501 – 750	85	17,93
751 – 1000	124	26,16
1001 >	165	34,81
School size not indicated	27	5,70
SCHOOL LOCATION		
City or a township in the city	195	41,14
Small town or a township in a small town	230	48,52
Informal settlement	22	4,64
Farm	10	2,11
School location not indicated	17	3,59
GENDER		
Female	286	60,34
Male	180	39,97
Gender not indicated	8	1,69
AGE		
15 years and younger	123	25,95
16 - 17 years	163	34,39
18 - 19 years	127	26,79
20 years and older	44	9,28
Age not indicated	17	3,59
GRADE		
8	64	13,50
9	47	9,92
10	105	22,15
11	88	18,57
12	158	33,33
Grade not indicated	12	2,53

Quantitative data were analysed using the Data Analysis Tool of Microsoft Excel and Intercooled Stata 10 software packages. The data from the questionnaires were analysed by means of frequencies and means scores. The statistical significance was evaluated by applying the Chi-square and student's 't' statistics while the practical significance was scrutinised using Cohen's 'D' and the 'phi' coefficient.

4.3 Ethical measures

Care was taken to adhere to ethical measures during the research on this sensitive topic (Sikes, 2006:108-111). Permission was first of all obtained from the Free State Department of Education to conduct the research on the basis of the submitted research outline and questionnaire. In order to ensure the safety and rights of the respondents, they were informed in writing of the prevailing ethical considerations (Strydom, 2005:57-68), such as the informed consent of the Department of Education, the school and the participants' (learners), voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. To ensure confidentiality learners were asked to return their completed questionnaires in sealed envelopes.

4.4 Results

Table 1 presents the investigation group's responses to the question of whether or not they have been subjected to different forms of sexual harassment by their peers in the 12 months preceding the investigation. These forms of sexual harassment were also divided into three categories: verbal, non-verbal and physical. They also had to indicate who the perpetrators were (Boys/Girls/None).

Table 2: Frequency of different forms of sexual harassment towards respondents

		Male respondents (n=180)				Female respondents (n=286)			
		Perpetrators				Perpetrators			
		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
	Forms of harassment	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Verbal sexual harassment	Spread sexual rumours about me	20	11,11	20	11,11	25	8,74	28	9,79
	Said I was a slut or a whore	14	7,78	9	5	32	11,19	26	9,09
	Said I was gay or a lesbian	14	7,78	9	5	9	3,15	14	4,90
	Made sexual comments about parts of my body	19	10,56	38	21,11	66	23,08	21	7,34
	Made sexual remarks about my clothing	20	11,11	26	14,44	48	16,78	31	10,84
	Made remarks about my sexual activities	23	12,78	29	16,11	15	5,24	20	6,99
	Told suggestive stories or offensive jokes	66	36,67	20	11,11	70	24,47	53	8,04
	Called me "babe" or "sexy thing" or "hot" or something similar	19	10,56	71	39,44	148	51,75	21	7,34
	Made sexist remarks about men/women's behaviour	34	18,89	26	14,44	55	19,23	16	5,59
	Other forms of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour	9	5	16	8,89	17	5,94	11	3,85
Non-verbal sexual harassment	Blocked or cornered me in a sexual way	11	6,11	32	17,77	59	20,63	7	2,45
	Leered or eyed-up my body	14	7,78	58	32,22	89	31,12	17	5,94
	Stood too close to me or leaned over me	21	11,67	67	37,22	93	32,52	27	9,44
	Indecently exposed him-/herself to me	12	6,67	45	25,00	49	17,13	19	6,64
	Made sexual gestures at me	11	6,11	34	18,89	55	19,23	7	2,45
	Showed me sexual pictures	51	28,33	32	17,77	55	19,23	27	9,44
	Sent sexual cell phone pictures to me	19	10,56	30	16,67	28	9,79	11	3,85
	Other forms of non-verbal sexual behaviour	6	3,33	26	14,45	21	7,34	11	3,85

