

**GIRLS COPING WITH SEXUAL HARASSMENT ISSUES IN A HIGH  
SCHOOL IN MASERU, LESOTHO**

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## DECLARATION

I, Ntseliseng Motsabi-tsabi, declare that this is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any university and the reference to work by other persons has been dully acknowledged.



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Durban on this the 29th day of November 2002

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to broaden the knowledge and understanding of issues of sexual harassment experienced by girls in a high school in Lesotho. It does this by focussing on Form D girls in one high school in Maseru, here referred as Fora High School; and consequently how they cope with it.

The study locates itself as concerned with gender justice. It assumes that it constitutes a discursive position that contrasts and opposes dominant patriarchal discourses. It sets out also to establish to what extent sexual harassment occurred and how it was perceived by those that experience it. It is a qualitative study that employs narratives and observation as the research methods. To achieve this, a module that introduced concepts of sexuality and sexual harassment preceded the data collection.

Although the study was confined to Form D girls and did not include all the girls in this school, findings reveal that girls in this class experienced and observed sexual harassment in this school and more specifically in the classroom than anywhere else. Teachers were the major perpetrators of sexual harassment. Studying the narratives presented as data, physical harassment was the most frequently reported form of harassment. When such behaviours are reported, teachers ignore it and this suggests that they 'normalise' sexual harassment and thus reinforce dominant patriarchal discourses of hegemonic masculinity.

Based on the participants' narratives and also arguing from the discursive position of gender justice, recommendations are suggested for this school and others to introduce sexuality and sex education in an attempt to make schools more equitable places for girls. It proposes that educational policies and curricular development more generally be revisited and to ensure that they are addressing sexuality education and therefore sexual violence particularly.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

This study was designed to increase knowledge and understanding of how girls in Lesotho understand and cope with sexual harassment. It specifically explores this issue in a high school in Maseru, here referred to as Fora High School. It assumes that girls in this school might have experienced sexual harassment or been engaged with other people's experiences of sexual harassment within the school. The study attempts to better understand aspects of sexual harassment with the hope that its findings might be useful to both learners and educators in this school and elsewhere.

This school is co-educational with a higher population of boys than girls and more female teachers than male teachers. The high proportion of boys could be explained by three factors. First, the regulations of the school that insist on a strict dress code and the regulation that disallows girls from keeping their hair long is unpopular and could relate to the dominant emphasis for girls on particular forms of feminine appearance and to fashion statements in popular cultural texts which increasingly play a part in the everyday world of the teenage girls (see Gilbert & Taylor, 1991). They work to unconsciously construct the sexuality of a 'real' woman as one whom:

...has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life (Berger cited by Gilbert & Taylor, 1991:13).

Second, this school has a reputation for excellency at boys' soccer and volleyball, the sporting activities that play a significant role in young men's masculinities within the Maseru urban region schools. Third, many parents within the Maseru urban region send their sons to this school because of the reputation of one male teacher (a co-opted member in the school administration) who is reputed to be a tough disciplinarian of the boys in this school<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> However, I have observed that his toughness causes many young boys to be docile and feel punished even before misconduct occurs, thus breeding fear in non-offending students (Nonguero, 1995); while older boys in senior classes tend to be rebellious and violent.

I wish to note that the body of literature dealing with gender issues that I encountered in the coursework of this degree generated the choice of topic for this study, including sexual abuse or harassment. This literature made me aware of various forms of sexual violence that girls and women are exposed to. It also brought the realisation that I had experienced abuse, both as learner and teacher. I was unaware that these experiences could be termed sexual abuse; and often times my discomfort and concerns were dismissed when I tried to present a complaint about such behaviour.

First, when I was at high school, the forms of behaviour that I now recognise as sexual harassment included boys writing and drawing degrading messages and pictures about girls that they passed amongst themselves. At assembly, they would hold a mirror underneath our skirts to see our underwear. In the dining hall, especially after supper, certain boys would manoeuvre us into the corners and touch our breasts and thighs. The matron would always instruct the boys to stop such behaviour, but nothing serious was done to address it.

Second, when I first came to this school as a teacher, male teachers made jokes and demeaning comments about women teachers who had been to higher institutions of education. One comment that I remember is that "we" were not pure. In addition, one male teacher would volunteer to give me a ride home after work, but would emphasise that this ride would have to be paid with sexual favours. Many of these incidents were reported to the principal, but I was advised to 'cool down' and learn to cope with this behaviour while at this school.

