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# Exploring the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand

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# Exploring the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand




**A report on a research study presented to**

**The Department of Social Work**

**School of Human and Community Development**

**Faculty of Humanities**

**University of the Witwatersrand**

**In partial fulfilment of the requirements**

**for the degree Master of Arts in Social Work in the**

**field of Occupational Social Work**

**by**

**Mr. Matimba Hlungwani**

**Student Number: 1969771**

**12 April 2023**

## CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

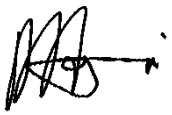
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

School of Human and Community Development

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## ABSTRACT

The internet and the digital technologies have drastically transformed the world of work. An enormous rise in the use of the internet has provided unavoidable grounds for abuse and exposure to cyber-sexual harassment. Cyber-sexual harassment can be understood as the use of digital platforms and tools for unwanted sexual advances, comments, and sexual coercion. This phenomenon is affecting women profoundly as studies have demonstrated that cyber-sexual harassment has the same effects on victims as physical sexual harassment, nonetheless this is often overlooked in workplace sexual harassment policies. This study attempted to explore the perceptions of female academics on cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law in the University of the Witwatersrand. The study used a qualitative approach, and purposive sampling was employed in the selection of twelve participants. The study population comprised of female academic employees of University of the Witwatersrand. The researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to conduct face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was carried out to code the data, and transcriptions were done verbatim. The findings of this study demonstrate that institutional culture and the intrinsic nature of our societal norms fuelled by patriarchy and masculinity play a significant role in aggravating cyber-sexual harassment in South African institutions of higher learning. The study suggests that Occupational Social Work should always be part of the institutions' strategic interventions into cyber-sexual harassment, adding value to the institutions' readiness to create a sexual harassment free environment in the 21st century and beyond.



**Key words:** Cyber-Sexual harassment, Female academics, Gender discrimination, Institution of higher learning, Workplace,

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## ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| CCDU | Counselling Career Development Unit |
| EE | Equal Education |
| GEO | Gender Equity Office |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| MAOSW | Master of Arts in Occupational Social Work |
| PIS | Participant Information Sheet |
| PTSD | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders |
| SA | South Africa |
| SH | Sexual Harassment |
| Wits | University of the Witwatersrand |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

This first chapter of the study provides introduction and background of the study. This includes the problem statement, rationale of the study, aims and objectives, definition of concepts, and the organization of the study.

## 1.2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Sexual harassment has no standard definition yet; hence, different authors define sexual harassment in relation to a specific context. Zastrow (2010,p.423) defines sexual harassment as, "…unwelcome treatment or sexual discrimination of a person because of his or her gender, and such treatment normally involves the use of lewd gestures and propositions, touching someone who does not want to be touched, or seeking to exchange sexual favours for employment opportunities…" This definition is based on the context of workplace sexual harassment. On the other hand, Apina-Pelemo (2020,p.42) defines sexual harassment as a "sex-based behaviour that derogates, degrades or demeans individual in a guise to protect or increase the social status of the perpetrator".

Cyber-sexual harassment is a relatively new phenomenon, and it therefore does not have a standard definition. The definition of cyber-sexual harassment is typically based on the variety of sexual harassment definitions, just adding the context in which it surfaces, i.e. cyber space. Schenk (2008) defines cyber-sexual harassment as "any gender-/sex-related comment received or image viewed that causes the individual to experience psychological discomfort". According to an article by Koleini (2016), cyber-sexual harassment refers to "the use of digital tools, in particular, social media and communicating technologies, for unwanted sexual comments and advances, solicitation of sexual favours, and sexual coercion".

This research explored the perceptions of female academics on cyber-sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning, with special focus on the School of Law, Wits University. The research report details the empirical evidence of the social scientific study.

## 1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Face-to-face sexual harassment is well known and prevalent globally (Barak, 2005). This type of harassment does not exclude institutions of higher learning, where a surge in policy development and formation of sexual harassment committees have been on rise address the offline/physical sexual harassment against students and members of staff (Wolpe, et al, 1997). However, the rise in internet use and innovative teaching technology has had a huge impact on institutions of higher learning, which has resulted in greater incidents of cyber-sexual harassment (Abbas & Arafa, 2017). Students and academics are highly connected via the use of internet-based communications platforms, especially email (Richman et al, 1999). Taking advantage of such a transformative step towards "smart" teaching and learning is potentially highly beneficial. However, Abbas and Arafa (2017) claim that the rise in internet use in institutions of higher learning also has its dark side; thus, the platforms in which people connect for academic purposes such as emails, SharePoint, and social media platforms are used to cyber-harass people based on their gender and sexual orientation.

Cyber-sexual harassment is a complex social issue affecting individuals in different settings such as their work environments, schools, social clubs, and homes, just like face-to-face sexual harassment (Dang, 2017). While the unwanted imposition of sexual desires in online platforms continues to adversely affect internet users, very little is known about the phenomenon. Cyber-sexual harassment is a contemporarily fast-spreading problem that is causing severe trauma to individuals, especially women. However, it is still overlooked as compared to face-to-face sexual harassment (Citron,2009 & Barak, 2005). Cyber-sexual harassment can be understood as the use of digital platforms and tools for unwanted sexual advances, comments, and sexual coercion (Schenk, 2008).

Cyber-sexual harassment has been associated with psychological discomfort, awkwardness, and feeling unsafe (Schenk, 2008). If this phenomenon is not explored and confronted, institutions of higher learning will continue to suffer in South Africa, resulting in poor academic production. A study conducted by Richman et al, (1999) discovered that there was a strong correlation between sexual harassment and mental health consequences within University employees. These researchers also claim that high levels of abuse of power and discrimination against women are very prevalent.

According to Richman et al (1999), institutions of higher learning are historically dominated by male academics. Gouws and Kritzinger (2007) claim that sexual harassment is likely to manifest in an environment where men are dominant. University of the Witwatersrand is one of the South African Universities where male academics are dominant with 51% of male academics in 2017/8, however, there has been a huge improvement over the years when compared to 62% of male academic staff in 2009 (Wits, 2018). According to Rathgeber (2013), sexual harassment in South African Universities is as a result of a lack of clear sexual harassment policies, the dominant culture of silence, fear of reprisals, fear of being labeled by colleagues, and, most importantly, a lack of basic training on sexual harassment and the use of institutions' sexual harassment policies where they do exist.

The rationale of this study came after an observation that University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)is committed to the provision of a safe environment for working, learning and the execution of other services, where sexual harassment and sexual violence has no place to manifest (University of the Witwatersrand sexual harassment policy, 2013). Although the University has a sexual harassment policy in place, there are several notable gaps such as the absence of protective measures against cyber-sexual harassment. The policy mainly focuses on one-on-one sexual harassment and does not extensively outline steps of dealing with cyber-sexual harassment. The policy protects employees and students from sexual harassment which takes place in the university premises, but cyber-sexual harassment can take place anywhere, anytime because it happens on the cyber-space (Richman et al, 1999). Therefore, the significance of this study was to gather information which may be useful in policy reviews, giving perceptions on different ways in which academic staffs think cyber-sexual harassment could be resolved.

Cyber-sexual harassment is a relatively new research area in South Africa, and little is known about the phenomenon and its impact in the institutions of higher learning (Van Wyk & Rothmann. 2011). In light of the rise in the use of internet-based communication platforms, where people socialize, and achieve academic goals; it is fundamental to gain more insight on the phenomenon that is perceived to be a serious workplace issue, especially in relation to the upcoming fourth industrial revolution (Barak, 2005).

## 1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

How do female academics of the Wits University School of Law perceive cyber-sexual harassment within an institution of higher learning?

## 1.4. AIM OF THE STUDY

The primary aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand

## 1.5. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a) To determine the definition of cyber-sexual harassment by female academics;

b) To explore the generic views of female academics on cyber-sexual harassment against women;

c) To explore the opinions of female academics on vilifying of cyber-sexual harassment and discrimination against women;

d) To determine the contingency on the regulation of communication and eLearning platforms within the institutions of higher learning;

e) To explore the possible ways in transforming institutional culture and governance to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment.

## 1.6. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

### *1.6.1. SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

According to Aina-Pelemo et al (2020), Sexual harassment refers to an unwanted sexual conduct towards another person.

### *1.6.2. GENDER DISCRIMINATION*

According to Page et al (2022), Gender discrimination refers to an unfair treatment towards a person due to their gender and/or sexual orientation. This may include employment decisions and social activities that are motivated by one's gender or sexual orientation.

### *1.6.3. AN ACADEMIC*

An academic is a teacher or research scholar at an institution of higher learning such as a University (Oxford Dictionary, 2019.Ed.).

### *1.6.4. SEXISM*

According to Lorenzi-Cioldi & Kulich (2015), Sexism is an attitude that one's sex is superior to the other's sex, which perpetuates an unequal and unfair treatment of individuals based on their sex.

## 1.7. ORGANIZATION OF REPORT

This research report comprises of five chapters organized as follows:

**Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter provides introduction and background of the study. This includes the problem statement, rationale of the study, aims and objectives, definition of concepts, and the organization of the study.

**Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review**

This chapter provides existing literature about cyber-sexual harassment. It contains engagement of the theoretical framework underpinning this study, and other relevant and current research in the area of sexual harassment and women in academia.

**Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

This chapter gives an overview of the research approach, data collection method and instrument, data analysis method, sampling procedure, and limitation of the study as applied by the researcher.

**Chapter 4: Presentation and discussion of the findings**

Chapter 4 provides the presentation of data collected for the purpose of this study, and the discussion in accordance with the themes and sub-themes established from data analysis.

## Chapter 5: Main findings, conclusions, and recommendations

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the main findings as per the objectives of the study informed by the themes and sub-themes. This chapter also includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

# CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides existing literature about cyber-sexual harassment. It contains engagement of the theoretical framework underpinning the study, and other relevant and current research in the area of sexual harassment and women in academia. It explores the history, controversies, and fundamentals of the subject to define the direction of the study and its main aims and objectives as outlined in the first chapter, by discussion the existing literature and the legislative framework.

## 2.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section of the report comprises of the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

### *2.2.1. THE FOUR-FACTOR MODEL OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT (O'HARE & O'DONOHUE, 1998)*

Studies have shown that sexual harassment has been described in the context of the workplace since the 1970's (Barak, 2012). When MacKinnon (1978) wrote the book *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, she based her arguments of the notion that sexual harassment towards women was a way of demonstrating power over women, discrimination, and authority by men, especially those in higher positions. She argues that the manner in which men control women's sexuality is in the same manner as "capital controls employees" (MacKinnon, 1978).

O'Hare and O'Donohue (1998) developed the so-called four-factor model, which is the aetiology of sexual harassment, and it comprises of the following models: biological model, organizational model, socio-cultural model, and sex-role spillover model, which will be explained more in detail below. The four-factor model attests that in order for sexual harassment to occur, four classifications of factors must be met as illustrated below (Figure 2.2.1).

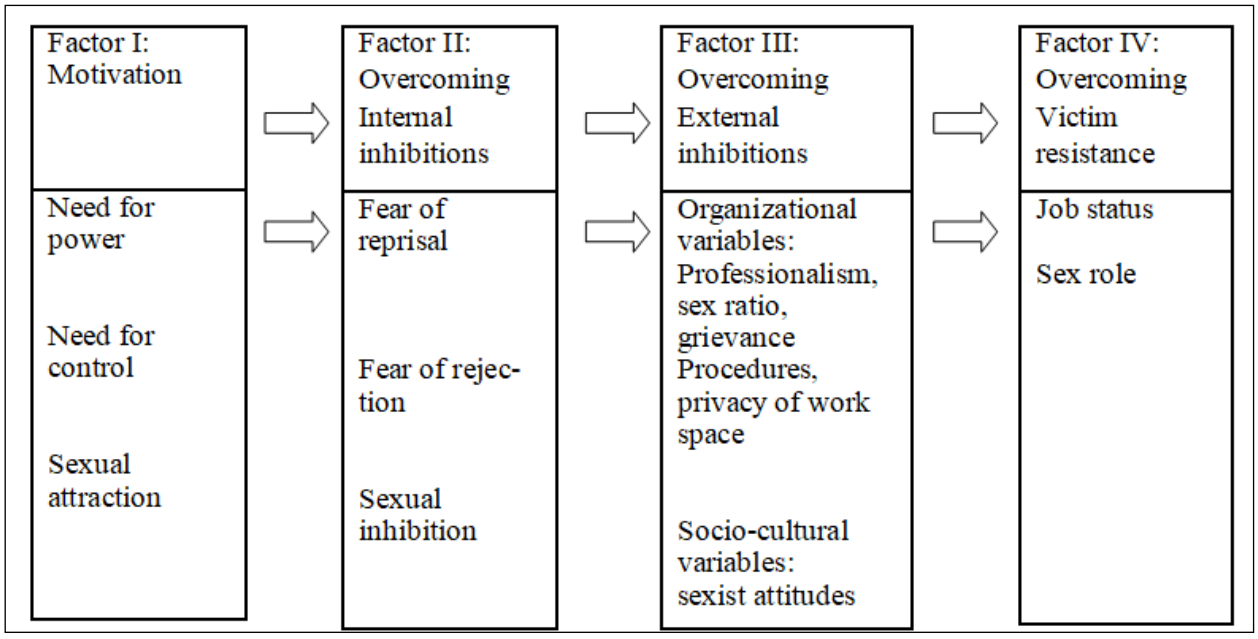



Figure 2.2.1: The four-factor model of sexual harassment (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998)

**Natural or biological model:** The biological model holds that the "demonstration of sex drives towards women is to be accepted, rather than a problem to be solved" (Merkin, 2012,p.15). Barak (1997), describe the behavioural model as a question of biology. This model asserts that "sexual harassment behaviour is simply a natural expression of sexual attraction and that men and women are naturally attracted to each other" (Whaley & Tucker, 1998,p.22). It also stresses that more than women, men have powerful sex drive towards women, and therefore, they want sex aggressively both in the work environment and other settings (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998). This model demonstrates its limitation by undermining the notion that sexual harassment is the act of discrimination against women, and attests to the notion that gender discrimination at the workplace does not exist. O'Hare and O'Donohue (1998) have demonstrated a concern that this model does not acknowledge the consequences associated with the acts of unwanted sexual attention and advances. It also ignores the idea that harassment is about power and not sexuality, and does not explain same-sex sexual harassment.

