



RESEARCH ARTICLE

PATTERN OF PREVALENCE AND AWARENESS OF SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION AMONG STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The emerging trends in postmodern cultures within the Nigerian University environment have altered the preexisting attitudes and behavioural norms of students leading to the incidences of sexual objectification and allied social ills. Yet, individual and management perception and awareness varied. This study evaluates the pattern of prevalence and awareness level of sexual objectification among female students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin, Nigeria. The study area was classified into six strata using Departments within the Faculty as index. A sample size of 313 was randomly selected for study. Data drawn using structured questionnaire and interview were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. The descriptive evaluation of the level of respondents' awareness of the phenomenon of sexual objectification differ, but with a high level espousing the most outstanding trend of 177 respondents, representing 58 percent in the sequence. Also, social media attracted the most dominant source of exposure to the phenomena of sexual objectification with a proportion of 33 percent, followed by personal experience attracting 29 percent. The t-statistical model of variations in the prevalence pattern of the indicators offers a high positive value of 16.42 that is statistically significance at 0.05 confidence level. This study therefore concluded that there is a statistical significant difference in the prevalence of sexual objectification experiences among female students in the University of Benin. It is recommended that though the University has establish a strong institutional framework to prevent sexual offences against female students and related gender violence, there is urgent need to advance the implementation of public policies that recognize the distinct implications of difference forms of sexual objectification on different age groups

Keywords: Sexual objectification, student, deviant behaviour, awareness, university environment

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global movement to eradicate all forms of violence against girl-child and women tend to receive much media and research attention in the developed countries than the developing countries in this 21st century. The deviations in the levels of commitments among countries, regions, and localities can be link to the dire desire to actualize the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 Target 2 that stated thus: ‘eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation’ (UNSDG, 2015). Amidst the deviants in people and groups commitments, girl-child and women especially in diverse academic environment are sometimes being sexually objectified, victimized, gratified, and harass without paying attention to the impacts of such actions on their total person and future.

Calogero (2012) opines that objectification involves treating someone as an object, focusing solely on their physical characteristics. Sexual objectification of women includes internalized sexual objectification, lack of empathy, and derogatory comments about women’s bodies (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Although males and females can experience or engage in sexual objectification, women often suffered more devastating psychological, social, educational, moral, and health impacts. This attests a notion that ‘women are more likely to be leered at than men, indicating a higher likelihood of objectification’ (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014).

Dimensionally, sexual objectification against female gender usually takes divergent forms. It is observed that deviant behaviours such as rape, leering, inappropriate sexual remarks, catcalling, physical assault, and sexual harassment, which have unfortunately become common issues for women in this modern world (Reinicke, 2022). Also, Gervais & Eagan (2017) opine that catcalling and acts of sexual violence are intricately linked. However, both are stemming from the sexual objectification of women by men, whether through various forms of media or face-to-face interactions (Durham, 1998; Szymanski, *et al.*, 2011; Mubeen, Zubair & Ashraf, 2024).

The preceding viewpoints suggest that sexual objectification in the university environment may vary across geographical location due to differences in people’s culture, tradition, belief, educational level, university policies, and duration of time. To Reyes-Valenzuela *et al.* (2024) sexual harassment and objectification among students vary by gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Dimensionally, what constitute sexual objectification can also vary, but includes requesting sexual favour for academic or professional gains, unnecessary touching and contact, unwanted sexual advancements or comments, making derogatory statements about a person’s body or appearance, and painting or displaying seductive materials or images with intent to exploit the victim.

The patterns and prevalence of sexual objectification vary from one geographical area to the other through time. In United States, there are indications that women are frequently recipients of sexist comments or behaviors by men, including derogatory sexual remarks and harassment as form of sexual objectification. Dimensionally, women come to internalize frequent objectification through an observer’s perspective as a primary view of themselves and engage in self-objectification (Ertl *et al.*, 2022).

Objectification involves treating someone as an object, focusing solely on their physical characteristics (Calogero, 2012). Men’s objectification of women includes internalized sexual objectification, lack of empathy, and derogatory comments about women’s bodies (Gervais and



Eagan, 2017). Although both men and women can experience and engage in sexual objectification, Mubeen *et al.* (2024) observed that women are impacted more significantly. For instance, women are more likely to be leered at than men, indicating a higher likelihood of objectification (Loughnan & Pacilli, 2014).