This response poses particular questions and problems. Does this mean that this behaviour should be accepted as 'normal'? How should one cope with this behaviour when it makes it difficult for one to work properly as a result of embarrassment, anxiety and other negative feelings and self-judgement? For the young girls in the classrooms who are always told about their thighs and facial features, what effect does this behaviour have on their academic work and their future lives? Who should assist them especially when their teachers are the perpetrators? They seem to be expected to accept this behaviour as 'normal' because the principal does not do anything about it. She personally rarely

attempted to solve any disciplinary misconduct in the school; rather, delegated this to the 'tough' male teacher. Her response could be described as a form of emphasised femininity in the face of hegemonic masculinity, one that is:

...characterised by compliance with subordination, ... passivity [and]... oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men (Connell in Gilbert & Taylor, 1991:10).

With this in mind, I hope this study will help develop understandings that can work to help girls in this school with skills to deal with sexual violence.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review on Sexual Harassment in Schools**

Sexual harassment is increasingly acknowledged as a problem in schools; and it has been argued that if left unchallenged or not dealt with "... schools may be described as training grounds for the insidious cycle of domestic violence" (Stein, 1995: 148).

The available literature on sexual harassment in schools describes various aspects of sexual harassment; and attention here is given to these aspects in order to inform this study. First, this chapter begins by identifying definitions of sexual violence as used in different studies. Secondly, forms of sexual harassment or abuse and their effects on both the individual and the society are discussed. Third, theories that attempt to explain gendered behaviours to understand harassment against women are discussed to provide a framework that informs this study. Lastly, a positive plan for dealing with sexual violence in schools is provided.

### **Defining sexual harassment**

Definitions of sexual harassment have varied considerably across studies. Many of the definitions have been broadly derived from incidences of abuse or harassment that have occurred at the workplace and domestic arena; consequently, they might have limited applicability in relation to school arena.

Van den Aardweg defines sexual violence as "...exertion of physical force to injure or destroy, accompanied by the emotion of anger and hostility" (1987: 175). Balles (1993), Gordon et al (1999), Ajzenstadt (1999) and Herbert (1992) understand sexual harassment as unsolicited and unreciprocated sexual male behaviour towards women and girls in which a person is tricked, trapped, forced or bribed into a sexual act. Stein (1995) who discusses sexual harassment in the school context identifies it as a form of discrimination that interferes with the right to receive equal educational opportunity.

In this study, drawing on Strauss (1993) and Connecticut Women's Education & Legal Fund (CWEALF, no date)<sup>2</sup>, sexual harassment is considered as any type of unwelcome or unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that may arise out of an unfair use of influence, power or authority, or a lack of respect for another and which affects a person's ability to do work or participate in educational opportunities including all other issues of sexual abuse.

### **The extent and various forms of sexual harassment in schools**

In a study conducted in three provinces in South African schools by Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2000,)<sup>3</sup> it has been argued that sexual violence against girls and women is prevalent in schools; and that the perpetrators are predominantly boys and male teachers, strangers to the school environment and other school employees. In South Africa, while education provision has been along the divisive lines of race in particular, HRW states that privilege does not protect a girl against harassment, it occurs in all schools, "...prestigious white schools, impoverished black township schools, those for children with impairments and even primary schools, at all levels of society and among all ethnic groups" (2000:5).

Another study conducted in rural schools of Botswana by Woods (2001) around sexual harassment against girls in schools describes the impact it has on the gendered identity. The study shows that of the 800 student girls who were interviewed, 38% of them reported that they had been touched in a sexual manner without their consent; 17% reported having had sex, with 50% saying that it was forced; 34% of these students saying they had sex for money, gifts or favours and 48% claiming they were forced into unprotected sex.

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<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Women's Education & Legal Fund (CWEFLF) is located in Boston. It is a state-wide non-profit organisation dedicated to empowering women, girls and their families to achieve equal opportunities in their personal and professional lives.

<sup>3</sup>The Human Rights Watch (HRW) is an independent, nongovernmental organisation based in United States. It is dedicated to protecting human rights of all people around the world. It conducts fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses in all regions of the world, and then publishes those findings in dozens of books and reports every year.

Certainly, sexual violence is not confined to this continent or these locations only. Larkin (1994), Stein (1995) and Strauss (1993) in their studies conducted in Canada and USA, have also noted that sexual abuse or harassment is prevalent in the schools they studied in these countries. Whatley (1999) concurs with this and adds that both boys and girls experience sexual harassment in most USA schools and much of it has a homophobic component.

The forms that sexual harassment or abuse take are varied and there is debate as to what constitutes sexual harassment or abuse. CWEALF (no date) explains that sexual harassment is subjective, and that the person who experiences the offensive behaviour is the one who decides if it is harassment. However, this is arguable.