**Organizational model:** This model holds that organizations over the years have been facilitating sexual harassment and gender discrimination by creating power differences in hierarchical structures based on gender differences. This power is the one that advocates for the abuse of women by men, as men abuse their power in organizational settings (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998). Zastrow (2010), postulates that sexual harassment can take any form in

any setting, but it is likely to take place where men have or feel superior powers over women. Barak (2005) concurs by arguing that over the years, it has been well established that sexual harassment is not only about sex, but the demonstration of power. This is contrary to what it obviously looks like, that sexual harassment is about the gratification of sex drive (Barak, 2005).

Mackinnon (1979,p.179) believes that "sexual harassment perpetuates the interlocked structure by which women have been kept sexually in thrall to men and at the bottom of the labour market". Deora (2016), Barak (2015), and MacKinon (1978) believe that this poor perception of women based on gender inequality contributes to the harassment of women globally. Sahgal and Dang (2017,p.50) claim that sexual harassment of women is "an equaliser against women in power instigated by sexual desire". This idea is also supported by Barak (2005) as he advocates that sexual harassment of women is a tool used to satisfy the harasser's need of domination and power. Both face-to-face and cyber-sexual harassment have been empirically proven to have a strong correlation between power and harassment of women (Schenk, 2008). Men are believed to use power to harass women in cyber space unconsciously; thus, when a man is sexually attracted to a woman in cyber space, he may use his "power" to sexually harass the woman.

**Sociocultural model:** The sociocultural perspective of sexual harassment is rooted within the concepts of "patriarchy and male dominance" (McKinon, 1978). O'Hare and O'Donohue (1998) claim that sexual harassment is more likely to occur in an environment where sex-ratio is imbalanced. A work environment that is male dominant puts women at a greater risk of being subjected to sexual harassment due to their sex roles. This model holds that societal context in which males are praised for their aggression while women are associated with the passive behavioural nature which avoids conflicts and be submissive to men, perpetuates the victimisation of women in the work place (Dang & Sahgal, 2017; O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998).

**Sex-role spillover model**: This model combines the sociocultural and organizational models. It holds that women are associated with the "weaker gender and worthy of a lower social status" (Deora, 2016). McKinon (1978) argues that women are being sexually harassed just because they are women. Societal beliefs also focus on perceived biological differences between men and women and place value on these differences so that men and women are not treated equally (O'Hare & O'Donohue, 1998). As Franks (2012) states that

power can go a long way from controlling the perceived person with less power (both physical and occupational). The sociocultural perspective of sexual harassment is rooted within the concepts of "patriarchy and male dominance" (McKinon, 1978). This situation occurs where you find men occupying high positions in hierarchy, yet women are expected to occupy low-level jobs such as personal assistants to men in executive positions (Fitzgerald et al, 1997).

In South African higher education environment, the four-factor model is relevant because according to Mdleleni (2021), the South African institutions of higher learning are still dominated by male academic employees. This level of inequality breeds grounds for institutional cultures that perpetuates toxic masculinity and patriarchy. Zulu (2003) claims that inequality and underrepresentation of women in senior academic positions emanates from the societal standards from childhood that the social orders and hierarchies as prescribed by the society, should be respected. This notion undermines the abilities and capabilities of women as equal participants and contributors in the academic space where knowledge is shared, and the society at large.

## 2.3. LITERATURE REVIEW

### *2.3.1. INTRODUCTION*

The literature review comprises of the existing data of cyber-sexual harassment and sexual harassment holistically from both local and international literature. In this section consideration is given to the following aspects …

### *2.3.2. STATISTICS ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

Victimisation of women by men has seen sharp increase globally, with the World Health Organization (2021) claiming that 1 out of 3 women experiences sexual harassment in the form of verbal or physical assault. This figure demonstrates how women live in fear of having been objectified, assaulted, and discriminated against for being women. In South Africa alone despite the fact that reporting of sexual offences is believed to be very low, the Statistics South Africa (2020) has reported that 40% of women reported sexual assault and rape. It is not surprising that South Africa is regarded as the pond of sexual assault globally (South African Human Rights Watch, 2019). Table 2.2.2. below illustrates the statistics of reported cases of sexual offences during the period 2018/2019 as published in 2020 by Statistics South Africa (2020).

Table: 2.3.2. Statistics of sexual offences in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

| Statistic | 2018/19 | CV % |
|---|---|---|
| Number of incidents | 26 460 | 38 |
| Number of victims | 26 460 | 38 |
| Sexual offence victims as a percentage of the population (16+) | 0,07 | 38 |
| Number of victims who reported at least one incidence | 23 237 | 42 |
| 95% Confidence interval for the number of victims who reported to the police | (4 168, 42 306) | |
| Percentage of victims who reported at least one incidence | 88 | 12 |

Table: 2.3.2. Illustrates that 88% of the sexual offences that took place during 2018/19 were not reported to the police. While this statistics demonstrates how South Africa is swimming in the pool of sexual offences, this may not be a true reflection of the actual cases of sexual offences because the provided stats does not include cases that were handled by authorities of various organizations and companies internally.

Table: 2.3.3. Number of reported sexual assault cases by province for the period 2014 to 2019 (Statistics South Africa, 2020).

| Province | Number of reported cases | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2014/15 | 2015/16 | 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 |
| Western Cape | 7 369 | 7 130 | 7 115 | 7 075 | 7 043 |
| Eastern Cape | 9 224 | 8 797 | 8 050 | 8 094 | 8 731 |
| Northern Cape | 1 578 | 1 719 | 1 587 | 1 538 | 1 578 |
| Free State | 4 094 | 3 928 | 3 488 | 3 284 | 3 457 |
| KwaZulu-Natal | 9 079 | 8 947 | 8 484 | 8 759 | 9 308 |
| North West | 4 585 | 4 164 | 4 326 | 4 182 | 4 021 |
| Gauteng | 9 902 | 9 510 | 9 566 | 10 116 | 10 752 |
| Mpumalanga | 3 474 | 3 331 | 3 216 | 3 198 | 3 470 |
| Limpopo | 4 312 | 4 369 | 3 828 | 3 862 | 4 060 |
| **SOUTH AFRICA** | **53 617** | **51 895** | **49 660** | **50 108** | **52 420** |

The above statistics demonstrates the high rates of of sexual assault cases , between the years 2014 and 2019. Although at the time of writing this report, there was no current statistics that demonstrated the impact of working from home due to the national lockdown as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is clear from the statistics that Gauteng Province, which is where this study was based, records highest number of sexual assault cases than any other province (Statistics South Africa, 2020). The statistics used for the purpose of this study cannot be entirely accurate because they do not necessarily depicts cyber-sexual

assaults or harassment as what the study is all about. However, they give an indication of how sex predators victimize women on a daily basis.

### *2.3.3. TRIVIALISATION OF CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

Although according to Sahgal and Dang (2017,p.52), victims of sexual harassment usually choose to remain silent after an incident or a series of sexual harassment incidents as "such occurrences can be tormenting and lead to feelings of helplessness and despair". Sahgal and Dang (2017) further claim that sexual harassment victims overlook and underestimate their feelings, and end up living with the untold truth for various reasons. In a study conducted by Fitzgerald at al,, (1997), it was discovered that victims do not lay complaints because they fear that they will not be taken seriously, that perpetrators would not face the consequences, or that they will be judged by their colleagues. This phenomenon is also supported by Sahgal and Dang (2017) who postulate that some organizations tolerate a culture of sexual harassment due to the status of the perpetrator in the hierarchy, threats to job security, stigma, and the need to preserve the reputation of the perpetrator (Barak, 2015). This means that when a perpetrator is someone who holds a managerial position, it is likely that the case will be repudiated. For example, after eleven years of victimization of women sexually by the Equal Education's (EE) then boss, the organization always protected the perpetrator, while victims' plights were not taken seriously (Groundup, 2019).

On issues of cyber-sexual harassment, there are people who still feel that it is not a serious issue because the perpetrator was not "physical" to the victim (Sahgal & Dang, 2017). This is in spite of the notion that the acts are repetitive and intentional, "causing discomfort" on the victim's end, and that they are targeted to specific individuals (Schenk, 2008,p.85). Sometimes "women tend to tolerate the behaviours of sexual harassment and avoid confrontation at the expense of their discomfort"; that is, they continue to withhold the information about their victimization because they do not want to tarnish the image of the organization, especially then the perpetrator holds a senior position (Citron, 2009,p.2).

Citron (2009,p.395) postulates that "commentators further trivialize harassment by describing targeted women as overacting 'drama queen(s)'". For example, some people believe that death threats do not exist, but people are just seeking attention or recognition by the state in cases of female journalists claiming to have experienced death threats for blogging. Citron (2009,p.395) further argues that many people dismiss cyber-sexual

harassment as constituting “innocuous teasing”. Simonds (2015) believe that it is possible for women to address harassment on the net on their own. However, these are just people’s views, which contribute to the trivialization of cyber-sexual harassment on women, referring to the cyber-sexual harassment as a “harmless teasing” (Griffiths, 2003,p.90). This cannot be the case because research has discovered that cyber-sexual harassment has more or less similar effects on victims as face-to-face offline sexual harassment (Franks, 2012).

Franks (2012,p.675) argues that there are three prominent characteristics of harassment on the cyber-space described as “an offense to dignity, means of enforcing gender stereotype, and gender inequality”. Although the above characteristics of sexual harassment on the cyber space demonstrate the seriousness and adverse impact on the victims functioning, victims may still be viewed as someone who has invited the advances (Zastrow, 2010). Face-to-face sexual harassment was at some point not recognized, with trivialisation that it was not as serious as rape (MacKinnon, 1978). The same sentiment is now applied to cyber-sexual harassment, being viewed as less ‘serious’ than face-to-face sexual harassment.

### *2.3.4. TYPES OF CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

This section describes various types of cyber-sexual harassment.

#### *2.3.4.1. Active verbal sexual harassment*

Schenk (2008) posits that active verbal sexual harassment involves the intentional sending of sexual messages that are offensive towards the victim. Sometimes the harasser is trying to make jokes, wherein one makes comments in the chat group, for example, “ladies with big titties, there’s no milk in the kitchen”. Barak (2005) adds that this type of cyber-sexual harassment is usually called “dirty jokes”. However, if the message reaches the victims and they feel offended, and when the act is not invited or consented for, then the act can be regarded as cyber-sexual harassment (Barak, 2005).

#### *2.3.4.2. Passive verbal sexual harassment*

Passive verbal sexual harassment involves the sending of offensive messages indirectly to the victims. This could be the use of general sexual comments which are not targeting at a specific person, such as nicknames or phrases (Barak, 2005). For example, “It is therapeutic to rub one’s balls” (Schenk, 2008). Scott et al (2001) believe that this type of cyber sexual harassment is usually called “flaming”. They went on to claim that harassers do not target a

specific victim, but the victims who receive the message can be offended and feel uncomfortable.

#### *2.3.4.3. Active graphic sexual harassment*

This type of sexual harassment is very common, especially on the online dating platforms. It involves the intentional sending of pornographic pictures or videos to the victim (Schenk, 2008). In the South African context, my observation is that this type of cyber-sexual harassment usually takes place on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and other social network platforms. Barak (2005), and Scott et al (2001) believe that the judgement of the pornographic content posted or sent to an online platform such as emails, depends of the sensitivity of the viewers. They claim that while some may find pleasure in viewing the contents, other viewers may suffer psychological distress.

#### *2.3.4.4. Passive graphic sexual harassment*

Schenk (2008) claims that the passive graphic gender harassment involves the public posting of erotic and pornographic pictures or videos on websites or social media platforms, without directing them to a specific person. Therefore, such pictures or videos would be accessible to anyone, and be offensive to the viewers; for example, posting of pornographic pictures or videos on online sharing platforms, without writing a warning that the content of the video or picture could be offensive to other people (Carnes, 2003).

### *2.3.5. Effects of cyber-sexual harassment on victims*

Deora (2016) found that cyber-sexual harassment has more or less the same effects as those of face-to-face sexual harassment. She associates cyber-sexual harassment with humiliation, and ascertained that women who have suffered humiliation due to online sexual harassment demonstrate some specific behavioural characteristics such as powerlessness, anger, fright, depression, numbness and lack of self-confidence. Schenk (2008) postulates that victims of cyber-sexual harassment report experiences of psychological discomfort such as feeling awkward and unsafe, and feeling uncomfortable communicating with the harasser, or even using the internet generally.

