Sexual Harassment Among Female College Athletes
Patricia Muchena
Zimbabwe Open University
Manicaland Region
P. Bag V 7480
Mutare
Zimbabwe
+263774 305 802

John Mapfumo
Sabbatical Scholar at Zimbabwe Open University, Manicaland
mrmapfumo@gmail.com
Africa University
Box 1320
Mutare
Zimbabwe
+263 772 374 585

Thelma Dhlomo
thelmad6@gmail.com
Great Zimbabwe University
Box 1235 Masvingo
Zimbabwe
+263777 589 227

Abstract
Previous studies found that sexual harassment of the female student by male lectures/officials was highly prevalent in colleges and universities in Zimbabwe and invariably compromises the performance of women in sport. The focus of this study was to establish the level of sexual harassment in sport on the female college athletes. Ten-item self-administered questionnaires were distributed to a population of five hundred female college athletes. One hundred and sixty responses were received. The results revealed widespread sexual harassment of the female college athletes by male coaches, peers, administrators and spectators. The results also revealed a variety of types of sexual harassment, locations where perpetrators meet the victim athletes and the most frequent time of harassment. The authors concluded that sexual harassment of the female college athlete was likely to remain a problem for the foreseeable future. The study recommended that colleges should embark on awareness campaigns on sexual harassment among the college fraternity and provide counselling services to victims of sexual harassment.

Key words Sexual harassment, female, student, athlete

Background to the study
Sexual Harassment has become a ‘hot topic’ today and much has been written by such scholars as Khan (1997), Jewkes and Abraham (2002), Hill and Silva (2005), Jamela (2011), Shumba (2002) and Zindi (2000). The foregoing authors have written on sexual harassment in different sectors especially the workplace, schools, colleges and universities. Sexual harassment itself has been conceptualised in a number of ways as presented below.

The manual on Preventing Sexual Harassment SDC IP.73 (1992) defines harassment as any behaviour by a person or organisation which is offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening, directed at any person or group of people. The manual further states that sexual harassment includes verbal harassment such as cat calls, telling sexual jokes and stories whilst non-verbal harassment such as looking a person up and down, blocking a person’s path, throwing kisses; or physical harassment such as unwelcome hugging, touching the person’s clothing, hair or body. Dziech (1990) concurs with the manual and defines sexual harassment as intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favours. Therefore, sexual harassment is an unwelcome action of a sexual nature (Athletic Business, 2008).

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (1980) demarcated sexual harassment into two types: unwanted physical and verbal sexual attention and solicitation of sexual activity by threat of punishment or promise of reward (quid pro quo or sexual coercion) and hostile work environment. Till (1980) further identified five hierarchical classes of sexual harassment viz: Type 1, gender harassment; Type 2, seductive behaviour; Type 3, sexual bribery; Type 4, sexual coercion and Type 5, sexual crimes and misdemeanours. The U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (1981) further identified six categories of sexual harassment: unwanted pressure for sexual favours; unlimited deliberate touching, unlimited suggestive looks, unlimited letters and calls, unlimited pressure for dates and unlimited sexual teasing, jokes, remarks or questions. Roscoe, Strouse and Goodwin (1994) added ‘wedgies’ (pulling up another’s pants) and ‘shuckies’ (pulling down another’s pants).
The female college athlete is the female college and/or university student who participates in college and/or university sport such as athletics, soccer, netball, volleyball, hockey, basketball and other ball games. She may also be involved in college and/or sport administration or may be a team supporter who is always at the sports field during games. In this study all are called female college athletes.

The prevalence of sexual harassment among the female student populations in colleges is well-documented. Zindi (2002) found that lecturers were in positions of authority with the power to pass or fail the student. These lecturers (predominantly male) utilized this power to ask for sexual favours from their female students. Although this went against teacher professional ethics, perpetrators in colleges harassed their female victims with impunity. In colleges, likewise, the coach, the sports administrator and the referee have power over the athlete and may utilize the same and ask for sexual favours from the female athletes. These sports personnel may have power to promote the interests of the athlete or work against the interests of the athletes. These sport administrators may entice their female victims by promising them extensive travel for competitions. Sexual harassment in African universities and colleges can be of student by staff; of staff by student; or staff to student (Zindi 2002; Jamela 2011).