The forms that sexual harassment could take are listed below and have been adopted from various studies on these issues, Strauss (1993); Van den Aardweg (1987); Balles (1993); Gordon et al (1999); Adzenstadt (1999); Herbert (1992); UND Student Counselling Centre (booklet issued during the campaign against women abuse in March 2002). Morrell (1998) and Humm (1989) have both mentioned sexual harassment as one form of sexual violence in schools, and pointed out that gays and lesbians also experience it. They include

- touching – the arm, breasts, buttocks, massaging the neck or shoulders;
- verbal calling – from 'honey' to 'bitch' or worse;
- spreading sexual rumours about a person, through such devices as graffiti or 'slam book';
- suggestive gestures such as touching oneself sexually in front of others;
- making suggestive gestures or sounds, such as kissing or smacking, licking the lips, catcalls, winking, leers and stares;
- pressure for sexual activity, such as cornering, blocking, standing too close, following, conversations that are too personal, repeatedly asking someone out when he or she isn't interested;
- stunts, such as 'spiking' – forcibly pulling down a person's pants – and 'wedges' – pulling on the waistband of a person's underwear to wedge it in their buttocks;
- assault – groping to rape;
- beating and slapping;
- exploitation through physical force, threat, intimidation and/or coercion;

- bullying.

CWEALF (undated) explains that all of these forms of sexual harassment can be classified into two categories in schools. Stein discusses such behaviours as unlawful forms of harassment (1995:148). First, *quid pro quo*, which means 'this for that'. This kind of harassment occurs when a person's entitlement to enjoyment of a particular benefit is conditional on sexual favours. In schools, *quid pro quo* occurs when a teacher lets a student know that their grade in the class depends on returning sexual favours. Teachers or school authorities commonly enact this kind of sexual harassment on pupils. Second, 'hostile environment' sexual harassment occurs when there is unwelcome sexual conduct that has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with a person's right or benefit by creating an intimidating hostile offensive environment (Stein, 1995:148). Experience has shown that students, teachers, non-teacher employees such as janitors or other school staff, or third parties such as visiting athletic teams can perpetrate this kind of harassment.

How the effects of harassment are experienced and dealt with by different sexes also varies in relation to the sense of powerlessness experienced. According to Stein "girls [are] much less likely than boys to feel confident about themselves after the episodes of sexual harassment" (1993: 38). In a study conducted in American schools, Bryant confirms this and adds that:

Approximately 12% of the boys who were harassed did not want to attend school and 13% talked less in class because of the harassment. ...Fully one third of the harassed girls no longer wished to attend school, 32% reported that talking in class was more difficult and 20% said they had received a lower class grade. [Some] reported altering their behaviour to decrease the likelihood of harassment by avoiding certain people or places and even giving up attendance at school events (1993: 45).

In her study, Stein (1991) reports that some girls said they managed sexual harassment by writing threatening letters to the perpetrators and the school administration. In the same study, one girl reported that she would always defend herself by hitting the boys; however, she was the one who got into trouble for unfeminine behaviour and the boys were not disciplined. Interestingly, such treatment identified in the literature has resonance in the experience of the

researcher. Similar treatment was administered at a school in which the researcher was working. During one lunch hour two girls ran to the staff room to report that Thato (a girl) was fighting Lehlohonolo (a boy) rather than stating that Thato and Lehlohonolo were fighting. When the two pupils were brought to the staff for discipline, the teachers responded by warning Thato not to fight boys because girls are not supposed to fight boys.

It is important to question the implications of this response for both boys and girls in schools. Such responses give boys permission to become batterers because many of their assaults on girls are not interrupted or condemned by adults in the school environment. In contrast, when girls do report the sexual harassment, the events are trivialized and are simultaneously demeaned and/or interrogated (Stein, 1995; Larkin, 1994). It further teaches young girls to view harassment at school as acceptable or an inevitable component of their everyday lives if adults at school cannot or will not protect them.

Consequently, some girls begin to lose trust in the adults around them and in the educational system for not providing a safe environment. They live with anger, fear, powerlessness, shame and self-blame, loss of self-esteem, guilt, confusion, depression and embarrassment (Strauss, 1993; Student Counselling Centre booklet, University of Natal, Durban).

Hall (2000), in her study<sup>4</sup>, identified that exposure to abuse or harassment for girls profoundly shapes or constructs their future lives. Most of the girls interviewed in this study stated that they had enough experience of abuse of their own and of their friends and neighbours at home; they were constructing their future lives to include jobs, self-sufficiency and as independent single-career-women to bypass domestic violence.