While other people believe that the impact of cyber-sexual harassment is not severe since one can just leave the platform in which cyber-sexual harassment could potentially take

place, it is arguably not as easy as it may sound, especially in an era in which almost everything happens online. One could just as easily say that face-to-face harassment could be solved by relocating geographically. But in the cases of cyber-sexual harassment, an online marketing specialist cannot just leave the net where a large pool of her clients is located , due to harassment. Arafa (2017) claim that the exposure to cyber-sexual harassment exposes victims to severe emotional distress and it can also compromise one's career or restrict the normal activities of one's job. Job loss and withdrawal from online social and economic activities were also discovered by Barak (2005).

### *2.3.6. CHALLENGES IN PROSECUTION AND ENFORCING CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAWS*

This section discusses are various notable challenges regarding the prosecution and enforcing laws and policies against cyber-sexual harassment.

#### *2.3.6.1. Identity of cyber-criminals*

The fact that cyber-sexual harassment happens on the cyber-space make it easy for perpetrators to hide behind fake names and multiple personalities. Ajayi (2016) asserts that the greatest challenge in stemming cyber-crimes globally is the anonymous nature of this crime. This is because no one knows who is behind the name or personality behind the crime. The cyber-criminals make use of login credentials to the online communication platform that are untraceable by the IP address.

#### *2.3.6.2. Challenges with jurisdiction*

In addition to challenges of anonymity as discussed above, jurisdiction of the courts of different countries and nationalities is also one of the serious challenges that the courts face regarding the enforcement of cyber-crimes laws, especially cyber-sexual harassment. "Jurisdiction may be defined as the power of a court or judge to entertain an action, petition or proceedings" (Ajayi, 2016,p.5). Therefore, if the courts or disciplinary action committee does not have such jurisdiction to enforce particular laws, legislations, or cyber-sexual harassment policies, the policies become useless.

#### *2.3.6.3. Lack of effective reporting, and poorly trained law enforcement officials*

Kimble (2016) claims that one of the biggest challenge in enforcing the rule of law against cyber-criminals is lack of effective reporting. She claims that most of the law enforcement

officials are ill-trained and therefore, do not have knowledge and skills to handle cases of this nature. Ajayi (2016) support this claim by stating that cyber-criminals know exactly what they are doing on the cyber-space, and they have various methods to protect themselves. Thus, a poorly trained law enforcement official cannot lay charges on cases of this nature. This creates a mystery of reporting because the people in which cyber-sexual harassment cases are reported to, do not have adequate knowledge, training and experience necessary to tackle cyber-sexual harassment cases.

#### *2.3.6.4. Lack of adequate legislation*

Lack of effective legislation and labour laws and other employment policies also contribute in hindering the punishment of cyber-sexual harassment criminals (Mohd, Lee, & Chan, 2014). Any attempt to rectifying any institutions' systemic challenges starts from developing effective policies or legislations against it. Policies do not only provide procedures in which the perpetrators can be disciplined, but they also send a deterrent message to the potential perpetrators that their barbaric behaviours are not welcome, and they are therefore, punishable (Kimble, 2016).

### *2.3.7. UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND SEXUAL HARASSMENT POLICY*

As part of the commitment to enabling safe institutional environment where everyone may learn, work, and carry out any other activities free of sexual harassment, University of the Witwatersrand developed a policy against it [sexual harassment]. The Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault and Rape Policy and Procedures (2013), was developed as a resolution of the sexual harassment advisory board, to curb the escalating institutional culture of gender discrimination and sexual assaults rampaging the South African institutions of higher learning. Therefore, the development of the Sexual Harassment Policy was a one-step forward into actively demonstrating that the university does not tolerate sexual harassment, and that there would be serious disciplinary actions against perpetrators of sexual harassment.

The university's sexual harassment policy is comprehensive, targeted, and radical about the university's stance on sexual harassment. It explicitly describes what constitutes sexual harassment, reporting protocols, and disciplinary actions thereof. Although the university's sexual harassment policy is adequate to protect students, staff, and contractors, it also has come notable drawbacks. The policy does not exclusively describes sexual harassment that

occurs on a cyber-space. The protective measures in place do not consider outside the university premises (including student residential areas), which means that a victim is not fully protected by the policy when outside the university premises and cyber space. Lastly, perpetrators can resign during the disciplinary processes to escape prosecution and tarnish of their image, which would make it impossible to secure employment in future.

### *2.3.8. INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND*

University of the Witwatersrand is a renowned research and innovative university at a global level. Its reputation for academic output and that of being an incubator of notable corporate leaders and Noble Prize winners contradicts its culture of housing sex predators and pest (De Waal & Mcluckie, 2013). Between 2013 and 2019, University of the Witwatersrand was caught in the controversy of sexual harassment scandals as the outcomes of the disciplinary proceedings were questionable (Fengu, 2020). Fengu (2020) further claims that the sexual harassment accused senior staff member who was at first, found in controversy of the university's sexual harassment policy, was reinstated back to his position after what was believed to have been a decision based on the findings of the de novo [heard anew] investigation.

To some members of the university, the outcome of the second investigations, which saw the accused reinstated back to his position within the University, was very controversial and believed to have caused secondary victimization to the victims. This is because the victims were allegedly invited to participate in the second hearing of the matter, of which they all declined to participate, making it an obvious win due to what is called "uncontested hearing" (Fengu, 2020).

The 2013 sexual harassment scandal where a full professor was implicated on sexual misconduct was just a turning point for the outside world to get to know the sexual predation the University of the Witwatersrand was (Daily Maverick, 2019). Students, University alumni and some University staff, who fell prey of the University's sex predator, also came out to assert their traumatic stories. One of the former students who had fell a victim some previous thirty years, was still carrying a burden of guilt for having maintained her silence. She felt that should she had reported her ordeal; perhaps it would have assisted (De Waal & Mcluckie, 2013). The feeling of guilt for non-action is not surprising. According to

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (2013), people respond and react to trauma of sexual assault differently. Some choose to speak out, some choose silence due to fear of judgement and consequently end up suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders.

### *2.3.9. THE SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK*

In the Republic of South Africa, it is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that employees are protected from any form of harassment and discrimination in their employ (Employment Equity, Act 55 of 1998). The Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, which is the supreme law of the country, makes it mandatory that every person should be protected from unfair discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, and sexual orientation as stipulated in section 9 (3). It further stresses that equality and non-sexism are fundamental rights of every individual. Therefore, before the implementation of labour laws in the workplace, employees subsequently have some form of protection from discrimination according to the constitution. The constitution therefore, sets grounds in which labour laws of the Republic should be based on.

As the supreme law of the country, the South African constitution created the platform in which the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 was developed. The Employment Equity (EE) advocates for right to equality in the work place, which is subsequent to section 9 of the constitution. Sexual harassment is believed to be a form of discrimination against individuals based on their gender, sex, and sexual orientation (Zastrow, 2010). According to section 6 the EE Act, harassment on the bases of gender, sex, and sexual orientation is classified as discrimination. Therefore, sexual harassment is not only a form of discrimination against individuals on the basis above, but also violation of individuals' constitutional rights to equality, privacy and human dignity. It is therefore, the responsibility of the employer to ensure that the rights of employees are preserved, in order to create and maintain a harassment free environment.

Given the constitution and the EE Act, employers can develop organizational policies that protect employees against sexual harassment in the work place. The Code of Good Practice in Handling Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace of 2005 provides guidelines, definitions and principles applicable to employers and employees as far as sexual harassment in the work place is concerned. The codes of good practice does not only assist in developing organizational sexual harassment policies, but also provides systematic procedures in

handling sexual harassment complaints in the work place. The code sets out the responsibilities of the employers regarding sexual harassment within their jurisdiction, and outlines the responsibilities of employees. In addition to the EE, the codes of good practice stresses the importance of preserving the employees' rights to privacy, equality and human dignity at any given circumstances, and that the employer should always abide by this principle.

The Sexual Harassment Policy Framework and the Code of Good Practice in Handling Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace of 2005 make prescripts to consider when developing policies against sexual harassment. This forms a reliable basis in which employers can set out the outlook of their organizations' commitment to creating a sexual harassment free environment. Unlike the Employment Equity Act which entails the protection from harassment generally, the Code of Good Practice in Handling Sexual Harassment Cases in the Workplace of 2005 specifically describes in details, conditions in which sexual harassment in the work place can be defined and comprehended.

One of the most fundamental South African legislative frameworks to consider for the purposes of this study is the Cybercrimes Act 19 of 2020. The COVID-19 global pandemic was devastating, yet it was a wakeup call to the realization of the future of work. The "working from home" has seen cyber syndicates taking advantage of these circumstances to commit cyber-crimes, of which cyber-sexual harassment is one of them. The cybercrimes act is there to regulate and investigate cybercrimes and set jurisdiction on cybercrimes. Now like never before, the South African law enforcement organizations have powers to investigate and prosecute cybercrimes.

### *2.3.10. Role of the Social Work Profession, and Occupational Social Work*

Social work is a dynamic helping profession that is adaptive to various environmental settings. Its diversity makes it fits in perfectly into the multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approaches to social-economic and political ills within the given environment, for example, learning institutions. The primary role of the social work profession is to improve the wellbeing of its client systems especially the vulnerable population, of which women form part of (Zastrow, 2010). In the context of cyber-sexual harassment, the social work profession plays a prominent role in providing functional support to the victims and

those affected. Social workers do so by applying necessary skills such as counselling, defusing, active listening, etc (Hay, 2019).

The role of the social work profession in response to cyber-sexual harassment can be carried out at three different functional levels namely promotive function, preventative function, and responsive function (Unicef, 2019). According to Ozsangur (2021), the levels of intervention play a prominent role in enabling the strategic social work management within the ranks of the patriarchal society, to decapitate the views that women are associated with the weak gender and sexual objects. Therefore, the promotive function of this strategy involves educating the society about gender stereotypes, sexism, and the role of the culture and religion as far as discrimination against women is concerned.

The preventative function may involve the development of institutional sexual harassment policies and comprehensive cyber-crimes policies that are radical, practical, and victim-centred. Policy development should be accompanied by identifying the target group to be involved in policy workshops and awareness campaigns (Ozsangur, 2021). This activity needs to be carried out by occupational social workers who have necessary skills, relevant and contemporary educational background that responds to the contemporary challenges and solutions thereof (National Association of Social Workers, 2016). Therefore, it is fundamental that social workers be involved in personal and career development in order to adapt to the changing world and the rise of the digital world (Chernack, 2013).

The responsive function of the occupational social work intervention to cyber-sexual harassment may include, but not limited to proper and ethical case management. This process involves putting survivors of cyber-sexual harassment at the forefront of their unique case, ensuring client self-determination, avoidance of harm, and respect to privacy (Ozsangur, 2021). Ozsangur (2021) further asserts that this will also protect the client systems from stigma and secondary victimization, creating opportunities for women to participate in the digital space free of harassment and bullying.

## 2.4. MITIGATING CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT

### *2.4.1. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT APPROPRIATE INTERNAL POLICIES*

According to the EE Act, (Act 55 of 1998) on the Code of good practice on handling of sexual harassment cases in the workplace, it is the employer's duty and obligation to protect its employees from sexual harassment in the workplace. Thus, developing and implementing

internal policies and appropriate grievance procedures to report and address sexual harassment in the workplace. Du Plessis (2018) stresses the importance of developing a sexual harassment policy that clearly defines sexual harassment. This is critical especially on how perpetrators disguise behind “flirting” when they were actually harassing a victim. She also stresses the idea that sexual harassment policy should be developed as a policy on its own, rather than being part of the misconduct policy, where sexual harassment is referenced as an example. Therefore, the sexual harassment policy should be comprehensive and comprises of the clear definition, types of sexual harassment, a clear and practical disciplinary procedure, and it should be free of secondary victimization.

### *2.4.2. CREATE CONDUCIVE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT*

Every work environment has its institutional/organizational culture that develops and evolve over time, in which employees and or employers also acculturate (Naidoo, 2017). They further argue that, “An institution's culture does not exist in a vacuum but is more likely part of a subculture of the broader society”. According to Lubabalo (2019), toxic and hegemonic masculinity is one of the cultural elements that develops at the work environment, which breeds gender discrimination and sexism. In South Africa, men, especially white men in senior positions, are believed to be at the top of the food chain, feeding on everyone below them (Saferspaces, 2022). If an organization comprises of such toxic institutional culture is not dismantled, it stands a better chance of producing sex predators. The fact that it is an institutional culture, sexual harassment victims may feel helpless and conform to the culture.

The employer has a legal obligation to create a conducive work environment that is free of human rights violation, and respect the employees’ constitutional rights to freedom, equality and dignity (Employment Equity Act, 1998). However, if the employees feel that, there would possibly be nothing that would be done if a sexual harassment incident occurs; offences are more likely to occur repeatedly. Therefore, the employer should make it very clear in policies, staff meetings, memos, etc. that they have zero tolerance to sexual harassment at their institution. This will give confidence and assurance to the victims and/or will-be victims of sexual harassment at their work environment (Angelique, 2022).

The Australian Government Comcare suggests that in creating a conducive work environment, leading by example should be at the forefront of the employer and the senior management. This is because should a sexual harassment incident occur, as perpetrated by

senior management, and nothing happens to them; it sends a wrong message to the future perpetrators that they can also do it and get away with it. It again, sends another wrong message to the victims that they are not protected, and therefore, see no need to report sexual harassment incidents.