Physical sexual harassment	Pulled at my clothes in a sexual way	10	5,56	36	20,00	38	13,29	6	2,10
	Flashed at me or mooned at me	10	5,56	32	17,77	45	15,73	12	4,20
	Touched, grabbed or pinched me in a sexual way	14	7,78	61	33,89	71	24,83	8	2,80
	Touched my body underneath my clothes in a sexual way	7	3,89	43	23,89	44	15,38	7	2,45
	Fondled me against my will	10	5,56	33	18,33	35	12,33	8	2,80
	Kissed me against my will	18	10,00	96	53,33	119	41,61	21	7,34
	Attempted to have unwanted sex with me	12	6,67	22	12,22	38	13,29	0	0
	Raped me	2	1,11	4	2,22	8	2,80	1	0,35
	Other forms of unwanted physical sexual behaviour	5	2,78	11	6,11	11	3,85	3	1,05

The results reveal that relatively high percentages of the male respondents were victims of the following forms of verbal harassment: being called "babe" or "sexy thing" or "hot" (39,44% harassed by girls and 10,56% by boys) and the telling of suggestive stories or offensive jokes (36,67% harassed by boys and 11,11% by girls). Girls (21,11%) and boys (10,56%) also made unwanted comments about the respondents' bodies. The results with regard to female respondents' exposure to the different forms of verbal harassment correspond with that of the male respondents. They also indicated that they were mostly subjected to the aforementioned three forms of verbal harassment.

The male respondents were mostly subjected to the following forms of non-verbal harassment: a fellow-learner stood too near to the participant or leaned over him/her in a sexual way (37,22% of the perpetrators were girls and 11,67% boys); the showing of sexual pictures (pornography) by boys (28,33%) and girls (17,77%); 32,22% and 7,78% of the respondents indicated that they were "leered or eyed-up" by female and male perpetrators, respectively. Girls also indicated that they were mostly victimised by boys (32,52%) and girls (9,44%) who stood too close to them or leaned over them. Their bodies were fairly often leered or eyed-up by boys (31,12%) and girls (5,94%).

The following forms of physical sexual harassment seem to be a problem amongst peers: 63,89% of the male (53,89% of the perpetrators were girls and 10,0% boys) and 48,95% of the female (41,61% of the perpetrators were boys and 7,34% girls) respondents indicated that they were kissed against their will. Whereas 41,67% of the male respondents indicated that they were subjected to the unwanted touching, grabbing and pinching by girls (33,89%) and boys (7,78%) in a sexual way, 27,63% of the female respondents were subjected to this form of harassment (24,83% by boys and 2,80% by girls). Whilst 18,22% (12,22% of the perpetrators were girls and 6,67% boys) of the male respondents reported that their peers wanted

to have unwanted sex with them, 3,33% indicated that they had been raped by peers in the preceding 12 months: 66,67% of these rapes had been committed by girls. The corresponding statistics regarding female respondents are as follows: 13,29% were victims of attempted unwanted sex by boys; 3,15% were raped (88,89% of these rapes were committed by boys).

The frequency table also revealed the following:

- Although children were frequently victimised by members of their own gender, same sex harassment is not an uncommon occurrence.
- Males were more frequently victimised by members of their own, rather than the opposite sex in the following forms of verbal and non-verbal harassment: "said I was a slut or a whore", "said I was gay", "told suggestive stories or offensive jokes", "made sexist remarks about men/women's behaviour" and "showed me sexual pictures".
- With the exception of three forms of verbal harassment ("spread sexual rumours about me", "said I was a lesbian" and "made remarks about my sexual activities") girls were more frequently victimised by members of the opposite gender.

Subsequently, the statistical significance and practical significance of the influence of gender on the different forms of sexual harassment was probed. Comparisons were problematic for two reasons:

- In the questionnaire the different categories of sexual harassment (verbal, non- verbal and physical) were investigated with unequal numbers of items (10, 8 and 9).
- On these questionnaire items, the respondents could indicate more than one transgressor (male peer, female peer) per item.