Another disturbing effect of harassment on girls that has been documented is the perception of their sexuality (Commeyras & Montsi, 2000)<sup>5</sup>. This study argues that

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<sup>4</sup> *It Hurts to be a Girl* is the name of this study conducted in the post-urban Northeast of Buffalo amongst poor white middle school girls.

<sup>5</sup> A study conducted among youths in Botswana

they hate themselves as girls and think that being the opposite sex would make their life better than as girls. The study shows that all twenty-five girls interviewed in one study in Botswana responded that they would be “very happy” if they could wake up as boys. One said it is because

...more women are suffering than men. Men have more opportunities than women. People who are mostly abused are women. They are always beaten by men. Women are mostly raped. So I would really be happy and I think I will cry tears for joy [if I woke up as a boy] ... I would not get pregnant at my teenage stage. I think I would be able to finish my education because I would not have as many problems as if I was a girl (female, age 15 in Commeyras & Montsi, 2000: 334).

All of these effects, described above, may result in lost educational opportunities, which in turn work to decrease career options and economic potential for victims in the society. Failure to deal with this by all institutions including family, school and government authorities can be argued to present an obstacle to democracy (ESIB; [www.esib.org/policies/nomeansno.htm](http://www.esib.org/policies/nomeansno.htm)).

However, this understanding poses a number of questions that have not been addressed, for example, why is sexual harassment mostly targeted at girls and women? Why are they likely to be the discriminated sex rather than boys and men? It has been argued that the issue of violence against women is one of the misuses of power by men who have been socialised into believing that they have a right to control the women in their lives, even through violent means (Archer, 1994:310).

Beckett et al, in their study conducted in Australian schools, have stated that perpetrators of harassment in society are predominately male, and that similarly

[T]he evidence that is available on [harassment] in schools suggests that men and boys are overwhelmingly the perpetrators. While other boys and male teachers are victims of violence from men and boys, it is mostly girls and female teachers who experience violence at the hands of boys and men (1987: 99).

These findings compelled Beckett et al (1987) to view sexual harassment in schools as an expression of the power structures in society. Connell calls this the ‘gender order’ a constructed pattern of power relations between men and women (1987:99).

Several studies considered in this study, including the researcher's experience, have shown that school authorities ignore incidences of harassment and expect the victims to accept it as 'normal'. From the feminist point of view, ignoring or normalising harassment against girls and women in schools constitutes a failure to practice democracy or social justice and equality between men and women. Even in those schools where leadership is in the hands of women, male perpetrators are ignored because a woman cannot discipline a man. When a boy has harassed a girl, the girl is told that the boy has a 'crush' on her; or if the boy has to be punished, he is punished by male teachers only<sup>6</sup>.

### **Theories that attempt to explain the gendered behaviour to understanding sexual harassment**

A number of theories that provide understanding of male harassment of girls and women have been put forward. Walby (1990) has argued that the violence of men against women cannot be understood outside an analysis of patriarchal social structures. Basaw (1992) and Paechter (1998) concur that violent behaviour of men and boys is the product of patriarchal social structures that have assigned different roles for females and males and given those assigned for male more power and higher status than those assigned for females. The ultimate result is unequal power relations between men and women. So, at times during which men fail to meet the masculine demands or identify themselves with these patriarchal roles, they are more likely to lash out in frustration against those nearer to them and especially against women and girls. This leaves women in subordinate positions be it at home, at work or at all social institutions.

Several feminist theories have challenged and attempted to explain the patriarchal discourses on violence. Radical feminist theory considers the biological structure of women as the fundamental base of women's subordination and oppression, prior to class or race (Weedon, 1997). This theory sees patriarchy as a trans-historical, all-embracing structure, which might be argued to necessitate women's withdrawal into

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<sup>6</sup> A similar incident occurred in the school where the researcher was working. Although the misbehaviour was not sexual harassment, the boy's mother stated that she was not able to discipline her son and so teachers should help her. One female teacher suggested that the boy should be sent to male teachers for discipline and all other female teachers agreed with the suggestion.

separatism from which to develop a new women's culture independent from men. This theory further identifies the family

... as the key instrument in the oppression of women through sexual slavery and forced motherhood. The central political issue for radical feminism is for women to reclaim from men control of their own body (Weedon, 1997: 17).