### *2.4.3. PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE*

Work place sexual harassment policy is the first step towards creating a sexual harassment free environment. However, the employer should also provide other options available for the victims outside of the workplace to achieve the decisive level of justice they can acquire (Renea, 2016). This may include, but not limited to the appointment of external parties to facilitate the disciplinary proceedings in sexual harassment cases; the application of the victim's constitutional rights to have legal representation of their choice, and access to unbiased liberty to have their sexual harassment cases heard at the Equality Courts (Keehn, 2010). This will also demonstrate explicitly, the notion that the employer acknowledges and comprehends that sexual harassment is a violation of the victims' constitutional right to dignity and equality.

## 2.5. CONCLUSION

Literature reviewed in this chapter demonstrated that cyber-sexual harassment is increasingly high and that women are more likely to be victims thereof. The four-factor model explained some of the motivations behind sexual harassment, which include power dynamics, social and behavioural factors. Although countries and various institutions around the world are developing policies against cyber-crimes and sexual harassment holistically, literature demonstrates that there are challenges regarding reporting, investigation, and prosecution of cyber-crimes due to jurisdiction and data manipulation.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## 3.1. INTRODUCTION

This third chapter of the report gives an overview of the research methodology focusing on research approach and design, data collection method and instrument, data analysis method, sampling procedure, ethical consideration, and limitation and delimitation of the study as applied by the researcher.

## 3.2. APPROACH OF THE STUDY

The research employed a qualitative research approach. Creswell (1994) notes that a qualitative approach solicits the explanation and exploration of people's experiences and how they make sense of their lives. This method is appropriate when the researcher wants to investigate a phenomenon that is new, as it allows for the flexibility of the researcher to explore (Babbie, 2007). Cyber-sexual harassment has been undermined for several years, and that behaviour may continue if not advocated for (Barak, 2000). Therefore, a qualitative method is relevant when the researcher wants to gather information on how people feel about the phenomenon, so as to allow for future researchers to build theories and hypothesis upon the descriptive knowledge obtained from human instruments (Creswell, 2014). This is because qualitative approach produces detailed feelings, opinions and experiences of participants, and explores deeper insights and interpretations of events (De Vos et al, 2011), therefore, explorative research design is considered more appropriate for this study.

## 3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Babbie (2011), research design is the plan or a blueprint on how the researcher intends carry out the research process in order to solve a research question scientifically. For the purposes of this study, the researcher used case study as a research design to guide him throughout the period in which the study was conducted. A case study is defined as an empirical inquiry in which focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context and boundaries between phenomenon and its context are not evident (Yin, 2013).

Babbie (2011) posits that the main advantage of case study is that it allows for interpretative paradigm, where a deeper empathetic understanding of the participant could be observed. According to Ebneyamini and Moghadam (2018), case study is the only design that have a

level of flexible for scientific enquiry, which is not readily provided by other designs such as phenomenology and grounded theory. This make it advantageous and accounts for majority of usage by experienced qualitative researchers (Ebneyamini & Moghadam, 2018). For the purpose of this study, the research employed multiple case study as described by Starman (2013) as the study that scrutinizes multiple cases which are usually compared or analysed against the other cases. This was fundamental for this study as it aimed at exploring the perceptions of various female academics, not a single case.

## 3.4. STUDY POPULATION

Babbie and Mouton (2001) define study population as "the aggregation of elements from which the study sample is actually selected". For the purposes of this study, female academic employees of the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand, were the study population in which the sample was drawn. At the time of data collection for this study, the School of Law had fifty-two female academic employees. Academics at the School of Law refers to the lecturers and researchers. Therefore, this number includes researchers and lecturers who have been under the employ of the University for over two years. From this population of 55 employees a sample was drawn.

### *3.4.1. SAMPLING*

Grey (2013) defines sampling as that process whereby objects, occurrences, or individuals are selected from the larger population. Purposive sampling was used for this study, which is a non-probability sampling method. Purposive sampling was used to select twelve participants plus three key informants, who formed part of the study, and two participants for the purposes of piloting the research instrument. The three key informants comprised of the former executive member of the Gender Equity Office (GEO) who has also made a greater contribution in reviewing the University of the Witwatersrand Sexual Harassment Policy; a senior researcher in the Gender programme of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, and a senior lecturer and a writer in the field of gender and sexual harassment in higher education.

Although the purposive selection of participants may raise subjectivity (Kumar, 2011), the researcher intended to ensure that relevant characteristics of the participants in relation to the research question were observed. The researcher recruited the potential participants

during a staff meeting. The researcher explained the purpose of the research and asked the potential participants to approach him personally.

Twelve participants who formed part of this study met the following criteria of inclusion: (a) from the age of 25 to 45 years of age. The researcher was interested in this group for its vulnerability in terms of technological advancement. The group is millennials' dominant, who are not tech savvy unlike the new millennials (Wilson & Gerber, 2008). They therefore, find themselves vulnerable of online abuse. (a) Entry to middle level academic staff. The researcher intended to consider this group alone for accessibility reasons, and to limit power dynamics, as the researcher is young professional who is also an employee of the Law School. (c) The participant had to be under the employ of the School of Law for two to five years. The researcher believed that having worked for the same school for two years or more, the participant would have had an opportunity to observe the teaching and learning tools used in the school such as Sakai.

### 3.5. RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Gray (2009) defines research instrument as a tool such as a questionnaire, survey, or observation schedule sued to gather data for a research project. Semi-structured interview schedule was used as a data collection. The researcher used semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix D) because it was an ideal research instrument for qualitative data collection, as it allows for rich verbal engagement where probing takes place. De Vos et al, (2011) advocate that semi-structured interviews are flexible in scope and depth, yet structured around a particular context of the researcher's interest. Five semi-structured questions based on the objectives of the study were asked, to avoid limiting the participants to yes or no questions. This is important in a qualitative study as it helps the researcher to obtain rich information from the participant, and to obtain new research angles, and questions what may need to be answered in future researches (Babbie & Mouton, 2001)

### 3.6. PRE-TESTING

Pre-testing is the process of carrying out a small-scale study trial before the main investigation, intended to assess the adequacy of the research design and the instrument to be used data collection (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). De Vos et al (2011) asserts that pre-testing is conducted to test the research instrument (interview schedule) in order to ensure that it is relevant to the research question, and that it responds to the objectives of the study. Pre-

testing was conducted with two participants meeting the criteria of inclusion, and they were recruited through target sampling. The two participants did not form part of the twelve participants who participated in the main study. After pre-testing, the research instrument it was anticipated that the research instrument would be adjusted in accordance with the findings of the pre-test results, to ensure that relevant information was collected by the instrument. However, after pre-testing, it was discovered that the participants understood the questions from the interview schedule and the data responded to the objectives of the study. Therefore, the research instrument was adopted as the final tool of data collection for this study.

### 3.7. METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is "the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest in an established systematic way, enabling researchers to answer research questions, and evaluate outcomes" (Punch, 2016). Owing to the sensitive nature of this study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews for approximately one hour per individual session with the participants. This enabled the researcher and the participants to build trust and rapport, which is fundamental for interviews (Egan, 2010). Another advantage of face-to-face interviews is that it allows for the observation of body language, which can indicate the level of discomfort or enthusiasm (Babbie, 2011).

However, (Yin, 2009) points out that face-to-face interviews also have some notable disadvantages where the researcher has influence over the events. In the case of this research study for example, which is a sensitive subject (sexual harassment) researched by a male researcher focusing on cases of female participants, the environment may be affected, resulting in lack of validity and reliability. Krusenvik said in his article "using case studies as scientific method: advantages and disadvantages" that it is impossible to generalise the findings from cases studies, especially from one or two cases (2017:6). This results in bias due to lack of verification and valid summary of the findings.

The researcher started building rapport when recruiting participants and making appointments during the School of Law staff meeting. The researcher requested consent to use an audio recording device. The audio records assisted in ensuring that the data analysed is accurate, by allowing the researcher to refer back to the records to ensure reliability of the findings. However, audio recordings have limitations because the participants may withhold

some important information and disclosures due to concerns of permanent records which would be kept by the researcher. This is especially when the participant has to disclose some personal experiences or speaking about issues that concern the organization as a whole on the subject matter. Therefore, it was fundamental that the researcher emphasises confidentiality of data collected.

## 3.8. DATA ANALYSIS

Babbie and Mouton (2001) define data analysis as the interpretation of data collected from the participants, for the purpose of drawing conclusions that reflect on the interest, ideas and theories that initiated the inquiry. Thematic analysis was used as a method of data analysis for this study. It assisted the researcher to identify themes from the interview, by interpreting the organized and coded data. Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail". Thematic analysis is recommended for qualitative explorative research for its advantage of identifying the repeated themes to identify gaps for future research problems.

*Step 1*

This step involved organizing and preparing of data for analysis. The researcher prepared the data for analysis by transcribing recorded data from the audio tapes into typed data presented on Microsoft excel. This enabled the researcher to access all data collected simultaneously without having to open another file to access information from another participant.

*Step 2*

This step involved reading through all the data. The researcher looked through all the data as presented on the excel spreadsheet. This gave the researcher the sense of reflection on what the participants were saying regarding their perceptions on cyber-sexual harassment.

*Step 3*

Step 3 involved coding of all data. The researcher categorized recorded data by generating codes representing certain ideas from the transcripts. After categorizing ideas, he then

clustered the data in the form of topics representing similar ideas, and put all relevant data into topics that represented similar ideas.

*Step 4*

The researcher generated codes for descriptions. He used the codes to create five themes and several sub-themes, which he used, in the next chapter (Chapter 4, presentation and discussion of the findings). These themes contain main ideas from the transcripts as generated from verbal and non-verbal data (observations of the researcher).

*Step 5*

The researcher advanced the themes generated, by including direct quotes from the interviews, which explained the themes.

*Step 6*

This final step of data analysis involved making interpretations of the findings. To complete the data analysis process, the researcher made interpretations of the data by explaining the meaning within themes and sub-themes. The researcher derived meaning of the findings by comparing and making critics of the findings against existing literature, and theories.

## 3.9. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

Shenton (2004) believe that trustworthiness is used in research to satisfy four criteria in the study, namely: (1) credibility – the researcher attempt to demonstrate that a true picture of the phenomenon under investigation has been presented, by ensuring that the collected data represent correctly, the original data as conveyed by the participants. In order to ensure credibility, audio tapes were made available to the supervisor and appropriately followed the qualitative data analysis process; (2) transferability – the manner in which the research findings are applicable to other context of similar environment. For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected participants who possessed relevant characteristics for the desired outcome, and made use of key informants, who had more knowledge and experience on the topic. The researcher also applied a vigorous data presentation and a profound data analysis process; (3) dependability – the manner in which the data collection process, analysis and integration of literature is sound, to an extent that the study could be repeated by other researchers and produce consistent findings. In order to achieve dependability, the researcher

applied audit trial of data analysis process, and ensured that every step of the research project was approved by the supervisor and reviewed by external readers; and (4) confirmability – the extent to which the study is neutral, thus, lacking bias. The researcher ensured that the study achieved confirmability by making a correct use of data labelling, keeping tape recordings for referral during data analysis, and also abided by the social research ethics to increase internal and external validity (De Vos et al, 2011).

## 3.10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

According to Kumar (1996), ethics are those guiding principles considered correct in a given group or profession. Creswell (2014) posits that social research is about people, and that information is collected from people. Hence, it is of the utmost importance that researchers protect participants of their research; be able to build rapport and develop a great level of trust; promote and maintain the integrity of the research; and protect against misconduct.

For the purposes of this study, ethics clearance was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand, to ensure that relevant ethics affecting the study were observed. Sexual harassment is a very sensitive issue, which needs a careful handling and profound knowledge of the possible harm in which participants would be exposed to. Personal impact was limited by only asking the perceptions of the participants, and not their personal experiences which would likely trigger possible traumatic experiences. However,

### *3.10.1. CONFIDENTIALITY*

To ensure confidentiality, the participants' names were only written on the consent forms, which was put inside a locked cabinet separate from the data collected from them. When transcribing and analyzing data, participants were given pseudo names to ensure that there was no direct link to the names and data collected. Data collected was stored in a password locked computer and put in locked cabinet for safety. Permission was requested from participants, to use the results for publication or conferences. Data will be destroyed after six years if the results are not published.

### *3.10.2. INFORMED CONSENT*

In order to achieve this principle, the researcher ensured that every participant of this study received a participant information sheet (PIS), explaining the purpose of the study, broad

aim and secondary objectives, as well as the procedures to be followed during the data collection process. The participants were provided with the consent forms, in which they signed to prove that they consented to participate in the study, and that it had been explained to them that participation in the study would be voluntary, with freedom to exclude themselves from the study at any time.

### *3.10.3. AVOIDANCE OF HARM AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS*

In order to avoid harm and psychological distress, relevant offices offering psychosocial services in the University, such as the Gender Equity Office (GEO), were contacted for guidance on how to respond to possible emotional reactions which would be triggered during the interviews, and to make referral arrangements. The researcher also arranged for counselling and psychosocial support for the participants by the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU), contactable at 011 717 9140 or info.ccdu@wits.ac.za, and the Gender Equity Office with Maria Wanyane at 011 717 9791 or maria.wanyane@wits.ac.za. This was to ensure that should participants feel uncomfortable or asked questions that trigger some psychological distress during the interview, they get assistance.