In a recent study, Mubeen *et al.* (2024) emphasized the need for study on men's objectification of women, especially in relation to pornography since Pakistan ranked as among the top five countries in terms of pornography-related searches. Such efforts often aid understanding how pornographic how media is affecting Pakistani adolescents/ young adults, and ascertain if pornography is leading them to perceive women as sex objects (Mubeen *et al.* (2024). Such phenomenal studies in context of Nigerian University students are either hidden or not existing.

In evaluating 1,988 advertisements using 58 popular American magazines, Stankiewicz and Rosselli (2008) established that about half depicted women as sex objects, and almost 10 percent portrayed them as sufferers. Contextually, the study concluded that the portrayal was more prevalent in fashion magazines compared to news and other categories, leading readers to objectify other women (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008).

In elucidation of how men's consumption of objectifying media influences their views on women, Wright and Tokunaga (2016) established that increased exposure to such material leads men to see women as sex objects, fostering attitudes that support sexual violence. It is admitted that both external and internalized sexual objectification can strongly be influenced by race/ ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class (Fedrickson and Roberts, 1997).

A recent study identify commercials, prime-time television programs, movies, music lyrics and videos, magazines, advertising, sports media, video games, and Internet sites as major sources of awareness and prevalence of women depiction of sexualizing and objectifying manners (American Psychological Association, 2007). Further still, the prevalence equally takes other forms such as wearing revealing and provocative clothing, portrayed in ways that emphasize their body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects) (Szymanski, *et al.*, 2011).

Further comparison on the form and prevalence presented in Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001) in United States revealed that 94 percent of undergraduate females reported experiencing unwanted objectifying sexual comments and behaviors at least once over a semester, women reported more sexual experiences than men. Thus, making sexual objectification one of the cardinal and unique phenomena of daily experiences of sexism in America (Swim *et al.*, 2001; Szymanski, *et al.*, 2011). Empirical evidence also showed that women portrayed in the media are frequently the target of men's sexist comments such as use of deprecating words to describe women, or sexual remarks to comments about women's body parts, and behaviors especially ogling, leering, catcalling, harassment) (Szymanski, *et al.*, 2011). Hence, the need for empirical studies in context of a Nigeria's University environment

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the patterns and awareness of sexual objectification on the psychosocial well-being of female students in the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. Examine the level and sources of awareness of sexual objectification experiences among female students at the University of Benin.
2. Determine the pattern of prevalence of sexual objectification among female students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin.
3. Determine whether there is a statistical significant variation in the prevalence of sexual objectification experiences among female students in the University environment.

2.0. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The University of Benin is location between latitude $6^{\circ}23'30''$ and latitude $6^{\circ}24'30''$ longitude $5^{\circ}38'0''$ longitude $5^{\circ}36'30''$. The landmass is straddles within two Local Government Areas (Egor and Ovia North East). There are large expanses of the University land that has not yet been optimally develop and utilize across Ikpoba River. The concave-convex slope profile accelerated by the river ad human activities have instigates varying degrees of gully erosion in the catchment area of the University Land in recent times.