Much interest has moved from harassment of females in the general population in colleges and universities to interest in the harassment of the female college athlete. Among several interested parties are sporting organizations such as the Women Sport Foundation (2008), International Olympic Commission medical (2011) and others which have published articles on sexual harassment focusing on the sporting sector in different countries largely outside Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe the extent to which female athletes are sexually harassed and the exact nature of the harassment are much less known than they are in other countries where considerable investigation has taken place. Hence, this study sought to estimate the prevalence of sexual harassment among female athletes in colleges, in Manicaland, Zimbabwe.

Across the world considerable work has been done in studying the harassment of female athletes in college and university. The American Association of University Women found in a 2001 study that 81% of female student athletes had experienced some form of sexual harassment. 25% had experienced it frequently, and 90% of female student athletes had witnessed it in their schools. In another study, in the USA, Freeberg (2003) found that 25 % of 126 respondents reported that they personally experienced harassment; 50% of the female respondents had observed harassment. 33% of high school respondents had experienced harassment; 30% of female college athletes had experienced sexual harassment; about a third of the coaches reported that they had been harassed, 9% of respondents had dated a coach and 42% of the respondents had witnessed another person being sexually harassed while involved with track and field activities. Hayden’s (2003) study also revealed that female athletes experienced more behaviour associated with sexual harassment from male coaches than they did from female coaches. In the same study, Hayden (2003) established that female college athletes reported that male coaches made more sexual harassment comments and jokes than female coaches.

In their study, Hayden (2003) established that 28% of the female athletes reported experiences of sexual harassment by male athletes; 16, 6% by male head coaches; 11, 1% by male assistant coaches. 77, 7% reported that harassers were male compared to 22, 2% who reported that harassers were female.

Nevin, Hakan & Mitat (2007) in a study in Turkey found that 200 out of 356 sports women participants in their study were sexually harassed most frequently after games or training and most frequently at the sport centre. The same study also revealed that a sizeable proportion of elite sports women from different branches of sport were exposed to sexual harassment. Prior to the work of Nevin et al. (2007), Fasting, Brackenridge & Sundgot-Borgen (2000) in Norway had established that sexual harassment occurred in almost every sport group and was not specific to any particular sport type. Fasting et al. (2000) also found that fifty-one percent of 553 participants had experienced one or more forms of sexual harassment. In that particular study, female athletes had been exposed to sexual harassment more often by someone outside sport (39%) than someone in a sport setting (28%). Fifteen (15%) of total sample had experienced sexual harassment from an authority in sport and (19%) from peer athletes. The same study also revealed that women involved in ‘masculine’ sports such as weight lifting, shot put and soccer had a higher, reported experience of harassment than other two sporting groups, viz: gender-neutral and feminine (Fasting et al, 2000). Fasting et al added that these women in ‘masculine’ sport had also been harassed by peer athletes.

Sexual harassment in sport can occur on the bus to and from a sports trip, at a sports camp, in a sports facility and other places (Staurowsky, 2011). Sexual harassment in sport can be verbal through lewd comments on ones’ sex life, demeaning language, collective assault, humiliating female athletes during coaching sessions or sessions with sexual talk or covert jokes, sexual bullying by attacking dress and negative comments on a sportsperson’s body or performance (Buzviz 2011; Nevin et al 2007). It can be non-verbal through texting on the cell phone, watching a movie depicting interracial sex scenes when there is an affected person, for example, a white or black person (Steinbach 2008), placing sexually abusive messages, pictures and comments about athletes with or without their consent through IT facilities within and outside the institution (Module 8 Gender Violence and Sexual harassment; Laredo, Reid, & Deux, 1995; Williams & Brake, 1998). Sexual harassment can also be physical.
through touching, scratching palms, patting or grabbing bottoms or grazing breasts in the playing field during demonstration of a skill. Brackenridge (2001) added that in sport, the harasser traps the athlete through a process called ‘grooming’ until they are able to abuse the individual.