## 3.11. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher was conscious of the possible limitations of this study, which included but are not limited to fact that the study was conducted from a small sample of one school out of thirty-three schools within the University of the Witwatersrand. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to the entire University. Another limitation is that the researcher identifies as a man, yet is investigating a phenomenon regarded as a form of discrimination and harm perpetrated against women, generally by men. Therefore, participants, who are females or identifies as females might have experienced the feeling of discomfort during the interviews and withheld some important information pertaining to their views or experiences on cyber-sexual harassment.

The participants might have provided information that is thought to be socially desirable to the researcher, and not their true feelings about the phenomenon. This may adversely affect the validity and reliability of the study. However, in order to minimize the limitations and fully obtain relevant answers to the research questions, a pre-test was conducted.

## 3.12. CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 of the study provided the discussion of the research methodology which explored the research design, and methodology employed for the purpose of this study. This included population and sampling procedure, research instrument, pre-testing, data collection method, data analysis, and trustworthiness of the study. Conclusion of the chapter explored ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

# CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

## 4.1. INTRODUCTION

The content of this chapter comprises of the presentation and discussion of the findings from the thematic analysis. The researcher used direct quotes, summarizing, and conclusions based on the data presented by the participants. The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand. The findings are discussed regarding the information gathered from key informants and are based on theories to assist in understanding the data presented.

The findings of the study are structured in four broad themes that respond to the objectives of the study and are as follows: Theme 1: Defining cyber-sexual harassment, Theme 2: Vilifying of sexual harassment, Theme 3: Regulation of communication and eLearning platforms, Theme 4: Transforming institutional culture and governance in mitigating cyber-sexual harassment. The main themes are broken down into sub-themes, while the discussion is pinned into those sub-themes, and they transition from one sub-theme to another, to conclude the main themes.

## 4.1. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Table 4.1. Comprises of populated demographic information of female academics and key informants who formed part of this study, and it demonstrates the diversity of individual participants.

| **Demographic factor** | **Sub-category** | **No.** |
|---|---|---|
| Age of female academic and key informants | 25 – 29 years | 2 |
| | 30 – 34 years | 5 |
| | 35 – 39 years | 4 |
| | 40 + years | 4 |
| Racial group of female academic | White | 7 |
| | Black | 7 |
| | Indian | 1 |
| Years of experience working at the University | 2 – 4 | 4 |
| | 5 – 7 | 8 |
| | 8 and above | 3 |
| Occupation of female academic within the University | Lecturer | 5 |
| | Senior lecturer | 5 |
| | Researcher | 5 |

Several sub-themes were identified from broad themes, and are tabulated below

**Table 4.2. Objectives-linked themes and sub-themes**

| **Themes** | **Sub-themes** | **Quotes explaining the themes** |
|---|---|---|
| Defining cyber-sexual harassment | Discomfort<br>Advances<br>Online platform<br>Repetition | "I think it's basically the type of sexual harassment that takes place online right. We can talk about your sending of nudes, commenting on someone's body with a sexist attitude of course, and making fun of someone else's sex in an inappropriate manner". |
| Vilifying of cyber-sexual harassment and discrimination against women | Exaggeration<br>Lack of support<br>Discrimination<br>Objectification of women<br>Patriarchy<br>Judgment<br>Blaming<br>Shame<br>Guilt | "The society has normalized the objectification of women. Therefore, men and even other women feel freer to comment on a woman's appearance and behaviour and disregard the woman's autonomy. So for those obvious reasons, men always have the power to do whatever they want over women because women are they sex objects". |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Culture of silence | |
| Regulation of communication and eLearning platforms | Formality<br>Privacy policies | "I mean, any communication platform can expose you to cyberbullying and cyber-sexual harassment in the case of your research. Therefore, I cannot say email over Sakai, or WhatsApp over Twitter" |
| Transforming institutional culture and governance in mitigating cyber-sexual harassment | Awareness<br>Capacity building and support<br>Policy<br>Accountability | "Encourage transparency- no Anonymous proceedings. If a person whether student or employee is accused of cyber-sexual harassment, the whole university should know. Remember that perpetrators are likely to repeat offense" |

Below follows the discussion of the above themes and sub-themes with illustrations in the form of quotes from participants. To maintain the confidentiality of participants, their identities are hidden behind pseudonyms

### 4.3. DEFINING CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT

In this first theme, the researcher discusses various definitions of cyber-sexual harassment as defined by the participants of the study. Different definitions presented in this theme are based on the perceptions of the participants. However, they are linked to the theory, and backed by data collected from key informants of this study. According to Koleini South Africa (2016), defining cyber-sexual harassment has many facets as much as defining sexual harassment that happens physically. The data presented for this study outlines various elements identified within the cyber-sexual harassment act for the experience to be described as cyber-sexual harassment. The elements include discomfort, advances, online platform, and repetition. The elements outlined were also identified as sub-themes under this theme.

> *"Sexual harassment that happens on an online platform so like on your emails on Facebook what's up just on something that's on an online platform"*. (Refiloe, a 28-years-old Researcher)

The above quote by Refiloe demonstrates one of the understandings of female academics regarding what cyber-sexual harassment is. The participant defined cyber-sexual harassment based on two elements namely: online platform (where) and harassment (what) which may include unwanted advances towards someone. Theses aspects are supported by Koleini South Africa (2016), when they define cyber-sexual harassment as "the use of digital tools, in particular, social media and communicating technologies, for unwanted sexual comments and advances, solicitation of sexual favours, and sexual coercion". These findings emphasises Zastrow (2010) statement that there is no standard definition of sexual harassment. Therefore, cyber-sexual harassment is often defined in the context of where it happened, how it happened, and how the victim felt about the ordeal.

Participants demonstrated an understanding of cyber-sexual harassment because they included the elements as outlined above (unwanted advances and online platform), in which the phenomenon is qualified to be cyber-sexual harassment. For example:

> *I think cyber sexual harassment is an unwanted sexual behaviour towards another person through online spaces such as sending someone nudes and actually asking them to send theirs. I think, it also includes asking someone for sexual favours in return for something* (Patricia, a 38 years old Senior Lecturer).

Participants' different understandings of cyber-sexual harassment were substantial as supported by literature because it touched on both elements and the method in which the harassment message is conveyed, namely: online platform and unwanted advances. The participant also included sexting as one of the common types of cyber-sexual harassment. Uninvited Sexting becomes harassment because it can cause psychological distress or discomfort towards a victim. Another participant perceives sexting to be cyber-sexual harassment by stating:

> "*I think cyber sexual harassment is an act whereby a particular individual sends sexual contents such as pornographic pictures, videos and sexual messages to another individual through electronic gadgets, like cellphone and computer using multimedia SMS, WhatsApp or email"* (Tinstwalo, a 32-year-old Lecturer)

Although various authors maintain that there is neither a standard definition of sexual harassment nor is cyber-sexual harassment, there are specific qualifying elements that legitimate the act as cyber-sexual harassment as captured from the findings (Franks, 2012; Simons, 2015, and Schenk, 2008). The claim that cyber-sexual harassment is defined based on categories, and factors such as conduct, performance, and environment was revealed from the three statements above and is supported by Schenk (2008) when he claims that cyber-sexual harassment is any form of gender-/sex-related comment that is targeted or received by an individual and causes psychological discomfort. Schenk's definition of cyber-sexual harassment touches an element of discomfort; this is something that surfaced from the findings. The following statement supports the claim:

> *It can be a message, like a written message, a text message, or it can be an image or maybe being forwarded, or an article which you don't like, or that contains something you don't like. I think it should be something that is sent*

> *to you in a way that conveys a particular message that in your view amounts to an incident of sexual harassment. However, how is sent maybe over the phone or a written document. It should be something that is done over the internet or social media. So I think is more the mode of communication and how you feel about it* (Lorraine, a 33-year-old Senior Lecturer)

The above quote by Lorraine reveals the different types of cyber-sexual harassment namely: gender harassment, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual attention (Biber, et al, 2002). While scholars classify different types of gender harassment on the internet, another common type of harassment experienced by women on different cyber-spaces especially social media is flaming. Flaming has elements of sexual harassment, but it is more of hostility towards women, whereby the victim experiences among others, swearing, insulting, and the use of offensive language (Sethi & Ghatak, 2018). Due to the psychological discomfort experienced by the victim, some academics referred to this act as cyber-sexual harassment. The following statement supports this notion:

> "*Inappropriate and abusive comments online, mostly social media - on someone's posts or stories on or even private messaging*" [Salphinah, a 47-year-old Senior Lecturer].

Salphinah demonstrates understanding of cyber-sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances towards a particular person, which happens on the internet or social media. However, three participants understood cyber-sexual harassment as posting images, texts, and videos that are sexual; causing discomfort on the victim. From all varying definitions and descriptions of cyber-sexual harassment as understood by the participants, the researcher found that in one way or the other, the participants understand what cyber-sexual harassment is.

## 4.4. VILIFYING OF CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

This theme explains how society labels, judges and discriminates against women for the reason that they are women. The use of the internet and smart gadgets to communicate, work, and study is the future because it enables people to connect in the virtual space needless to be physically present (Barak, 2005). While the internet provides platforms where both healthy and compulsive behaviours may surface. Some societies like in the Middle East,

believe that women should be exempted from using the internet (Deora, 2016). It is not surprising, as Deora (2016) claims, that victims of cyber-sexual harassment are crucified for their experiences and labeled as attention seekers, liars, and may even be assaulted for experiencing their discomfort post harassment. This construct results in women normalizing the sexual harassment practices and ends up not questioning the acts as something devious (Gouws and Kritzinger, 2007). The objectification of women is the sad reality and shame at this stage of civilization. To support this literature, one participant had this to say:

> *It's the norm men think they can do it and it's ok and generally women are taught to brush it off and so the perpetrators are comfortable. It is just something that they do and they don't think anything is wrong with it and most of the time, women just brush it off and carry on with life. I know sometimes I also experienced something where someone says something like that, and it sounds dodgy but then I'm like, hmm! Whatever and you move on* (Salome, a 29-year-old Lecturer).

The above quote by Salome demonstrates two important roles played by the society in which women find themselves. Firstly, the notion that women are expected to behave in a particular manner, or conform to certain standards and rules set out by the society, for example, not to make a big deal about men making unwanted advances towards women. Two is the idea that women also find themselves defaulting judgment by society, and end up normalizing bearing pain just so they could fit in the society. Sometimes it is not even men who judge, shame, and blame women, but fellow women. The following quote support this claim:

> *"People are afraid to be shamed. They often say 'no but your tone in the email was suggestive why did you let the person use that particular term the first time around and they turn it around on you' so yeah I think it's a fear of being shamed. Maybe people not believing them and saying 'you're reading too much into it. It's not what you think it is the person is probably just being nice'"* (Refiloe, a 28-year-old Researcher).

The idea that women also vilify one another makes it even difficult for victims of cyber-sexual harassment to report such harassment because they do not have enough support on their side. The above quote by Refiloe demonstrates that victims of cyber-sexual harassment lack support from home or work environments. It further establishes that reporting cyber-sexual harassment is difficult considering that the authorities may not believe the victim, and

instead of assisting the victim, they may secondarily victimize the victim by uttering words that demoralize the victim to continue with the cyber-sexual harassment case. The following statement supports this sentiment:

> *"Sometimes as women, we don't support each other. When a person says, 'my friend, Joe is sending me these nasty messages and I think I am fed up with him'. Your friend may think you are just exaggerating and Joe is only doing that because he likes you. Therefore, from that moment the victim is discouraged to report the incident because the authorities may also think that way"* (Florah, a 31-year-old Lecturer)

Florah reveals that cyber-sexual harassment incidents are not taken seriously despite the psychological distress accompanying the experience. While a large number of sexual harassment victims are women, there is still a myth that women exaggerate and fabricate sexual harassment cases just to report a boss or colleague they dislike in the context of the workplace. Women are believed to be faking harassment and overacting over minor issues when they break their silence to friends and family members, or even the workplace authorities. This also makes it difficult for victims to report incidents of cyber-sexual harassment (Schenk, 2008). The following statement supports this idea:

> *I think victims of cyber sexual harassment tend not to speak out because of feeling shame about what has happened to them. In most cases, victims fear being blamed for such actions because individuals tend to be judgmental to victims. A victim may feel that she will be blamed and she will be judged because you find that the perpetrator was once a dear friend, which led to victimization. Therefore, society might pose judgments such as "he was your friend there was no way he could've victimized you" " you willingly sent him your pictures and videos why did you sent them to him" " you used to spend a lot of time with him what did you expect". All these judgments make victims to feel shame and blamed because some victims before they are victimized, they tend to have had a good relationship with perpetrators.* (Alicia, a 42-year-old Senior Lecturer)

Alicia claims that not only are women ashamed of reporting incidents of cyber-sexual harassment, but they are also discouraged to do so. Women are denied an opportunity to speak out about their experiences. Alicia further demonstrates that victims are not believed

when they speak out and this may be causing even more pain and grief on the victims. This view is also supported by Citron (2009) when stating that although the effects of cyber-sexual harassment are more severe than those that occur face-to-face, society tends to trivialize it. They tend to "dismiss it as harmless locker-room talk, characterizing perpetrators as juvenile pranksters and targeted individuals as overly sensitive complainers." (Citron, 2009, p.375). The data also establishes that vilifying sexual harassment is another form of discrimination against women, which the reason why it is acceptable for men to harass women without bearing consequences.