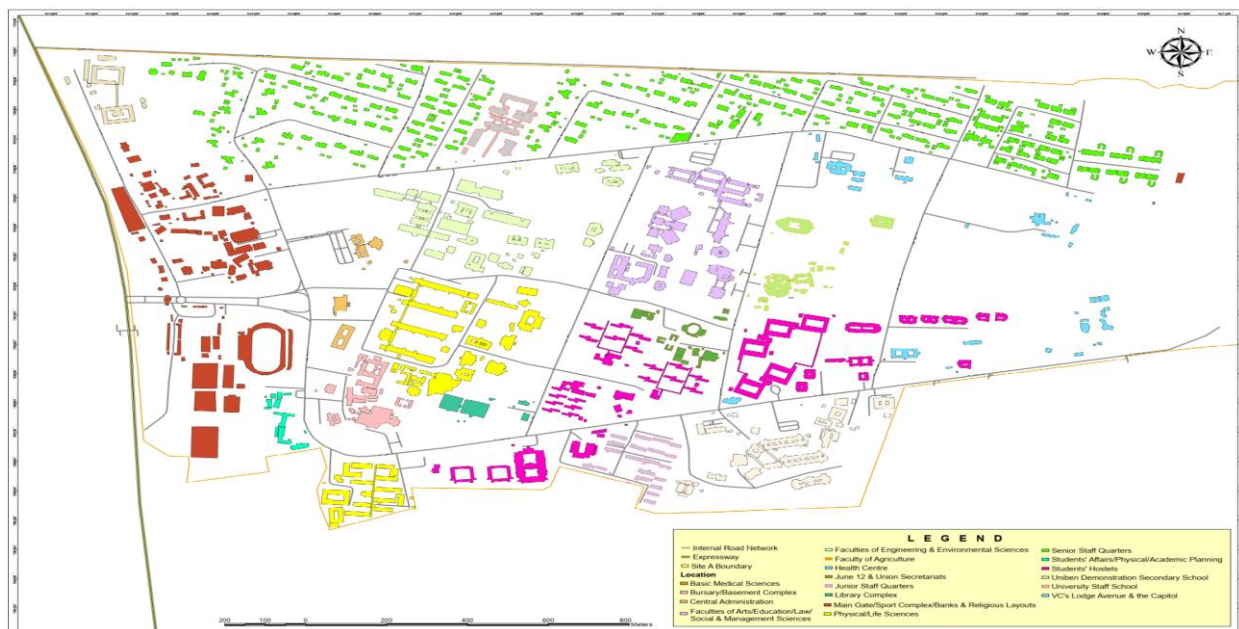


Figure 1: University of Benin, Ugbowo Campus showing Various Facilities and Road Network.
Source: Department of Geography and Regional Planning (2022).

3.0. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey design in assessing pattern of awareness and prevalence of sexual objectification among female students in the University of Benin. The rationale for adopting descriptive design is to provide enabling ground for the researchers to describe and compare the responses and perceptions of the phenomenon among students without bias.



3.2. Population

The population distributions of students in the Faculty Social Sciences, University of Benin are summarized in Table 1 for undergraduate programs and Table 2 for post graduate program respectively. From Table 1, the population of undergraduate students from six Department that make up the Faculty of Social Sciences is 1404 males and 1734 females respectively, and a corresponding grand total of 3138 full-time students (Admission Unit of the University of Benin, 2025). From Table 2, the population of postgraduate students in the Faculty of Social Sciences comprises 308 males and 174 females making a total 482 in the series (Admission Unit of the University of Benin, 2025). The total population for this study therefore, is 3,620 students for postgraduate and 3138 students for undergraduates. Thus, making a grand total of population of six thousand, seven hundred sixty-eight (6,768) students in the Faculty of Social Sciences (Admission Unit of the University of Benin, 2025).

Table 3.1: Population of Undergraduate Students in the Faculty of Social Sciences

Department	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Subtotal		Grand Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Economics & Statistics	73	70	69	61	51	56	96	98	289	285	574
Geography & Regional Planning	9	1	10	1	4	1	27	13	50	16	66
Political Science	92	57	120	96	111	63	101	51	424	267	691
Sociology & Anthropology	56	95	65	74	32	83	77	107	230	359	589
Social Work	37	79	40	89	49	146	75	127	201	441	642
Public Admin.	63	98	58	82	43	74	46	112	210	366	576
Sub Total	330	400	362	403	290	423	422	508	1404	1734	3138

Source: Admission Unit, University of Benin (2025).

Table 3.2: Distributions of Postgraduate Students in the Faculty of Social Sciences

Department	Diploma		Master		Doctorate		Subtotal		Total PG M& F	UG & PG		Grand Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		M	F	
Economics & Statistics					32	10	32	10	42	321	295	616
Geography & Regional Planning			45	18	18	3	63	21	84	113	37	150
Political Science			34	10	70	12	104	22	126	528	289	817
Sociology & Anthropology			8	11	19	7	27	18	45	257	377	634
Social Work	8	13	27	45	7	19	42	77	119	243	518	761
Public Administration			26	13	14	13	40	26	66	250	392	642
Sub Total	8	13	140	97	160	64	308	174	482	1712	1908	3620

Source: Admission Unit, University of Benin (2025).