To overcome these disproportions, a harassment factor for each respondent was calculated for each category of harassment (verbal, non-verbal and physical) using the formula:

$$\frac{\textit{number of times harassment is indicated}}{\textit{max number that can be indicated}}$$

The mean scores of these decimal factors, obtained with this formula, were used to analyse the influence of gender on the different categories of unwanted sexual behaviour. The statistical significance of the difference in mean scores was determined by using student's 't' statistics while the practical significance evaluated by calculating Cohen's D (cf. Bless & Kathuria, 2004: 152-178; Cresswell, 2008:195 & 203).

Table 3: Unwanted sexual harassment factors means, per gender subgroup

Type of sexual harassment	Overall mean	Girls (n=286)		Boys (n=180)				
		mean	sd	mean	Sd	*t*	*p*	*d*
Verbal	0,1310	0,1271	0,1024	0,1372	0,1113	1,0049	0,3155	0,0956
Non-verbal	0,1392	0,1243	0,1227	0,1629	0,1383	3,1377	0,0018 *	0,2991 *s*
Physical	0,1069	0,0923	0,0985	0,1303	0,1211	3,7030	0,0002 *	0,3541 *s*

* statistically significant on a 95% probability level

s small practical significance

A scrutiny of the data in Table 3 reveals that non-verbal sexual harassment is the most common category of harassment (mean=0,1392), followed by verbal harassment (mean=0,1310). Boys experience more harassment than their female counterparts in all three of the overarching categories. The differences in their exposure are statistically significant (on a 95% level) for *non-verbal* and *physical sexual harassment*. The difference between boys and girls are also of small practical significance as far as *non-verbal* and *physical sexual harassment.*

Respondents were asked to indicate during what activities and/or where the harassment took place (Table 4). They could indicate more than one location/activity. The statistical significance of the differences between the male and female respondents' experience was evaluated by applying the Chi-square and student's 't' statistics while the practical significance was examined using 'phi' coefficient. (cf. Bless & Kathuria, 2004:152-178 Cresswell, 2008:195 & 203,).

Table 4: Context of sexual harassment: Where did the harassment take place?

Location	Combined	Boys (n=180)		Girls (n=286)		χ^2-value	*p*	ϕ
	f	F	%	f	%			
Classroom	95	39	21,67	56	19,58	0,2963	0,586	0,025
Hall	29	15	8,33	14	4,90	2,2378	0,135	0,069
Schoolyard	65	29	16,11	36	12,59	1,1428	0,285	0,050
Cafeteria	7	5	2,78	2	0,70	3,2256	0,072	0,083 *s*
Day trip	29	14	7,78	15	5,24	1,2146	0,270	0,051
School party	55	28	15,56	27	9,44	3,9684	0,046 *	0,092 *s*
Sports event	35	19	10,56	16	5,59	3,9142	0,048 *	0,092 *s*
Gym class	6	3	1,67	3	1,05	0,3317	0,565	0,027
School hostel	22	5	2,78	17	5,94	2,4622	0,117	0,073

* statistically significant on a 95% probability level

s small practical significance

A relatively high percentage of respondents reported having been harassed in the following two places: classrooms (21,67% boys and 19,58% girls)

and schoolyards (16,11% boys and 12,59% girls). Respondents were furthermore subjected to sexual harassment during school parties (15,56% boys and 9,44% girls) and sport events (10,56% boys and 5,59% girls). In all of the identified places and events, a larger percentage of male than female respondents were victimised – with the exception of school hostels: 5,94% of the girls compared with 2,78% of the boys indicated that they were victimised in hostels. Statistically significant differences were found between the answers of the boys and girls at a 95% level with regard to the following two events: *school parties* and *sports events*. The practical significance of differences between boys and girls is small with regard to *school parties, sport events* and *the cafeteria.* In all three cases the boys have indicated a higher frequency of some form of sexual harassment.

The respondents were also asked to indicate in whose presence incidences of sexual harassment occurred. Respondents could indicate more than one category. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5: Context of sexual harassment: In whose presence did it take place?