> *"Women are abused and harassed by men sexually just because they are women, and there is no other justifiable rationale behind that. Society has also normalized it, such that when women open up about their experiences, they are not believed, and they even get ashamed and embarrassed. This really needs to change, and women cannot change men's behaviours, but men themselves need to own to their behaviours fuelled by toxic masculinity and patriarchy"* (Alicia, a 32-year-old Senior Lecturer and a Gender Activist).

The quoteby Alicia demonstrates that cyber-sexual harassment is due to gender discrimination. Women are targeted by men on various online platforms just for men to exercise their power over women. Alicia also shared her frustration and lack of trust from the society she lives in regarding protection against an increasingly high number of harassment cases for both face-to-face and online. She is of the view that society has normalized the victimization of women by men, and that women's struggle for a discrimination-free society is not receiving enough and necessary support. This sentiment supports the concerns as raised by the participants of this study that women are discriminated against, solely for their gender.

The four-factor model is the theoretical framework underpinning the study. This model explains the correlation between sexual harassment and what is believed to perpetuate victimization of women for their gender, namely: the biological model, organizational model, socio-cultural model, and sex-role spillover model. The data collected for this study demonstrates contrast regarding sexual harassment and the biological model, which holds that the behaviour regarded as sexual harassment is due to the natural attraction of men towards women, and that sexual harassment is not discriminatory.

However, the data is in correlation with the organizational model, which holds that power plays a role in perpetuating sexual harassment. Many participants demonstrated that men harass women due to their perceived power over women. This also includes patriarchy and masculinity, which is also in correlation with the sociocultural model, which holds that men harass women just to maintain their male dominance over women. This is perpetuated by the societal belief systems. The following statement supports this idea:

> "*Discrimination against women is rife, trust me. Moreover, it is disturbing to learn that men do not bother to support women. They refer to our struggle as 'women's work, just like their forefathers kept our grandmothers in the kitchen just because they were women, while they go around drinking booze. We recently held a workshop on gender-based violence, and we only had 2% of men. What does that tell you? So this power dynamic will always come to play as much as gender and sex discrimination is still a problem in the society"* (KI-1, a 37-year-old Researcher)

Dang and Sahgal (2017) stress that discrimination of women in the last two decades is overwhelmingly increasing in both organized and unorganized sectors in a variety of ways possible. In India and many African countries, women are treated as something of lower value, weaker gender, and worthy of lower socioeconomic status. However, this does not seem to explain why female academics could fall prey to sexual harassment by men. Sexual harassment of women is one form of discrimination against women and human rights violation that is taking a toll globally. Women all over the world are rising against this form of discrimination, while men sit back and watch women fighting for their rights (Deora, 2016).

### 4.5. REGULATION OF COMMUNICATION AND ELEARNING PLATFORMS

This theme came about different concerns raised by the participants of this study that regulation of communications and eLearning platforms could reduce the risk of cyber-sexual harassment. The data demonstrate that regulation of communication and learning platforms on the internet is regarded as one of the measures to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment. However, this is debatable because a perpetrator does not have to be anonymous to harass an internet user. This is so in the case of the workplace, where male employees (Griffiths, 2003), abuse female colleagues over emails. However, this does not undermine the notion

that many cyber-sexual harassment cases occur in anonymity, where perpetrators use a pseudonym to hide while targeting a specific victim (Koleinu SA, 2018).

Wits during the period this research was undertaken used  a learning managementcalled Sakai. This is an online teaching and learning platform that is regulated by a third-party company, contracted by the University. The platform is formal and gives more control to academics than it gives a student. However, to facilitate easy blended learning that is non-discriminatory based on socio-economic background, some academics allow students to form WhatsApp groups, where they also form part of the groups to provide opportunities for students to ask questions timeously and convey messages about the running of courses (Lorraine). Convenient as this may be, some students may have found a platform to harass female academics in the platform, in the form of sharing jokes. When asked to identify platforms that pose more risk of cyber-sexual harassment, some academics had this to say:

> *I think for the most part it has to be WhatsApp groups because those are the most informal, unregulated platforms where colleagues would want to share jokes. I see Sakai is being very regulated where you just post class notes and there is no a lot of interaction between you and the students, or you and the other faculty members. Maybe email as well. You are probably vulnerable over email because it's just you and the person that is emailing to you, so they might be emboldened to send things that are sexual to you* (Jane, a 39-year-old Senior Lecturer).

> *"WhatsApp groups I think are the most common. On rare cases, email threads between staff or even staff and students. I think it is tricky right? Because you cannot exactly monitor the content and you do not know what a person will type and so I think there should be a reporting mechanism on those platforms. Other than that, I don't really think they can do anything"* (Refiloe, a 28-year-old Researcher).

As per the above quote, Refiloe claims that some academics use social media platforms such as WhatsApp to communicate with students other than the formal University's eLearning platforms. Academics also feel that in these platforms, incidents of cyber-sexual harassment are likely to happen because the platforms are not monitored and regulated by the University like other platforms such as Sakai. She further suggests that the eLearning platforms should have reporting mechanisms. This can be in the form of an option that is attached to the App

or website, to ensure that should there be any cyber-sexual harassment incidents, a victim could simply use the option to report with fewer hustles.

Data also reveals that with communication platforms that are not regulated by the university, it is not easy to track down the perpetrator because people can easily use fake names to victimize their targets.

> *I think is the ones that are more informal. Therefore, when you think of Sakai for instance, it is more formal. People will only get there because of information, as it is very formal. However, when you talk of WhatsApp groups, then things can get a bit personal. Someone will send a video of this, while someone shares that. Therefore, I think harassment is more likely to happen on those platforms that are seen more as social media typically. I don't know if there's anything else apart from Sakai that Wits actually has, but I will think of WhatsApp, yeah.* (Lorraine, a 34-year-old Senior Lecturer).

Other than the collective concerns of participants, that platforms that are not regulated by the university, can pose a risk of cyber-sexual harassment; the above quote further demonstrates that the messaging apps or typical social media platforms can get too personal than an eLearning platform, where students and academics only visit for a sole purpose. The sole purpose of visiting the eLearning platforms is to learn, teach, and communicate important messages concerning teaching and learning. However, the social media platforms become some of the low cost methods of communication due to the migration from contact teaching and learning to emergency remote online teaching because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Agarwal and Kaushik (2014, 39) claim that "In recent years, there have been numerous reports of women receiving unsolicited emails that often contain the obscene and obnoxious language". They believe that this is true because senders can alter the email header and others sender's details to make it appear as if it from an authentic sender. This makes it even harder to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment via emails. Mahar et al. (2018) believe that "solutions for combating online harassment have not kept pace. Common technical solutions such as user blocking and word-based filters are blunt tools that cannot cover many forms of harassment, are labour-intensive for people suffering large-scale attacks and can be circumvented by determined harassers." Although a small percentage of female academics

who participated in this study believe that regulation of these online platforms could mitigate harassment, the findings of this study prove otherwise, and their views are supported by the literature. Some participants had this to say:

> "*I mean, any communication platform can expose you to cyberbullying and cyber-sexual harassment in the case of your research. Therefore, I cannot say email over Sakai, or WhatsApp over Twitter"* (Patricia, a 38-year-old Senior Lecturer)

Patricia was of the view that any communication and eLearning platform has the potential of exposing academics to cyber-sexual harassment, as long as there is a form of communication happening.

> *"I think as long as it's a means to communicate it's essentially a means to harass as well. Someone also shared with me recently. He works at a different University and he was saying that he was shocked at how he could approach faculty or whatever part of the university to get access to personal information of students of former students and because he is a lecturer no one will ask then there are things like Sakai and many different platforms. I think as long as it's a means to communicate it's essentially a means to harass as well"* (Salome, a 29-year-old Lecturer)

Five participants of twelve claim that any form of communication and eLearning platform whether regulated by the university or not, is a means to harass the victims. This data reveals that cyber-sexual harassment can happen on any online platform. This idea demonstrates that although there could be regulations put in place, it may only send a message to the perpetrators that should they be involved in harassing the platform users, there will be consequences. However, the data also demonstrates that regulation of eLearning and communication platforms does not prevent the harassers from exercising their sexist behaviours. Many participants have raised this view; however, one participant has expressed this opinion:

> *"I don't think the eLearning platform can expose one to harassment, well or maybe at rare cases because there, it's all about important communications like tests, assignments, and important communications like class attendance. However, with email or WhatsApp group, one can just send a sexually explicit joke, or what they*

*call memes that perhaps portray gender or sexual sentiments"* (Alicia, a 42-year-old Senior Lecturer).

The above quote by Alicia demonstrates a claim that eLearning may not pose risk to users. This statement may be premature, looking at the rive of cybersecurity issues rambling institutions for higher learning, of which Wits University is not immune. This is according to the Wits University Transformation office information booklet (Stop Cyberbullying and harassment, unpublished). The document further clarifies that everyone is susceptible to cyber harassment despite race, sexual orientation, disability, and gender.

> *There's pros and cons to using these social media platforms and these technological things. One, it is easy to hide behind the scenes, so you might find lecturers or even your classmates who can use these platforms who can manipulate platforms. However, at the end of the day there is a host who gives people access and licenses to these things. There must be a way, you don't have to be like an IT genius, but there must be a way in which you can find out how are people abusing the platforms that are being used. I mean I am thinking about it in the email sense, there could be a system where whenever a lecturer emails students, someone else is copied on the email automatically or something like that. There should be something similar in like these platforms like Sakai that also keeps a track because also when things like these come out, it boils down to that type of evidence who said what? Although I do appreciate that some of the harassment is very subtle it's not always easy to prove but there's ways in which lecturers and peer students can be held accountable* (Salphinah, a 47 years old senior lecturer)

The above statement by Salphinah demonstrates how advantageous it could be to use online platforms to facilitate teaching and learning. However, it cautions on how sex predators could take advantage of the platforms to exercise their powers. This is despite how cautious and alert institutions for higher platforms are, regarding cybercrimes. Scientists and communication platform developers are working overtime to develop mechanisms deemed appropriate to mitigate online harassment (Marah, et.al, 2018). However, spam filters and blocking services do not seem enough because perpetrators have the liberty of using different accounts and profiles to continue harassing their victims.

## 4.6. TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND GOVERNANCE IN MITIGATING CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This theme contains an array of critical views regarding institutional culture and its management as an important aspect when mitigating cyber-sexual harassment in institutions for higher learning. The discussion also embedded the four-factor model/theory, which explains the relationship between the work environment and the subsequent sexist behaviours. The organizational model of this theory holds that sexual harassment in the workplace is due to the hegemonic male dominance. It explains how the organizational structures and power imbalances play a pivotal role in insinuating and creating room for harassment and discrimination based on gender.

The internet is characterised by a lack of jurisdiction in which legal processes could take place, lack of accountability, and unclear authorities. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to hold the perpetrators of cyber-sexual harassment accountable for their actions.

> *It is absurd that women are expected to behave in a certain manner to protect themselves from harassment and rape by men. Why do we have to live in fear? Why do we have to avoid some platforms on the cyber-space? Why do we have to fight stigma and blaming from society when we know where the problem is? A person will tell you that 'but you should have just blocked him', why can't we tell the perpetrators that 'but you should not have harassed her'? We live in a society where women are treated as sex objects, not as human. I do not know how long civil society organizations are going to raise awareness on how tired we are, living in fear of harassment from men. I don't think there is anything that motivates the behaviours of men towards women, be it how she dresses, or what she posts on social media* (Jessica, a 32-year-old Senior Lecturer and Gender Activist).

Jessica cliams that women feel that they are treated like sex objects and that their issues are regarded as women's issues. When talking about this issue, many participants demonstrated frustration. Their tones of voice could also substantiate the frustration they were holding. They believe that the institutions for higher learning should take a serious stance about sexual harassment and the victimization of women. Their views are supported by the literature. Sahgal and Dang (2017) claim that institutional culture has a great impact on

increasing or reducing occurrences of cyber-sexual harassment within an organization. Thus, if leaders of an organization are decisive about creating a sexual harassment-free culture; chances are high that harassment of this nature will have no place within an organization. Participants also demonstrated that as they encourage advocacy work around gender discrimination, men should be involved in raising awareness.

> *"I would implement or encourage awareness campaigns through the gender equity office and employee wellness office to encourage victims to come forward and report such cases. I would also review the sexual harassment policy, ensuring that it responds to the real issues and that it encourages accountability such that the person accused of cyber sexual harassment would be dismissed with immediate effect, pending investigations".* (Tinstwalo, a 32-year old Lecturer)

Tinstwalo establishes that awareness campaigns are one of the useful tools to use in an attempt to create an environment that is free of discrimination, abuse of power, and harassment of women; by empowering them with knowledge and necessary skills to protect themselves. However, one of the key informants of this study demonstrated a concern about empowering women to protect themselves. She believes that instead of women having to protect themselves, perpetrators should be taught not to victimize women.