Socialist feminist theory has attempted to extend the Marxist assumption that human nature is not essential, but socially produced and changeable (Weedon, 1997). Weedon (ibid) writes that this theory does not see patriarchy as monolithic, but suggests that it takes forms of oppression that may vary historically. Capitalism, patriarchy and racism are viewed as discrete forms of oppression that are interrelated, as in the case of family. Unlike radical feminist theory that stresses the need to take account of biology, socialist feminist theory, sees its meaning as historical and social rather than essentialist. It does not see women as primarily either sexual or procreative things; rather it argues for the abolition of the categories "women" and "men" as they exist currently and opening of all social ways of being to all people, including elimination of the sexual division of labour and participation of men in child-rearing, reproductive freedom for women, freedom to define one's own sexuality and right of lesbians to raise children (Weedon, 1997).

Liberal feminist theory on the other hand stresses women's rights as individuals to choice and self-determination irrespective of biological sex. They largely focus on ideological conditions that prevent women competing under conditions of equal opportunity (Weedon, 1997).

Post-structuralist theory draws on elements of these forms of feminism but views 'masculine' behaviours somewhat differently. Weedon (1997) writes that post-structuralist theory argues that patriarchal discourses and ideas about femininity and masculinity are structural as they emanate from the institutions and social practices of our societies and are embedded in language, subjectivity and discourse.

Accordingly, language is defined as the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined and

contested. It is also the place where our sense of ourselves is constructed. This implies that words, signs and all forms of communication consist of sets of meanings we can draw on in constructing our identity - that is who we are, be it in terms of gender, race, class, age, disability or any thing; and these meanings are not "...guaranteed by the subject who speaks it..." (Weedon, 1997:22) but also, by the subject which receives it. Loots also writes that these meanings are "...the result of already existing social and historical definitions, which the individual in turn is subjected to..." (1994: 13). Consequently, meaning is susceptible to challenge and redefinition depending not only on a person's relationship to the signifier or message, but to the context in which these messages are articulated; and also on the meaning they acquire from their difference to all other signs in the language. For example, in my language, the word 'mother (*m'e*)' has no intrinsic meaning when used in formal situations and said in a low soft tone. However, once it is used and said in a provocative tone by a youngster to an unmarried woman, it acquires another meaning and the subject who receives it may feel harassed or violated as it has sexual connotations. Thus, poststructuralist feminist theory argues that language is a socially and historically specific site for political struggle (Loots, 1994). Language offers various discursive positions to subjects and includes forms of femininity and masculinity through which we can consciously and unconsciously live our lives and constitute our subjectivities.

Subjectivity is defined as a sense of ourselves. Weedon (1997) states that subjectivity is not innate or genetically determined, but socially produced and as argued earlier language is one of the major contributing factors. In this view the individual's relation to language is largely unconscious that is how the subject reacts towards words, sound and meanings that relate to femininities and masculinities is not predictable or pre-determined but depends on the context and the discourses that compete in the mind of the subjects. A subject who is constituted within patriarchal relations of power might accept certain forms of femininity or masculinity without questioning them much.

By employing the idea of discourse, post-structuralist feminists are drawing on the works of Foucault where he defined discourses as ways of constituting knowledge,

together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them Foucault (in Weedon, 1997:105). Loots adds that these discourses "...often compete for and contradict the subjectivity of the subject they seek to govern - the conscious and unconscious mind and the emotional life of the subject" (1994:15).<sup>7</sup>

Foucault (ibid) notes that the ways in which these discourses constitute the mind and bodies of individuals is part of a wide range of power relations and the most powerful ones have firm institutional bases in the law, medicine, social welfare, education and in the organisation of the family and work. Arguably, patriarchy exists as the hegemonic discourse that inhabits all these sites, including education. Again, these discourses gain status through being privileged and this makes them achieve certain dominance. In relation to this topic one would ask, how are patriarchal discourses enacted and maintained, for example, in schools?

Gilbert and Taylor (1991) have argued that schools, through the formal and hidden curriculum, are able to privilege these discourses intentionally or unintentionally; and Lesko (1988) wrote that they (discourses) then become in effect a curriculum of the body which is implicated in social control and legitimating of certain versions of femininity and masculinity. The formal curriculum, tacitly influenced by structured powerful patriarchal discourses, proposes which school subjects are more appropriate for the different sexes. It proposes that certain school subjects perceived as masculine be attributed higher status than those perceived as feminine. This results in girls engaging with work that suggests subordinate positions for them at school and in society. However, for every dominant discourse there are other possible discursive positions.