3.3. Sampling Techniques

The female students' population in the Faculty of Social Sciences were stratified in into two strata (comprising undergraduate and postgraduate students), using stratified sampling technique. Considering the differences in the female students' population in each stratum, a proportion of 10:80 were employed in selecting the sample using systematic sampling technique. Comparatively, the female undergraduates of 1734 gives a sample size of 174 female postgraduates were selected.

Undergraduates Female Students = $10/100 * 1734$	=====	174
Postgraduates Female Students = $80/100 * 174$	=====	139
Total Female Representation	=====	313

3.4. Sample Size Determination

This study focuses on sexual objectification of female students in the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Benin. The sample was drawn from undergraduate and postgraduate female students in the Faculty comprising 1734 and 174 on the order and a grand total 1908. To determine the sample size, Nwana (2004) suggestive method of 10 percent for undergraduate female students and 80 percent for the postgraduate female students were employed. The rationale for the choices is because the undergraduate female students comprise few thousands and their postgraduate counterparts composed of few hundreds. Therefore, ten (10) percent of 1734 gives a sample size of 174, while eighty (80) of 174 gives a sample size of 139 accordingly. Thus, the total sampled size for study 313 female students (respondents).

3.5. Instruments Data Collection and Administration

The instruments used for primary data collection are structured questionnaire and interview. Structured questionnaire was used to aid in information generation on the respondents' awareness and prevalence of sexual objectification, while interview was used for assessing respondents' opinions on the phenomenon. The questionnaire instrument was systematically administered on a ratio of 1:10 for undergraduate and 1:80 for postgraduate respondents in the study area. The interview was conducted purposively based on the willingness and ability to volunteer the needed information (especially those that had experienced sexual objectification) for the actualization of the purposes of this study.

3.6. Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The validation of instrument was carried out first by submitting the draft to the project supervisor for face and content validation. Thereafter, the correction were integrated and resubmit to the project supervisor for approval before the instruments were repackaged and send to two lecturers, each that specialized in Measurement and Evaluation As well as Psychology within the University community for final validation. Their inputs were integration and re-submit for the researchers' final approval prior to the final administration in the field. On the basis of instrument reliability, a split-half test was adopted and the outcome was calculated using Cronbach's method and the result gave a high coefficient of 0.98 in the series.

3.7. Method of data Analysis

Data that were generated from field surveys were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive statistical tools comprise mean score, standard deviation, percentages, deviation, and range. On the contrary, student's t-test was employ as surrogate for statistical test of



differences between each group of variables used in this study. The statistical analyses were carried out using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0, while test of significance was done at 0.05 confidence level

4.0. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Comparative Assessment of Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The descriptive assessments of demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized in tables and the results reveal differences based on the attributes. In context of age, the results in Table 4.1.1 indicate that those within the range of 21 – 25 years old attracted the highest frequency of 128, representing a proportion of 42 percent in the series followed by those within the age range of 15 – 20 accounting for a total of 96, with a proportion of 31 percent in the sequence. A further assessment of the results presented in Table 4.1.1 using threshold scenario indicates that those within the age range of above 40 years old attracted a lowest frequency of 3, representing only 1 percent, followed by those within the age range of 35–40 attracted a lowest frequency of 7, representing 2 percent in sequence. The results suggests that the respondents were dominated the youthful population.

Table 4.1.1: Analysis of Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15–20	96	31
21–25	128	42
26–30	54	18
31–35	19	6
35–40	7	2
Above 40	3	1
Total	307	100

Source: Author's Analysis (2026).

Table 4.1.2: Analysis of Academic Level of Respondents

Academic Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
100	42	14
200	51	17
300	46	15
400	35	11
500	27	9
600	40	13
700	34	11
800	32	10
Total	307	100

Source: Author's Analysis (2026).

On the basis of academic levels, the result presented in table 4.1.2 reveal adequate representations of all academic levels of respondents in the study area. Comparatively, the highest frequency of 51, representing a proportion of 17 percent is associated with those in 200 academic level. The pattern is closely followed a frequency of 46, accounting for 15 percent for those in 300 level. On the contrary, a least frequency of proportion of 27, expressing a proportion only 9 percent is recorded for respondents in 500 academic level.