While Patricia is also of the idea that raising awareness is one of the strategies that could be employed to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment within an institution of higher learning, she also emphasizes the fundamentals of workshops on cyber-sexual harassment and the policy thereof. This also supports the idea that ignorance plays cards as far as online sexual harassment is concerned (Marah, et. al 2018). Some participants suggested the following when the researcher asked them to put themselves in the shoes of the vice-chancellor:

> *I don't think people are really aware of the criminalization of cyber-sexual harassment. Therefore, more and more awareness campaigns should be conducted within the university, for both staff and students. As a Vice Chancellor, I would make sure that I familiarize all employees and students with cyber sexual harassment and other harassments. I know we have the Gender equity office, but is the office well capacitated? Do high-ranking officials of the university take it seriously? Well, I do not want to touch on politics of this University, but I would capacitate the gender equity office*

> *(GEO), and make sure that employees of this university are aware of the consequences associated with sexual harassment. I think we have a good policy, but implementation may be a concern. One more thing, I would get experts on cyber sexual harassment and legal experts at least twice a year to do awareness on such crimes. Workshops on Sexual harassment policy would also be needed* (Patricia, 36-year old Senior Lecturer).

Patricia stressed the notion that ignorance regarding the criminalization of cyber-sexual harassment could be an enabling factor for perpetrators to continue victimization without consequences. This is largely because victims of cyber-sexual harassment lack knowledge of the criminalization process of cyber sexual harassment and therefore, end up reporting cases. Institutional policies may contain disciplinary processes on sexual harassment, which forms the basis of the need to familiarize everyone within the organization about such policies.

> *I would have a policy against it. I am not too familiar with the recent policy, but the one that I have had a look on; I do not even think it touches on cyber sexual harassment. It is not specific. So we could create a system that focuses on more than one type of cyber-sexual harassment, you know. That actually defines what it is and defines what happens when people perpetuate it like the consequences for being a perpetrator, and what happens if you are a victim? In addition, when your report who do you go to within the university and what are the support structures that are there within the university? Because of the fourth Industrial Revolution, a lot of work will be done online but it has not been in my thought that cyber-sexual harassment will be featured so thank you for expanding my world.* (Jane, a 39-year old Senior Lecturer).

Studies have shown that reporting of cyber-sexual harassment is still a challenge, as much as reporting face-to-face sexual harassment is still a concern (Cripps & Stermac, 2018). Issues around a country's legislation, the justice system, and institutional policies play a significant role. This increases the chances of experiencing the negative impact of cyber-sexual harassment from anxiety, shame, guilt, stress, post-traumatic stress disorders, and secondary victimization due to lack of organizational support (UN Women, 2020). In a study conducted by Hill and Kearl (2011), it was established that people who experience cyber-

sexual harassment need support. This will enable them to report cyber-sexual harassment cases. Providing support to sexual harassment survivors means adopting approaches that are victim-centered and providing platforms where perpetrators are held accountable (Swemmer, 2017. unpublished).

Lorraine and two more others stress the issue of treating cyber-sexual harassment the same way as face-to-face sexual harassment is. They believe that doing so, will diminish the culture of silence among victims of sexual harassment at the workplace. Other noted concerns were how the Wits sexual harassment policy is believed to protect the perpetrators that the actual victims of such dignity-taking incidents.

> *I also think publicizing these disciplinary hearings would also add value. I know the issues about protecting the accused person and so on. I do not understand why such as far as sexual harassment is concerned. However, letting the university, as well as everybody in the sector, know that this is what has happened it would help. Besides, if there is a bit of too much secrecy trying to uphold confidentiality and everything else, I think it also leads to a situation whereby, it denies others a learning opportunity. Because then they do not know what exactly happened, that fell within the scope of sexual harassment. Because all you know is 'oh, this person has been suspended, maybe even expelled because of sexual harassment incident'.* (Lorraine, a 35-year-old Senior Lecturer).

Five participants of this study encored the above sentiments that the university should take a strong stance regarding sexual harassment and cyber-sexual harassment. This may include actively adopting the victim-centered approach to sexual harassment, and making disciplinary processes fair and transparent. The data demonstrates a lack of confidence in the University management as far as sexual harassment is concerned. Participants feel that the disciplinary processes adopted by the university are weak and lack strategic vision and mission. They, therefore, feel that more could be done beyond policy reviews.

> *I think the first step would be for Wits to take a hard-line stance on cyber-sexual harassment in the sense that, at Wits, it should be the same level as offline-sexual harassment right? Also, I think it should be the same level and also it should be taken seriously so because it is cyber sexual harassment and*

> *it happens on an online platform doesn't mean that it not serious because it could be the reason why I am not coming to work every day. I also think perpetrators should not be allowed to resign. The investigation should take place and the perpetrator should only be allowed to leave once the findings have been made public.* (Refiloe, a 28-year-old Researcher)

Although some participants demonstrated that they were not sure of the Wits Sexual Harassment Policy other than knowing that it existed, they still believed that the policy should be comprehensive enough and decisive about cyber-sexual harassment. Participants believe that cyber-sexual harassment should be given similar priority as face-to-face sexual harassment. In this way, the University will send a strong message to the sexual predators that sexual harassment has no place in Wits University. The perpetrators should be held accountable for their actions, and also demonstrate an example radically.

> *"I think the university letting perpetrators resign it is unacceptable. They should not allow that, so I think Adam Habib must do the things."* (Salome, a 35-year-old Researcher)

> *Encourage transparency- no Anonymous proceedings. If a person whether student or employee is accused of cyber-sexual harassment, the whole university should know. Remember that perpetrators are likely to repeat offenses. So everyone should know that Matimba is accused of sexual harassment and never give him the opportunity to also prey on me. I would make sure that we have systems in place that effectively deal with the issue - from reporting to follow through, so that victims feel Encouraged to speak out and know that there will be an outcome. I would also recognize that a policy alone is not enough. People must know that there is action, by learning from those who are held accountable no matter how the offense is believed to be minor.* (Salphinah, a 47-year old Senior Lecturer)

As per the above statements, Salome and Salphinah demonstrates lack of satisfaction regarding how the University handles sexual harassment complaints. This poses even more risks when we talk of cyber-sexual harassment, where one can easily hind behind fake social media accounts and pseudonyms. Participants believe that disciplinary processes should be robust and of transparent nature.

## 4.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter included the discussion of the views of the participants as presented in the form of themes and sub-themes from the thematic analysis. The chapter also tabulated the demographic of participants as a way of demonstrating the diversity of the participants of the study. As analysed, the data revealed that female academics who participated in the study understood what cyber-sexual harassment was. They could demonstrate their views concerning real-life issues of our society and what it meant to be a woman in an academic arena during the 21st century.

# CHAPTER 5: MAIN FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

## 5.1. INTRODUCTION

This last chapter of the research report provides the main findings of the study as analysed and discussed in chapter four. The main findings of this report are discussed according to the objectives of the study, literature, and the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

The main aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand. The findings of this study were anticipated to contribute to policy development and reviews of the University, as well as raising awareness to both academic and non-academic staff of the University, including students and contractors. The inspiration of the researcher to conduct this study came after a mere conversation with a University staff member about their recurrent experiences of cyber-sexual harassment by a colleague. The researcher developed an interest in exploring more about possible cyber-sexual harassment incidences that female academic staff members might experience and not aware that the incident is punishable, despite the trauma accompanying the experiences. However, the researcher decided to explore the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment, which would be followed by a possible study, where he would explore the personal experiences.

## 5.2. MAIN FINDINGS

The main findings of this study are presented in a form of a summary based on the objectives of the study.

### *5.2.1. OBJECTIVE 1: DEFINITION OF CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT*

The participants of this study demonstrated different understanding of cyber-sexual harassment, which satisfied the researcher that they understood what cyber-sexual harassment was. Different understanding of the participant on cyber-sexual harassment manifested the following key indicators that qualify the behaviour as cyber-sexual harassment: unwanted behaviour, online platform, harassment, repetitive acts, and sexual advances.

Although there are different types of online harassment and bullying, the findings of this study establish that cyber-sexual harassment has to include the element of gender and

sexuality. For example, participants demonstrated how cyber-sexual harassment or sexual harassment, in general, is a power crime. The majority of the participants defined cyber-sexual harassment as making advances or commenting on someone's body and asking for sexual favours or anything sexual that could be satisfying to that particular individual who is committing the harassment on a cyber-space.

The ambiguity of defining cyber-sexual harassment even makes it difficult to describe properly, the activities that constitute cyber-sexual harassment. The findings of this study further establish that cyber-sexual harassment is a form of sexism that happens in the cyber-space, which forms the basis of it mostly happening to women because of their gender.

### *5.2.2. OBJECTIVE 2: VIEWS OF FEMALE ACADEMICS ON CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN*

The findings of this study conclude that cyber-sexual harassment is gender motivated, and is that society has normalized victimizing women just for 'being women'. Participants are of the view that women are discriminated against, for being women, and therefore, fall victim to all sorts of harassment by men. Sexual harassment by nature has been associated with discrimination against women, especially in the workplace. This idea is in line with the four-factor model, which demonstrates how perpetrators' need for power and control motivates sexual harassment towards women.

The majority of the participants of this study believe that women are sex objects in the eyes of men. However, they hold a position that objectifying and sexualizing women, is barbaric and inhuman. Society has made it normal for men to dress the way they want, but it is different for their counterparts. One participant made an example that a man can walk around off shirt, but a woman cannot do the same because they will be regarded as indecent. This can be explained by O'Hare's four-factor model that socio-cultural variables form part of the external inhibitions. The power relations of men and women have been that of superior versus minor, and the society has made that acceptable until the 70's when the term "sexual harassment was coined and believed to have existed in the workplace.

The idea that women are victims of gender harassment forms a huge part of the findings of this study. The findings hold that the form of cyber-sexual harassment that women in the institutions of higher learning are likely to experience is gender harassment other than unwanted sexual attention. Therefore, the findings of this study conclude that women fall

victims to cyber-sexual harassment just because they are women, which is a form of gender discrimination.

The study establishes that although sexual harassment existed decades before in the work environment, the behaviours were trivialized. This is still happening today, especially on the online platforms where women are expected to be nice when a man sends unwanted sexual attention towards a woman. The suffering of women due to sexualizing their bodies and gender is dismissed and believed to be everyday silly acts of men and that it happens to every woman. It is also hard to understand that the struggle of women against gender discrimination is considered women's problems rather than a societal ill. The struggle of women to be considered equal to men in the law and society never seem to bear fruits. The "power" of men over women has to be normalized to an extent that when women "cry out for help", are mocked.

### *5.2.3. OBJECTIVE 3: OPINIONS OF FEMALE ACADEMICS ON THE TYPES OF SITUATIONS WHEREIN CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT COULD TAKE PLACE WITHIN AN INSTITUTION OF HIGHER LEARNING.*

The findings of this study establish that there is not specific circumstance favourable for cyber-sexual harassment as long as the perpetrator wants to exercise their "powers". The participants of this study argue that it is wrong that women do to expose themselves to sexual harassment, but it is in the mind of the perpetrator that they target women and victimize them without shame. Society had been vilifying women and accused them of inviting attention by how they dressed. However, female academics believe that women should be able to dress the way they like, without judgment by society.

Female academics believe that women have the right to dress the way they like and that they expect to be respected no matter how sexy they may come across. The idea that patriarchy and masculinity degrade the dignity of women has been observed by gender activists and feminist writers, disputing that "women invite unwanted sexual attention by how they dress". From a young age, a girl is raised with the "principle" that they should always dress "appropriately", and should never take off their shirts. In contrast of the perceptions of the researcher that there could be some situations in which female academics should avoid evading cyber-sexual harassment, the findings of this study demonstrate that any situation

or circumstance is susceptible for sexual harassment to take place. As long as the perpetrator is determined to victimize their prey, they can always do it wherever, and whenever.

### *5.2.4. OBJECTIVE 4: POTENTIAL PLATFORMS IN WHICH CYBER-SEXUAL HARASSMENT COULD BE ASSOCIATED WITH*

The findings of this study hold that e-learning and communications platforms can expose female academics to cyber-sexual harassment. While others identified the names and types of communications and e-learning platforms, the majority have indicated that unregulated communications platforms such as social media platforms that are not regulated and monitored by the University pose serious risks of cyber-sexual harassment towards female academics. Although some of the social media platforms that are used by academics and students are not official methods of communications established by the University, students and academics still use them because they believe that they are user-friendly and convenient. For example, students create WhatsApp groups for specific modules or programs, and occasionally, academic staff forms part of the groups to respond timeously, to students' queries.

It is, however, according to the findings of this study, premature to believe that regulated eLearning and communication platforms do not expose female academics to cyber-sexual harassment. This is reliable because studies have shown that cyber-sexual harassment existed way before the introduction of social media platforms. However, the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, are reported to pose an even serious risk of experiencing cyber-sexual harassment because perpetrators could send nasty messages to their victims via emails,

### *5.2.5. OBJECTIVE 5: POSSIBLE METHODS TO BE USED TO PROTECT FEMALE ACADEMICS FROM HARASSMENT IN THE CYBERSPACE*

While gender activists believe that the only way to mitigate sexual harassment is for penetrators to stop the victimization, the findings of this study propose that instead of women being at the forefront of fighting gender discrimination, men should. The idea that gender discrimination is a women’s problem makes it even difficult to even think of radical transformative ways to mitigate it. The participants of this study feel that a policy alone is not enough. No matter how beautiful a policy could be, the institution should create an environment where a culture of abuse and discrimination has no space.

The findings of this study suggest that a comprehensive sexual harassment policy should be developed in institutions of higher learning. Participants of this study claim that although the university has a policy against sexual harassment, it is not compressive enough, and that it does not cover all forms of cyber-sexual harassment. Some participants demonstrated ignorance of the University's sexual harassment policy. This may prove that the University does not conduct awareness campaigns and policy workshops. By principle, an institution that is committed to transformation should have no place for discrimination based on gender and sexuality.