In relation to this topic, if a patriarchal discourse that privileges hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity is dominant (Connell, 1997), then an

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<sup>7</sup> At a personal level, I am reminded of an experience whereby a boy always commented about my friend's large breasts and described her as "dairy". For me there was no need for this boy to remind my friend about the size of her breasts and that she is a "dairy". I was so angry and was about to respond critically about his features when my friend told me to ignore him. Thereafter, I did not want to talk or see the boy, but my friend was not displeased with him.

alternative discourse exists, which I here refer to as a gender justice or social justice discourse that proposes equality between men and women. From this point of view, hegemonic masculine behaviour in schools is argued to promote sexual harassment; aspects of behaviour that are undemocratic and discriminatory against women. From this alternative discursive position, it is argued that the young girls in the school under study need to know that they have rights and deserve to be respected for what they are. In relation to this study then, although change cannot be implemented overnight, girls and women in this school need to be aware of the patriarchal discourses that marginalize them, thereby subjecting them to male domination and harassment. They need to be made aware that *quid pro quo* and hostile environment harassment (mentioned earlier) are patriarchal and examples of power play by men who feel threatened by women's progress or by their presence (FFE: [www.ffeusa.org/harassment.html](http://www.ffeusa.org/harassment.html)).

In her study *Slippery Justice*<sup>8</sup>, Stein (1996) has also indicated that adults in the school environment are responsible for the existence of sexual harassment against girls in schools. She states that the manner in which adults have handled sexual harassment disputes has been arbitrary, inconsistent, or rigid and uninspired. Several times boys have been excluded from discussions on sexual harassment issues and yet they are not aware that what they are doing is harassment. They have always considered it as what boys have got to do. She has written that

[These] adults have often marginalized the conversation about sexual harassment into a boring; pedantic subject...students are read the riot act of do's and don'ts of sexual harassment. ...[Then] the unspoken ideology that links all these discussions is one that reduces boys to hormones and characterises girls as temptresses or prudes....Boys find themselves getting into trouble, sometimes big trouble, ranging from reprimands and suspensions to expulsions and lawsuits (1996:2).

So, Stein's argument is that, while she acknowledges that harassment is mostly towards girls, boys should be made aware of the behaviours regarded as harassment as well as its definition for sometimes they do not know what harassment is. So asking boys and men to do away with their behaviours is like asking them to abandon what constitutes their masculinity; and it may not be easy if

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<sup>8</sup> Slippery Justice is a study conducted in K-12 schools in Massachusetts amongst boys and girls.

they have nothing to hold on to. As one form of social justice discourse, Morrell (1998) has suggested that men should be included in the intervention programmes that deal with gender issues.

From a discursive position of gender justice, sexual harassment is a matter of social injustice. It violates fundamental democratic principles, and schools need to discuss this problem in a way that highlights those principles. Stein & Sjostrom have argued that

If schools are to act as agents of democracy, they must practice democracy. This means putting at the forefront conversations and lessons about social justice, including sexual harassment, and finding mechanisms for justice that are worthy of democratic institution in a democratic society (1994: 7).

It is, therefore, from this position of gender justice that one would propose that – to counter the dominant masculinist discourse, schools revise the policies that govern them and develop those that are inclusive and address sexual violence within them (this is addressed further in the final chapter).

In conclusion, Gilbert & Taylor have stated that “while schooling is an important site for the reproduction of gender relations, it is also a site for intervention and change” (1991: 129), especially because in schools is where the future generation is concentrated. So, implementing programmes or addressing the issues of sexual harassment in schools serves to offer a different and oppositional discursive position to the dominant gender order. It might curb the rate of its occurrence as it is able to reach many young people (Foreman, 1998) and thereby, preventing reproduction of harassers for the future.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research methodology

#### Background

This study was undertaken to investigate the nature of sexual harassment in Fora High School<sup>9</sup> in Lesotho and the response of girls to it. It was established earlier that women teachers in this school experience sexual harassment by their male colleagues and have developed their own ways of dealing with it, because the administration of the school is reluctant to intervene in these issues. This implies that this study was concerned with sensitive issues as it was intended to make girls in this school familiar with another discursive position to this dominant one and to be aware that sexual harassment is not 'normal', rather it is violation of their human rights thereby providing a discourse on gender justice. It was, therefore, essential that the researcher obtain the support of the school's principal in conducting the study in this school. Communication with the principal of this school about the study served to guarantee her support.