Statement of the problem
The issue of sexual harassment is of great concern in higher education. The prevalence of sexual harassment in tertiary institutions is well documented. The forms of sexual harassment have also been well investigated and in general hinge on the power disparity between male officials and female students. Also well documented for the general population of female students in colleges are the painful results of sexual harassment which can be both physical and psychological. Some of the harassment even adversely affects academic performance of the females that are the subjects of harassment.

It is possible, but not yet systematically established in Zimbabwe that sexual harassment is as prevalent among female athletes as it is among the general population of females in colleges and universities. It could be more or less. The motivation for this study is thus to systematically establish the extent and nature of female sexual harassment in sport in higher education considering the lead writer’s long experience with sport in higher education and other environments. Sexual harassment really compromises on quality of sport in higher education.

Purpose of the study
A great deal of sexual harassment of the female student has been found in colleges. This study, however, focuses on the possible harassment of the female student in sport. The study further aimed to find out the type of harassment, the perpetrators, when sexual harassment takes place, the place(s) where it happens, the psychological and physical effects and the reaction of those on whom sexual harassment is practised.

Objectives of the study
The objectives were to:
• Determine whether female college athletes experienced sexual harassment.
• Determine the extent to which female students in sport were sexually harassed.
• Establish the type of harassment.
• Identify the perpetrators.
• Determine the time and place when/where sexual harassment took place.
• Specify psychological and physical effects reported from acts of sexual harassment.
• Record the reaction of the victims of sexual harassment.

From the objectives above the following research questions were derived.
• Do female college athletes experience sexual harassment in sport?
• What is the prevalence of female sexual harassment in sport in colleges and universities?
• What type of sexual harassment (if any) is experienced by female college athletes?
• Who (if any) harasses the female college athletes?
• Where does the harassment (if any) take place?
• When do the perpetrators sexually harass the female college athletes?
• What are the effects of sexual harassment on the female college athlete?
• How do the harassed female athletes respond to the harassment?

Research methodology
Research design
A descriptive survey was preferred for this study because it captures perceptions of participants. Further, the design is effective in the sense that it enables the researchers to collect information, describe it and explain perceptions, views and behaviour.

Population
500 female college athletes from 4 institutions of higher learning (two teachers’ colleges, one primary school teacher’s college and one secondary school teacher’s college, one polytechnic college and one university) participated in this study. All the prospective participants had been in college for 1-4 years. This population was made up of women aged 18 to 23 years. The institutions were selected because they were easily accessible to the investigators. The female college athletes were identified through the college sport registers.

Sample
Of the 500 possible participants for this study, only 160 female college athletes agreed to participate in this study by completing and returning a self-administered questionnaire.

Instrumentation
A ten-item self-administered questionnaire was used. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section solicited the bio-data (sex, age, level of study at college) of each respondent and the second part sought data on whether female college athletes experienced sexual harassment or not. If they did, the questionnaire then sought the type of harassment, by whom they were harassed, the place where it happened, the time, the psychological and physical effects and the nature of reaction by those who were harassed. The questionnaire was used because of the large number of respondents to be surveyed. It was the most appropriate instrument where participants in the study could be brought together at each research site to take the survey at one time and was very economical in the use of time (Munn and Drever, 1999).

The questionnaire had five open-ended and five closed sections. Closed-questions were used in order to solicit specific responses about the female college athlete. Responses from closed questions are easy to solicit specific responses about the female college athlete. Responses from closed questions are easy to solicit specific responses about the female college athlete. Responses from closed questions are easy
to tabulate and allow more items than would open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allow the respondent to be more elaborate. They enable the researcher to generate unpredictable, less structured information.

**Instrument development**

Questions for the questionnaire were aligned to the research questions that were posed. The three researchers independently drafted as many questions as they could for each research question. Then the three researchers met discussed and reached consensus on what questions should be included in the questionnaire, making sure that the questions solicited all the information that was needed. Questions were also evaluated in discussions, for clarity, utility and other attributes. The researchers agreed that the questionnaire was consensually valid. The opinions of other researchers within the lead author’s institution were sought and incorporated in the instrument development.