	Combined	Boys (n=180)		Girls (n=286)		χ^2-value	*p*	ϕ
Location	**f**	**F**	**%**	**f**	**%**			
No other persons	66	27	15,00	39	13.64	0.1690	0.681	0.019
Small group	94	45	25,00	49	17.13	4.2461	0.039 *	0.095 *s*
Whole class	42	11	6.11	31	10.84	3.0114	0.083	0.080 *s*

* statistically significant on a 95% probability level

s small practical significance

Table 5 shows some gender differences. Girls reported more incidence of sexual harassment in class (10,84% versus 6,11%). Boys, on the other hand, experience harassment more often in small groups (25% versus 17,13%) and in privacy ("no other persons") (15% versus 13,64%). Girls, as well as boys, indicated that sexual harassment most often occurred in a small group. Results from χ^2-tests indicated one gender specific pattern: boys reported significantly more harassment in small groups than girls. This difference, as well as that girls tend to be harassed in front of the whole class more than boys, has small practical significance. Looking at the combined frequency, sexual harassment in front of a small group seems to be the most common phenomenon.

In the following section, the results of the current study will be discussed and tentatively juxtaposed with findings from other South African or international studies on sexual harassment. Comparisons between these studies and ours may be misleading because of methodological and

definitional differences and inconsistency in the time frames[†] and the events on which the learners were asked to report.

5. Discussion

Studies such as ours, as well as those of amongst others De Wet (2007:15-41), Timmerman (2005:291-306), Brookes and Higson-Smith (2004:111), Haber (2004:56), Shumba (2004:353-359), HRW (2001), Hallam (1994:1-4) and the 1992 poll by the AAUW (Grube & Lens, 2003:174), all found that sexual harassment is a reality in the lives of many children. The extent of the problem in some Free State schools may be highlighted by the following descriptive data from the study. More than half of the boys, and 48,34% of the girls indicated that they were kissed against their will. Relatively large percentages of the girls (59,09%) and boys (50,0%%) respondents were subjected to derogatory name-calling (called "babe" or "sexy thing" or "hot").

Several researchers compared boys' and girls' exposure to sexual harassment. The AAUW (in Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002:353) found that 65% of girls and 42% of boys who participated in this large scale survey were victims of peer sexual harassment. In another large-scale study in the US, 87% of girls and 71% of boys reported sexual harassment by peers (Klusas, 2003:94-95). In connection with and linked to the foregoing, Klein (2006:149), as well as Hand and Sanchez (2000:740-742) found that girls are the main targets of sexual harassment in the US. Dunne *et al*. (2003:9) and Hallam (1994:1-4) found that sexual harassment in Zambia, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Botswana is also largely focused on girls. Haber (2004:56) also reports that sexual harassment of girls in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Malawi is common. The forgoing trend, namely that girls are more often than boys the victims of sexual harassment, is confirmed by Van Vuuren and Jacobson's (1997:9) study in the Western Cape. They found that the perpetrators were predominantly boys, whilst the victims were predominantly girls. In a study among 261 high school youths in Gauteng, Fineran *et al.* (2001:211) also found that the frequency of sexual harassment is greater for girls than for boys. Contrary to these findings, in which the male-to-female gendered nature of sexual harassment is emphasised, our study (Tables 2 and 3); Fineran

† While our study inquired about harassments during the preceding 12 months, Benbenishty and Astor (2005:58) looked only at events a month prior to their investigation. Others probe events during a learner's entire school life (AAUW 1992, in Klein, 2006:163).

and Bolen (2006:1176) as well as Benbenishty and Astor (2005:58-59) found that boys are more likely to be the victims of sexual harassment than girls.