#### Sample grouping

For this study a sample or target population (Cohen & Manion, 2000; Neumen, 1997) was identified. It consisted of fifty girls in Fora High School. The study was designed to acquire data from this target group of fifty girls in Form D. Students in Form E, who are in their fifth year, were not considered for the study due to the pressure of the final external examinations. The choice of Form D pupils was based on three assumptions. First, pupils in this class, in their fourth year at the school have had considerable campus life experience and as such are likely to be more comfortable in discussions of abuse or harassment than newcomers in the school and because of being older their responses could be more mature and reliable. Second, as they have spent a number of years at this school, it is probable that they would have more experiences of abuse or harassment than pupils in lower forms. Third, the researcher is familiar with these pupils and developed a good rapport with them as their teacher

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<sup>9</sup>This is not the real name of the school.

three years earlier. This was considered to be a factor in enabling the collection of data.

### **Nature of research and planning**

This study is a qualitative biographical one that employs a narrative methodology. According to Cohen and Manion (2000), this kind of study enables the researcher to represent or interpret events in his/her own life. Plummer (1983) notes that this kind of study includes interactive and co-operative techniques directly involving the researcher and participants or research subjects. Goodson (1983) concurs with this and suggests that biographical studies:

...have the potential to make a far reaching contribution to the problem of understanding the links between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues', a task that lies at the heart of the sociological enterprise (Goodson, 1983:178).

Babbie and Mouton (2001) also note that biographical or life history studies are often responses to questions provided by the investigator or the researcher.

Before undertaking the narrative aspect of the study, it was necessary to develop particular awareness of the issues being researched. A module of four sessions on sex and sexuality and sexual harassment was conducted for two reasons. First, the research participants could not be assumed to know what constitutes sexual harassment. Second, as the dominant patriarchal discourse proposes sexual abuse or harassment as 'normal' and which seem to be reflected and reproduced in schools in many ways (Jones, 1995), it was necessary to provide a clearly articulated alternative discourse, here that of gender justice.

The module was informed by Greathead et al's (1998) publication *Responsible Teenage Sexuality*, which is aimed at facilitating the teaching of sexuality education. (See Appendix 1 for details of the module).

### **Stage one**

This stage of the research consisted of a module of four sessions, which are briefly detailed below (also see Appendix 1).

### **Session one – Sex and sexuality**

The major objective for this session was to help both boys and girls to understand the difference between sex and sexuality and to identify the stereotypes involved in the construction of their sexuality and, consequently, the effect of these stereotypes on their lives.

### **Session two – sexual abuse or harassment**

This session's objective was to broaden participants' understanding and awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment; and to identify potential dangerous situations for harassment.

### **Session three – forms of sexual abuse or harassment**

The objective for this session was to help participants develop awareness of how society perpetuates myths that support harassment and consequently various forms of sexual harassment in the society, family and at school.

### **Session four – methods of protection against abuse or harassment**

The objective for this session was to help participants to develop strategies that would help them protect themselves against abuse or harassment.

### **Session five – personal narratives**

At this stage of the module the intention was to acquire personal written narrative stories of sexual harassment girls in this school had experienced; or of someone's she has observed or heard about within the school using the following guidelines:

- Who abuses?
- Where did it occur-within the school compound or on the way to or from school?
- What kind of abuse or harassment was it/ what form?
- Did you consider it as abuse or harassment at the time of occurrence?
- How often does it occur?
- What action did you take?

## **Triangulation**

In addition to eliciting narratives, other methods of data collection were considered useful. Babbie and Mouton (2001) indicate that in biographical studies or life history studies bias may crop up in three possible ways. First, participants may lie, cheat, present a false front or try to impress the researcher in some way or another. Second, the researcher may hold particular prejudices or assumptions that may influence the structure of the question and selection of materials; or introduce biases by virtue of age, class, gender and general background. Third, the encounter itself could be too formal to encourage intimacy or too informal to encourage an adequate response.

In trying to avoid the bias that may be caused by these factors or weakness of one research method and to maintain validity and reliability of data, a process of triangulation was included. According to Denzin, triangulation is defined as:

...a plan of action that raise[s]...researchers above the personal biasness that stem from single methodologies. By combining methods in the study, researchers can partially overcome the deficiencies that flow from one method (1989; 230).

Ball (1981) and Merriam (1998) concur by adding that the idea of triangulation is founded upon the notion that every form of data is potentially biased and that the use of a variety of different methods of data collection (e.g. observation, interview and questionnaire) can either eliminate or highlight these biases by convergence, thereby strengthening reliability as well as internal validity of the findings. This process, therefore, involved two methods namely, participant observation and a judicious mixture of observation and casual chatting with teachers in addition to the narratives.