**Pilot study**

To make sure that the questionnaire would collect the data that was needed without presenting any difficulties to the respondents, the questionnaire was pilot tested with twenty female athletes from one of the colleges, but these did not participate in the main study. There were no major modifications to the questionnaire as a result of pilot testing.

Five hundred questionnaires were then distributed to respondents across all the research sites.

**Data collection procedure**

The lead researcher sought permission from the institutional authorities to carry out the study. She then asked the authorities to allow her to address the female college athletes on the topic of the study. The lead researcher then informed the female college athletes that those who were willing to participate would answer a self-administered questionnaire at a time to be advised. The prospective participants were informed that the information they would give would be held in confidence and would not be used for purposes beyond the study. No one else, apart from the researchers would have access to the completed questionnaires and the identities of the participants who had completed the questionnaires.

The prospective participants were informed that taking part in the study was entirely voluntary and those who felt that they wished to withdraw from the study at any time would be free to do so.

The researchers visited each research station on different days. At each station the team took the participants into one large room where they explained the purpose of the visit again to those who had agreed to participate. In addition, sexual harassment which was a key concept in this study was described so that the participants would understand it clearly. The participants were then given the questionnaires to complete. Before they completed the questionnaire, they were encouraged to browse through the questionnaire in case they had any questions. There being no questions the questionnaire was distributed. The respondents were allowed to work in the room or outside, but were advised that they should hand in their completed questionnaires at the end of the hour. Only 160 questionnaires were returned.

**Data Analysis strategy**

Analysis of data was both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative data from open ended questions followed a thematic approach in its description and interpretation. The thematic approach helped in clarifying the topics on which the problem was based. The quantitative data from closed questions was analysed and presented in tables showing frequencies of responses and corresponding percentages.

**Results and discussions**

**Subject to sexual harassment**

The study found that of the 160 respondents (72(45%) reported that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment. These findings reveal that sexual harassment is prevalent among female college athletes. The results show that sexual harassment of female students reported here was much lower than that which was found by the American Association of University Women (2001) which was 81% and considerably lower than the findings of Fasting et al. Norway which was 51 % and by Nevin et al (2007) (in Turkey) which was 56 %. However, the prevalence rate reported in this study was much higher than that reported by Freberg (2003) in the United States of America and the 20% established by Hogshead-Makar (2003) in Canada.

Table 1 reveals that female college athletes experienced variety types of sexual harassment such as demeaning language, unwanted jokes, touching, scratching of palms and a good number of others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of sexual harassment</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demeaning language</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted touching</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scratching palms</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted texting</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwanted patting</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice sessions with sex talk</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewd comments</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective assault</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative comments</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grazing breast and hugging</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study also sought to identify who sexually harassed female college athletes. Table 2 shows that sport administrator; trainer/coach, peer athletes and spectator were responsible for the sexual harassment of female athletes.

Table 2 Perpetrators of sexual harassment to female college athlete

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perpetrator</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male coach</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male peer athletes</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male sports administrator</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male spectator</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The female college athletes revealed that 39 (54%) were harassed by the male coach whereas 36 (50%) were harassed by male peer athletes. The study found that female athletes in colleges were most harassed by their male coaches and male peer athletes. The results showed that in Zimbabwe the percentage of female college athletes sexually harassed by male coaches and male peer athletes was much higher than 15% harassed by authority figures in sport and 19% harassed by male peer athletes found in the study by Fasting et al. in Norway and the 20% female athletes harassed by their male coaches in Canada (Hogheid & Makar, 2003). However the low percentage of (17%) athletes harassed by someone outside sport settings (spectators) was sharply different from a corresponding prevalence of 39% found by Fasting et al. (2000).

It can be concluded that the coach was the most common perpetrator of sexual harassment in sport. This may suggest that the male coach was damaging the quality of female sport in higher education. This may be possible because coaches spent most of the time with the athletes, which predisposed the athletes to harassment. The future and welfare of the athletes depended on the coaches who had power and authority in sport (Brackenridge, 2001) and as could be inferred from the work on Zindi (2002) and Jamela (2011) with respect to general female student populations in colleges and universities.