Timmerman's (2005:297) study found gender specific patterns in the different categories of sexual harassment. According to Timmerman (2005:297), boys reported significantly more verbal incidents, and girls reported significantly more physical incidents (χ^2=22,509, df=3, p<0,01). In our study, on the other hand, boys indicated that they were subjected to more forms of verbal, non-verbal and physical harassment than girls. In the latter two categories, boys experienced significantly (practical as well as statistical) more harassment that girls (cf. Table 3). A comparison of the answers of the boys and girls pertaining to the different forms of harassment revealed that boys were more often than girls the victims of seven forms of verbal harassment (including "other forms of unwanted verbal sexual behaviour"). More girls than boys reported exposure to the following three forms of verbal harassment: "said I was a slut or a whore", "said I was a lesbian" and "called me 'babe' or 'sexy thing' or 'hot' or something similar". An analysis of the different forms of non-verbal and physical harassment reveal that boys suffered more frequently than girls in all the forms of the aforementioned two categories of harassment (cf. Table 2).

Timmerman (2005:298) found no statistically significant difference between gender and places/events where the harassment took place. Our study found practical as well as statistical significant differences between the answers of the male and female respondents pertaining to their exposure to sexual harassment at school parties and sports events (Table 4). Table 4 also reveals that a higher percentage of boys than girls were victimised in all the identified places/events, with the exception of school hostels. Contrary to these results, Klein (2006:163), Brookes and Higson-Smith (2004:120), as well as Van Vuuren and Jacobson (1997:8) found that girls are more often subjected to sexual harassment in classrooms than boys. Our results, as well as those of Van Vuuren and Jacobson (1997:8) found that boys were mainly the victims in schoolyards.

Table 5 may be seen as a summation of what Klein (2006:163) perceive to be the "public character" of sexual harassment: only 15% of the boys and 13,64% of the girls indicated that they were victimised with no other person present, 31,11% of the boys and 27,97% of the girls were victimised in either the presence of a small group or in front of the whole class. Table 5 shows gender differences that are practically significant: more girls than boys were harassed in front of the whole class, while more

boys than girls were harassed in front of a small group. The latter difference is also statistically significant. These results are in line with that of Timmerman (2005:289). Although her results were non-significant, girls reported more incidences of sexual harassment in class and boys more incidences in small groups.

6. Recommendations

Peer sexual harassment is a reality in the lives of many Free State secondary school learners. It is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a more precise knowledge of the nature and context of the problem. The undertaking of systematic and widespread studies involving baseline measurements through nationwide surveys of school gender violence will not only create an awareness of the problem (Brookes & Higson-Smith, 2004:127), but may also be used as point of departure for the development of guidelines for deterring this scourge in our schools.

The necessity for developing national policies and guidelines pertaining to sexual harassment is underlined by the HRW's (2001) finding that the existing procedures and actions for dealing with sexual violence in South African schools are inadequate. Cognisance should hence be taken of Woods's (2002:22) suggestion that the National Department of Education should develop an assessment instrument that schools can administer not only to determine the extent of the problem in their schools, but also to evaluate the efficiency of their sexual harassment policies.

The results of our, as well as other studies, namely that sexual harassment often takes place in places where there ought to be educator and/or (other) adult supervision (e.g. school parties), stresses the necessity for schools to have clear and consistently enforced discipline policies and codes of conduct prohibiting any unwanted sexual behaviour (cf. Department of Education, 1998:11). Learners and educators should repeatedly be informed of the policy and should observe its procedures. This policy should stress that all forms of sexual harassment are inappropriate and that educators will intervene in all instances of unwanted behaviour. Those who fail to recognise and stop sexual harassment may actually be guilty of promoting sexual violence.

The role that educators should play in combating sexual harassment cannot be overemphasised. Educators should, at all times, act in accordance with the principal of *in loco parentis*. Meyer (2006:44) shows concern about the lack of intervention by educators to tackle the problem. If educators do not prevent gendered harassment, then "schools support the discriminatory attitudes that cause it to happen in the first place". It

should also be emphasised that educators are legally obliged to look after the physical and emotional wellbeing of their learners. Thus, if a school fails to take action against perpetrators or fails to set up essential preventive measures, learners have the right to sue for damages because of the school's inaction (De Wet & Van Huyssteen, 2005:33).

Educator training institutions should include information concerning sexual harassment in their courses (Timmerman, 2002:403). Winters *et al.* (2004:183) correctly observe that educators often "do not have the experience or the sense of empowerment to be able to recognize and label all sexually harassing behaviour."