Other residuals converge within the intermediate proportion of between 10 percent for 800 academic level and 15 percent for a 100 academic level respectively.

4.2. Assessment of the Level and Sources of Awareness of Sexual Objectification

The analysis of the level of awareness of sexual objectification among respondents is summarized in Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 based on research objective one and the results differ among distinct levels. In context of Table 4.2.1, high level of awareness dominates in the series, with a frequency of 117 respondents, accounting for a total aggregate of 58 percent, followed by a frequency of 94 representing 31 percent of the respondents for moderate level of awareness, and a total of 26 depicting a proportion of 8 percent affirms moderate level of awareness, while a comparatively very low frequency of 10 respondents (2 percent) attests that zero level of awareness. In comparison therefore, the results are clear indication of high level of awareness of the prevalence of sexual objectification among respondents in the study area.

Table 4.2.1: Analysis of the Level of Awareness of Sexual Objectification

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	177	58
Moderate	94	31
Low	26	8
Never	10	3
Total	307	100

Source: Author's Analysis (2026).

On the account of source of awareness, the results of the descriptive assessment presented in Table 4.2.2 sustain deviation based on indicators. The point-centered elucidation of results show that the most focal source of awareness emanates from social media (such as Facebook, twitter, instagram, and x) attracted a highest frequency of 102, which represent a total of 33 percent. The result show strong conformity with Sun et al. (2023) report that younger individuals appear to benefit more from using social media for socio-emotional coping regarding their psychological adjustment during lockdown, as compared to their older counterparts.

Table 4.2.2: Analysis of Major Source of Awareness of Sexual Objectification

Major Source	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Personal experience	89	29
Friend	46	15
Social media	102	33
Mass media	21	7
Textbook	8	3
Magazine/ Newspaper	7	2
Teacher/ Classroom	22	7
Others (Traditional Institution & Telephone)	12	4
Total	307	100.0

Source: Author's Analysis (2026).

The result is closely accompanied by a frequency of 89 respondents indicating a proportion of 29 percent of the outlined sources of information, while magazine/ Newspaper least frequency of 7



respondents that account for a total 2 percent. The residual sources of information presented in the Table converge within the intermediate frequency and percentage in the series.

4.3. Examination of the Prevalence of Sexual Objectification Experiences

The analysis of the prevalence of sexual experiences among respondents based on research objective two, mean score and standard deviation was used. The results presented in Table 4.3 depict disparities. From the results, a highest mean score of value of 3.61 is associated with the use of social media inducement, followed by use of leering /catcalling behaviour with a value of 3.51. The use of sexual remarks about women's body parts attracted a score value of 3.55, increase women's opportunities for body shame possesses a mea score of 3.47, followed by a mean score value of 4.46 for the use of sexual remarks about women's body parts. In context of the use of ogling behaviour, the result offer a relatively high mean score value of 3.44, while the use of deprecating words to describe women attracts a score value of 3.41.

Further still, our assessment of the use of derogatory words to describe women, use of videos and lyrics, fostering attitudes that support violence against women, and pornographic inducement of women attract varying high mean score values of 3.38, 3.29, 3.18, and 3.12 on the order. A further comparison of the pattern on the prevalence of sexual objectification among female students in the study area indicates that a lowest mean sore value of 2.68 is associated with rape, and this is closely followed by indecent exposure attracting 2.73. Each of the identified low score values fall above the accepted value range in the series.

In a generalized dimension, the grand mean score offer a value of 3.29, while the values of the remaining indicators of prevalence of sexual objectification also converge above the decision rule of 2.5 for acceptance in the series. The analysis of the deviation from the mean indicate based on Table 4.3 reveal that the results converge between 0.72 for the use of sexual remarks about women's body parts and 1.11 for rape. The results reveal that the arrays of indicators are valid sources of prevalence of sexual objectification in the study area and adequate creation of awareness is very vital in building students' capacities to mitigate or eradicate the pattern of prevalence of sexual objectification in diverse university environment.