The time when sexual harassment is committed

The results also showed that sexual harassment was commonly perpetrated on the female college athlete (49%) after training, after a game (35%), during a sports trip (11%) and during training (6%). The results showed that sexual harassment was perpetrated on the female college athlete mostly after training and after games. The results are consistent with Nevin et al (2007) findings in Turkey who stated that female athletes were most frequently harassed after games or training. Staurowsky (2011) concurred that sexual harassment might be perpetrated on the bus to and from a sports trip and this was after games. Brackenridge (2001) reported that sexual harassers in sport took time to groom the victim till they are able to abuse the individual. This time for grooming was mostly after games when everyone was relaxed.

Places where sexual harassment takes place

The study found that college sport centre, community stadia, trainer’s office, sports trip, college campus, staff bus, gym, and shop were the places where sexual harassment took place. The most frequent place was the college sport centre, trainer’s office and the bus to and from a sports trip. The findings seemed to establish that the sports centre was a hideaway for sports personnel who felt that they were in charge of those places and controlled entry to them. This result concurred with that of Nevin et al (2007) who found out in Turkey that 200 out of 356 participants were sexually harassed, most frequently at the sport centre. Findings were inconsistent with those of Steinbach (2008) who reported that a female football team manager was sexually harassed by players on the bus from a sports trip. Freberg (2011) reported a higher percentage (42%) of 126 respondents who had witnessed another person being sexually harassed while involved with track and field activities.

The effects of sexual harassment of the female college athletes

The study revealed that 57 of the 72 (79%) respondents acknowledged a decrease in sporting performance after being sexually harassed. Female athletes also reported that they suffered psychological effects from the sexual harassment. These psychological effects included fear, demoralisation, embarrassment, anger, stress, reduced drive to participate, loss of concentration among others. The results concurred with Clayton cited by Schomo (2007) who stated that individuals who were sexually harassed in sport claimed that the harassment adversely affected their participation in athletic programmes. This showed that athletes’ performance might be affected by the environment in which they were participating. The Athletic Business (March 31, 2008) also reported a women’s basketball player who revealed that her coach would send her text saying, “I love you, I miss you, can’t wait to see you.” She left the team because she felt uncomfortable.

Results in this study also showed that the female college athlete suffered several physical problems such as headaches 11(15%), insomnia 33 (46%), irregular menstruation 13(18%), fatigue10 (14%) and dizziness (7%) after the sexual harassment incident. This also showed that sexual harassment affected the female college athlete emotionally and physiologically. The problems cited indicate signs of negative stress/distress or anxiety. Martens (1982) cited in Cox (1990:122) define anxiety in terms of negative affect (fear, apprehension, worry and tension). Anxiety affects sport performance.
Sexual harassment is not tolerated, and measures must be taken to ensure that everyone is aware of the laws and how to handle harassment within the institutional structures when it occurs. It is common knowledge that sexual harassment is not tolerated, and the organization must act to draft and distribute the organization's policy on how to handle harassment within the institutional structures when it occurs. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 protects individuals from discrimination against education, employment, and others. The 2005 Sex Discrimination Amendment Act made it an organization's business to know how his/her student, employees, and friends are conducting themselves in order to know that sexual harassment is not tolerated, and the organization must act to draft and distribute the organization's policy on how to handle harassment within the institutional structures when it occurs.

In the United Kingdom (UK), there are a number of laws on sexual harassment. The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 protects individuals from discrimination against education, employment, and others. The 2005 Sex Discrimination Amendment Act made it an organization's business to know how his/her student, employees, and friends are conducting themselves in order to know that sexual harassment is not tolerated, and the organization must act to draft and distribute the organization's policy on how to handle harassment within the institutional structures when it occurs.

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Recommendations

The female college athletes are exposed to sexual harassment in Zimbabwe, Manicaland. Therefore, the following recommendations should be considered:

- Policies, security guidelines and other materials should be prepared to increase the security of the female college athlete. The harassers should be punished with deterrent and appropriate punishment.
- Colleges and universities should encourage athletes to report cases to senior administrative personnel who should take corrective action.
- Harassed female college athletes should be counselled to help them deal with the problems.

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