As more and more women are joining the academic space, it is the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to ensure that they are protected from harassment abuse due to their gender. The protection of women from cyber-sexual harassment should, therefore, start from the institution developing a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment. The institution should hold the perpetrators accountable for their actions and adopt the victim-centered approach to sexual harassment. The fact that perpetrators can evade the disciplinary procedure by just resigning from the institution should be reviewed in consultation with labour laws of the country and the institution.

The eLearning platforms should be formally regulated to be able to trance and track anyone who uses them. It is on this idea that the University could be able to hold perpetrators of cyber-sexual harassment accountable. This is due to the notion that the University would have jurisdiction to take the perpetrators through the disciplinary proceedings.

The findings of this study further suggest that the University should have clear grievance procedures available and accessible for the complainants. The participants believe that the office that is responsible for sexual harassment should be approachable and non-judgmental because not only is cyber-sexual harassment sensitive, but it is also embarrassing to report it to someone who does not understand the position of the victim. Therefore, cyber-sexual harassment like any other gender discrimination crimes should be taken seriously to encourage report and end the culture of silence.

## 5.3. CONCLUSIONS BASED ON FINDINGS

The findings of this study conclude that in the conception of rising trends of the use of the internet and smart gadgets for teaching and learning, the female academics at the School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand perceive that higher education institutions are not safe

from online sexual harassment. They believe that cyber-sexual harassment is a complex phenomenon and it is not different from face-to-face sexual harassment, which is gender-motivated. The study further concludes that the intrinsic nature of our societal norms motivated by patriarchy and masculinity makes it possible for men to harass and discriminate against women. The theoretical framework underpinning the study demonstrates that the external inhabitants at the higher institution environment where men hold the inherently sexist belief system; there is a high chance of cyber-sexual harassment incidents. Therefore, the institutional culture plays a prominent role in creating an environment where sexual harassment is either prevalent, or has no place. This largely depends on what the institution stands for, and the kind of environment it creates for its employees.

## 5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

### *5.4.1. UNIVERSITY*

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen the University switching to emergency remote online teaching and learning. This was a good test on the readiness of institutions of higher learning into the future of work, teaching, and learning. It sure proved that in the future, teaching and learning would be fully conducted online, then having to be physically in the classroom. Therefore, one can anticipate an increase in cyber-sexual harassment because this transition does not bring immunity to this escalating phenomenon.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher proposes that the management of the institution should take sexual harassment seriously. They need to allocate sufficient resources and capacitate the organizations that deal with sexual harassment. The findings of this study demonstrate that the Gender Equity Office needs more resources and that it is not entirely independent. It is, therefore, important that the Senior Executive Team look thoroughly at possible mechanisms that could be employed to mitigate sexual harassment.

Wits has one of the comprehensive sexual harassment policies. However, the University needs to acknowledge that a policy alone is not enough. Wits need to be more proactive than reactive about sexual harassment. Thus, exploring methods to deal with the culture of silence and impunity among the University's senior leaders who happen to be implicated with behaviours perceived to contain some form of gender discrimination.

### *5.4.2. OCCUPATIONAL SOCIAL WORK*

The world is becoming smaller, and people around the world are becoming closer to each other connecting virtually from various geographic locations. The digital world makes it possible for people to work, study, and socialize. Nonetheless, sexual harassment is evolving alongside, taking advantage of the challenges in holding perpetrators accountable due to lack of jurisdiction and the idea that perpetrators can hide behind pseudonyms. Many organizations are developing policies against sexual harassment and cybercrimes. While Occupational Social Work seems to be a fast growing profession, the corporate industry uses occupational work services either internally or externally, (out sourcing) to deal with issues within organizations. This is an opportunity for occupational social workers to aid organizations regarding developing more robust intervention strategies based on the increasing trends of cyber-sexual harassment and all forms of gender harassment.

In addition, Social Workers need necessary and contemporary knowledge to develop and implement institutional policies and assist in developing legislative frameworks necessary for the virtual world. The researcher therefore, recommends that Occupational Social Workers take courses that aim at capacitating them to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment and other gender discrimination that take place on an online platform. The researcher further recommends that Occupational Social Workers should involve themselves in research projects to discover ways of resolving global organizational issues.

### *5.4.3. FUTURE RESEARCH*

Cyber-sexual harassment is a relatively new phenomenon that is gaining research interest as the world of work transforms rapidly, taking advantage of the technological advancement and fast internet. This phenomenon is more complex than what many people perceive to be "just flirting" because sexual harassment by nature is dignity taking, and should not be belittled due to its nature of occurrence, which is the online platform in this case. The researcher anticipates that this study would contribute in developing the foundation for future research in the field of cyber-sexual harassment in institutions of higher learning and beyond. I believe that Cyber-sexual harassment is going to become more prevalent due to the greater use of the internet. COVID-19 has diverted many communications online, and therefore, I feel that there is a need for this topic to be researched further. Having conducted this research at Wits University, I wish that this research could also be conducted in other

faculties/schools, and Universities including historically disadvantaged Universities and online Universities, involving academics, professional and administrative staff, and students.

The following are some of the recommendations for future research. Investigate the coping mechanisms of cyber-sexual harassment victims concerning the support structure of the organization to which the victim is attached; explore the theoretical framework underpinning cyber-sexual harassment in line with the platforms in which the phenomenon takes place, and investigate institutional readiness regarding cyber-sexual harassment as a possible serious problem to affect the future of work.

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**APPENDIX A: Participant Information Sheet**

Good day

My name is Matimba Hlungwani, a Masters student at University of the Witwatersrand registered in the MA Occupational Social Work. As part of the requirements for the programme, I am currently conducting research in an attempt to gather perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law of the University of the Witwatersrand. It is envisaged that the findings of this study may give ideas on the development and reviews of institutional sexual harassment policies.

Therefore, I wish to invite you to participate in this study. Please note that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate in this study. Should you wish to participate in this study, I will make an arrangement to meet with you at your convenient place, date and time. The interview is anticipated to last for one hour approximately. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and you may refuse to any of the questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

Subject to your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. Except for my research supervisor, no one will have access to the audiotapes. The audiotapes will be kept for two years following any publications or six years if no publication comes from the study. I, therefore, also request your permission to use the results for publication or conferences. I assure you that your personal details will be kept confidential and that your identifying information will not be included in the final research report.

I am conscious that cyber-sexual harassment is a sensitive issue and it may cause some feeling of emotional distress. Should you feel the need for counselling or any form of psychosocial support during or following the interview, I have arranged for this service to be provided to you by the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU), contactable at 011 717 9140 or info.ccdu@wits.ac.za, and the Gender Equity Office where the arrangement has been made with Maria Wanyane at 011 717 9791 or maria.wanyane@wits.ac.za.

I am available to answer any questions you might have regarding the study, and I am committed to answering those questions to the best of my ability. You can contact me at 011 717 8304/073 325 5311 or email at matimba.hlungwani@wits.ac.za, or my supervisor, Dr.

Roshini Pillay at 011 717 4468 or roshini.pillay@wits.ac.za. If you have any concerns and complaints about the study, please contact ***Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:*** Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za or the administrator: Ms Shaun Schoeman Tel 011 717 1408 Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za If you wish to receive the findings of this study, the report can be shared with you upon request.

Thank you for your time and consideration to participate in the study

Sincerely

**Matimba Hlungwani**

**APPENDIX B: Consent Form for the Participant**

I…… voluntarily agree to participate in this research project. I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind. I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted. I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. I understand that the information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially, and that my name or any other identifying information will not appear in the research report. I understand that the findings of this study may be used for publications. I also understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this study.

Date: …….

Names: …….

Signature: …….

I, **Matimba Hlungwani** believe that the participant is giving consent to participate in this study, and I acknowledge that I have explained the purpose of this study. I also acknowledge that I have informed the participant of their rights, including the right to withdraw from the research at any given point.

Date: ……..

Signature: ……..

**APPENDIX C: Consent Form for Audio-Taping the Interview**

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed two years after any publication arising from the study or six years after completion of the study if there are no publications.

Name: ……

Date: ……

Signature: ……

**APPENDIX D: Participant Information Sheet (Key Informant)**

Good day

My name is Matimba Hlungwani, a Masters student at University of the Witwatersrand registered in the MA Occupational Social Work. As part of the requirements for the program, I am currently conducting research in an attempt to gather perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the School of Law of the University of the Witwatersrand. It is envisaged that the findings of this study may give ideas on the development and reviews of institutional sexual harassment policies.

Therefore, I wish to invite you to participate in this study as an expert in the field of sexual harassment. Please note that your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to participate in this study. Should you wish to participate in this study, I will make an arrangement to meet with you at your convenient place, date and time. The interview is anticipated to last for 30 minutes approximately. You may withdraw from the study at any time, and you may refuse to answer any of the questions you feel uncomfortable answering.

Subject to your permission, the interview will be audio-taped. Except for my research supervisor, no one will have access to the audiotapes. The audio tapes will be kept for two years following any publications or six years if no publication comes from the study. I, therefore, also request your permission to use the results for publications or conferences. I assure you that your personal details will be kept confidential and that your identifying information will not be included in the final research report.

I am available to answer any questions you might have regarding the study, and I am committed to answering those questions to the best of my knowledge and ability. You can contact me at 011 717 8304/073 325 5311 or email at matimba.hlungwani@wits.ac.za, or my supervisor, Dr. Roshini Pillay at 011 717 4468 or roshini.pillay@wits.ac.za. If you have any concerns and complaints about the study, please contact ***Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) Contact Details:*** Chairperson: Jasper.Knight@wits.ac.za or the administrator: Ms. Shaun Schoeman Tel 011 717 1408 Shaun.Schoeman@wits.ac.za. If you wish to receive the findings of this study, the report can be shared with you upon request.

Thank you for your time and consideration to participate in the study

Sincerely

**Matimba Hlungwani**

**APPENDIX E: Interview Schedule**

**DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS**

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Population group
4. Duration of service as an academic staff
5. Academic level
6. Highest qualification

**SECONDARY OBJECTIVES**

a) To determine the definition of cyber-sexual harassment by female academics;

b) To explore the generic views of female academics on cyber-sexual harassment against women;

c) To explore the opinions of female academics on vilifying of cyber-sexual harassment and discrimination against women;

d) To determine the contingency on the regulation of communication and eLearning platforms within the institutions of higher learning;

e) To explore the possible ways in transforming institutional culture and governance to mitigate cyber-sexual harassment.

**QUESTIONS**

1. In your opinion, what do you think cyber-sexual harassment is?
2. Why do you think victims of cyber-sexual harassment choose to remain silent after victimization?
3. From various types of eLearning and communication platforms used at University of the Witwatersrand, what are the specific ones you think can expose female academics to cyber-sexual harassment?
4. Why do you think women are more likely to be victims of cyber-sexual harassment?
5. Imagine you are in charge of this University as a Vice Chancellor, what would you do to prevent cyber-sexual harassment?

**APPENDIX F: Interview Schedule (Key Informants)**

**DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS**

1. Sex
2. Age
3. Population group
4. Occupation

**QUESTIONS**

1. As the use of eLearning platforms increase for various academic activities, do you think cyber-sexual harassment could become a serious academic problem within institutions for higher learning? Please elaborate
2. Do you think Wits University has adequate legal processes in place to address cyber-sexual harassment?
3. What do you think could be done to prevent and effectively deal with cyber-sexual harassment in institutions for higher learning?

# APPENDIX G: Ethics Approval

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

**SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE**
**CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE** | **PROTOCOL NUMBER: SW19/08/03** |
| **PROJECT TITLE** | Exploring the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber sexual harassment at the School of Law at the University of Witwatersrand |
| **INVESTIGATOR** | **MATIMBA HLUNGWANI** |
| **SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR** | SOCIAL WORK |
| **DATE CONSIDERED** | 18 OCTOBER 2022 |
| **DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE** | Extension Approved unconditionally |
| **RISK LEVEL** | LOW RISK |
| **EXPIRY DATE** | 31 December 2022 |

**ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE** 25 October 2022 **CHAIRPERSON**
(DR L PETERSEN)

cc: Supervisor: Dr R Pillay

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**DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR**

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

**Signature** **Date** 25 / 10 / 2022

**PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES**

## APPENDIX H: Letter of permission to conduct study

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

**OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY REGISTRAR**

08 October 2019

Matimba Hlungwani
Student number 1969771
MAOSW
School of Human and Community Development

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**"Exploring the perceptions of female academics regarding cyber-sexual harassment at the Law School, Wits University"**

This letter serves to confirm that the above project has received permission to be conducted on University premises, and/or involving staff and/or students of the University as research participants. In undertaking this research, you agree to abide by all University regulations for conducting research on campus and to respect participants' rights to withdraw from participation at any time.

If you are conducting research on certain student cohorts, year groups or courses within specific Schools and within the teaching term, permission must be sought from Heads of School or individual academics. Kindly be advised that the Dean of Students does not deal with research related requests, and all arrangements will need to be made with the relevant HOD to obtain consent for staff participation (which is entirely voluntary) in your interviews. Staff recruitment may not be done through the platforms of meetings and email communication. Physical approach may be used during staff lunch breaks; alternatively, your supervisor is permitted to obtain email consent on your behalf.

Ethical clearance has been obtained. (Protocol number: SW/19/08/03)

Research may commence for ***6 months*** from the date of approval.

Nicoleen Potgieter
**University Deputy Registrar**

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