Table 4.3: Analysis of the Prevalence of Sexual Objectification Experiences

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
Rape	2.68	1.11	Accepted
Harassment	3.46	0.78	Accepted
Use of sexual remarks about women's body parts	3.55	0.72	Accepted
Use of ogling behaviour	3.44	0.81	Accepted
Use of leering/catcalling behaviour	3.51	0.74	Accepted
Use of derogatory comments about women's bodies	3.38	0.83	Accepted
Increase women's opportunities for body shame	3.47	0.77	Accepted
Indecent exposure	2.73	1.02	Accepted
Use of deprecating words to describe women	3.41	0.79	Accepted
Use of music lyrics and videos	3.29	0.88	Accepted
Fostering attitudes that support sexual violence	3.18	0.91	Accepted
Pornographic inducement	3.12	0.93	Accepted
Use of social media inducement	3.61	0.69	Accepted
Grand Mean	3.29	0.85	Accepted

Source: Author's Analysis (2026).



4.4. Test of variation in the Prevalence of Sexual Objectification Experiences among Students

The prevalence of sexual objectification among female students in the study area based on research objective four was explored descriptively using mean and standard deviation, while test of significance was done inferentially using student's T-test. The results presented in Table 4.4 depict a mean value of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 0.85 respectively. The test of differences in the mean pattern based on research objective four gives a high positive T-test value of 16.42 that is statistically significance at 0.05 confidence level, while T-critical gives a comparatively low value of 1.96.

Table 4.4: T-test Analysis of the Prevalence of Female Students of Sexual Objectification

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	T-cal.	T-crit.	Decision
Sexual objectification prevalence	307	3.29	0.85	16.42	1.96	Null Hypothesis Rejected

Source: Authors' Analysis (2026).

Retrospectively, since the calculated t-test value of 16.42 is higher than the critical value (1.96), the null hypothesis which stated thus: 'there is no significant variation in the prevalence of sexual objectification experiences among female students at the University of Benin' is rejected. It is therefore declare that there is a statistical significant difference in the prevalence of sexual objectification experiences among female students. The established pattern of prevalence partly affirmed Fedrickson and Roberts (1997) notion that both external and internalized sexual objectification can strongly be influenced by multiple factors such as race/ ethnicity, sexual orientation, and social class.

In summary therefore, the explorations of the demographic attributes of the respondents in the study area show disparities. In context of age, the results in Table 4.1.1 indicate that those within the range of 21–25 years old attracted the highest frequency of 128, representing a proportion of 42 percent in the series. On the dimension of academic attainments, those at the 200 academic level were most dominant, attracting a frequency of 51, and a corresponding proportion of 17 percent in the sequence.

Further still, the issue-based elucidation of exposure indicate that the most focal source of awareness emanates from social media (such as Facebook, twitter, instagram, and x) attracted a highest frequency of 102, which represent a total of 33 percent. The examination of the prevalence of sexual objectification based on research objective two showed that an indicator with a most dominant mean score value of 3.61 is the use of social media inducement, followed by use of leering /catcalling behaviour with a value of 3.51, while rape incidence attracted a lowest mean score of 2.68.

The test of difference in the prevalence of sexual objectification among female students based on hypothesis one is presented in Table 4.8 and the results gives a high positive T-test value of 16.42 that is statistically significance at 0.05 confidence level. This attests that there is a statistical significant difference in the prevalence of sexual objectification experiences among female students in the study area.



5.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study clearly established that objectification of female students accelerate the victims' withdrawal attributes of mind and impair their moral and academic concern. Such impairments influence how the objectified person is subsequently judged, blamed more and allied modes of de-humanizing mistreatments that often blur their interpersonal relationships with others. The inferential model led to a conclusion that sexual objectification has statistical significant negative effects on the psychological well-being of female students within the University environment.

5.2. Recommendations

It is therefore recommends that the University management should partner with government and donor agencies/ organization such as Federation of International Female Lawyers and UNICEF to established Center of Excellence in Research on Sexual Offences against students. Such action can built advocacy planning and create awareness on the ills of sexual and allied offences within the academic communities and the society in general.

In another dimension, though the University has establish a strong institutional framework to prevent sexual offences and other forms of victimization against students and related gender violence, there is urgent need to advance the implementation of public policies that recognize the distinct implications of the issue of difference forms of sexual objectification on different age groups. Such move is quite vital in addressing sexual offences through awareness and sensitization initiatives that promote zero tolerance and promotion of gender-responsive approaches beyond the university context.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exist in this manuscript.

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