Not only educators, but learners should also be empowered to become more aware of the nature and extent of sexual harassment. Van Vuuren and Jacobson (1997:13) write in this regard that "gender competent education (should be) including anti-bias and anti-sexist strategies to encourage both boys and girls to develop to their full potential and to move away from gender specific roles". Timmerman (2005:303) notes that "information about the gender differences in incidence, types, contexts and severity, and the differences in psychosomatic health of girls and boys related to unwanted sexual behaviour, should be part of sex education curricula".

A holistic approach is imperative to combat the problem. The authors therefore believe that a decrease in sexual harassment will only be realised if schools improve aspects of their climate and culture, i.e. the unwritten values, beliefs and everyday practices of schools and learner supervision. Brookes and Higson-Smith (2004:120-121) found that "zero tolerance for any form of violent behaviour, close monitoring of learners, unified and consistent application of rules, and emphasis on the core social value of respect", resulted in lower levels of gender violence. They also found that specific interventions such as life-skills training on gender equity and violence for learners and educators had minimal impact if the overall school climate did not support these interventions. It would seem that overall climate rather than specific interventions is the key to effectively preventing sexual harassment. This line of argumentation is supported by De Klerk and Rens (2003:353). According to them South Africa is in a moral crisis. They ascribe deviant learner behaviour, including sexual harassment, to the absence of internalised values based on a specific life-view perspective (for example based on Biblical principals). In the light of the foregoing the authors agree with their view that educators and the broader society should help learners "to make choices and to act with self-discipline" in accordance with principles embedded in the Bible (De Klerk & Rens, 2003:369). The following Biblical principals may act as deterrent for sexual harassment:

Boys and girls should avoid sending mixed messages such as verbally rejecting sexual advantages by dressing provocatively. The Bible recommends dressing with modesty (1 Timothy 2:9).

Boys and girls should choose their friends (Proverbs 13:20) and words (Proverbs 10:19) wisely as it may have a direct impact on how others treat them.

The foregoing may not be a panacea for sexual harassment. It is therefore important that Christian youths speak out about their beliefs and their condemnation of sexual harassment. If potential perpetrators realise that a potential victim is different from them and have strict moral values it may curb offensive sexual behaviour (Matthew 5:15-16)

While several researchers (cf. Section 5) emphasise the boy-to-girl character of sexual harassment in schools, our study (Tables 2 and 3), as well as those of Fineran and Bolen (2006:1176) and Benbenishty and Astor (2005:58-59) found that boys were more likely than girls to be the victims of sexual harassment. Our results may thus be seen by some as corroboration of the argument of the New Rightist backlash politics, namely that schools no longer cater for the needs of boys (Mills, 2000:221). According to Martino and Berrill (2003:101), proponents of the New Right movement, which emerged in the form of a moral panic with regard to designating boys as the new disadvantaged in Australia, the US and the United Kingdom have taken it for granted that "the feminisation of schooling" has a negative effect on boys' "developing masculinities". Advocates of the New Right therefore believe that boys need male educators (mentors) to empower them (Mills, 2000:222). Whilst they believe in "affirmative action for boys" (Martino, 2006:354), feminist researchers are of the opinion that boys and male educators should be encouraged "to acknowledge the ways in which boys and men are privileged within existing gendered relations of power" (Mills, 2000:222). We agree with Mills's (2000:225) insight that it will be difficult to convince male educators to identify with pro-feminist programmes. Rather than making boys feel powerless, educators should adopt a respectful approach towards boys and girls. Such an approach will recognise the complexities involved in being boys and girls growing up in a society where violent, masculine qualities are often valued, hegemonic forms of masculinity (e.g. misogyny, homophobia, compulsory heterosexuality, the importance of sport, the threat or use of violence to get what one wants) prevail and where factors such as class and sexuality are also implicated in the ways boys and girls view the world. Educators should thus recognise boys' privileged position in gender relations (Mills, 2000:236).

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