Participant observation was planned for use in the sessions. This tool was considered safer to use because whatever was observed, was revealed, and was of significance in the study could always be recorded later without anyone of the participants noticing me (Neumen, 1994); and thereby feeling threatened. Stenhouse (cited by Mahlobo, 2000:30) argues that "observation clearly calls for some kind of recording and the held notebook is the classic form". Cohen & Manion (2000) have

also argued that in observation, researchers are able to discern on-going behaviour as it occurs and are able to make appropriate notes about its salient features.

As mentioned earlier, casual chatting with teachers on issues of abuse or harassment within the school was also considered to be useful. This was also supplemented by note taking later without their awareness. What follows is an account of the research process as well as observations made during the sessions, which is followed by the analysis of the narrative stories of the target group in the next chapter.

### **Research process**

The process of research began on April 22, 2002. In spite of careful planning, it was a time during which the school timetable could not be changed to accommodate the researcher. Again, at this time of the year teachers are busy preparing their learners for the first session examinations. As a result, it was not very easy for the researcher to have a fixed slot on the school timetable for her sessions. However, the principal and heads of the departments were supportive and co-operative. They persuaded the teachers in their departments to share some of their double periods with me. As a double period was 80 minutes long, the researcher was allowed 40 minutes. This then resulted in the researcher having to come to school as early as 7:00 a.m to use the morning study period, which was also 40 minutes. Consequently, the lessons were not necessarily completed as planned.

While in the field, at the principal's insistence the module had to be offered to a group not only of girls, but also boys. Her concern was that these boys would behave in a chaotic way if left out. While this was not planned, including boys in the sessions has merit because it constitutes one way of introducing a gender justice discourse in which both boys and girls are made aware of issues of sexual harassment together.

The first stage of the research process was to conduct the module, which as stated earlier, was divided into four sessions. In session one, boys and girls were put in different groups and asked to list words used to describe boys/men and girls/women.

All the words were documented on the board and thereafter the stereotypes involved in the construction of their sexuality were identified as well as their implications on the individual and society.

In session two participants were asked to state what they know about sexual harassment and their responses were documented on the board. The researcher added to their responses by giving a definition of sexual harassment adapted from Greathead et al (1998). Afterwards, participants were divided into groups, and while in groups each group was provided with a statement of potential dangerous situations for harassment and asked to analyse them in relation to the following questions:

- Could the situation be dangerous or lead to difficulties in any way?
- How could you cope with the situation?

Group discussion was followed by presentations in which each group read its statement and how they would cope with the situation. As a form of conclusion, participants were asked to give their own examples of situations where harassment is likely to occur and concluded that harassment is not selective. It can happen to anyone anytime and anywhere.

During session three, the facilitator started by first, making a summary of the previous sessions, which in turn facilitated the discussion on how society perpetuates sexual harassment. Second, scenarios of harassment of other girls' experience of harassment, largely drawn from Larkin (1994) and HRW (2000), were used to help participants identify examples of harassment. The facilitator also gave examples of her own experiences of harassment as a student and as a teacher and related them to patriarchal discourses that perpetuate harassment. Some participants were also able to relate their own experiences of harassment. Third, forms of sexual harassment, largely drawn from Larkin (1994) who classified them into physical harassment, visual harassment and verbal harassment, were discussed. Fourth, participants were divided into five groups. Each group was given a statement about harassment and asked to express their feelings about it. Lastly, a summary of all forms of harassment identified was given, as well as those stereotypes or myths about sexual harassment. Participants were asked to think, while at home, of which sex is more likely to be harassed than the other and why. Their responses were used as an introduction for the fourth session.

Session four was an open oral discussion on whether boys or girls are more likely to be harassed and how to cope or deal with harassment. The principal and head of maths and science department were present. Asked to respond on this topic, one girl answered that girls are more likely to be harassed than boys and was supported by almost all the class. Interestingly, the boys demonstrated a defensive feeling and started explaining why girls are more likely to be harassed than boys, and the girls were very reserved. One boy stood up and said, 'Madam, I think these girls are going to say that we rape them.' 'Yes, madam,' responded the girls. The boy continued, 'We do not rape them because if a girl agrees to be my girlfriend, we must have sex. She must not refuse.'

A group of five boys seemed to have the same feeling while other boys in this class were just laughing and saying yes to everything these boys were saying. Other boys claimed that girls expected to have sex with boys. Boys who were unwilling to participate were regarded by girls as 'weak' and 'unmanly'. One girl, whom the researcher considered to have been arguing from a patriarchal discursive position, supported these boys. She told the class about women who claim to be raped by their husbands. It became evident that she did not allow that this was rape because they are married. At this point, the principal and head of science department, arguing from gender justice discursive position, came to the researcher's rescue and explained the importance of respect in sexual relationships before marriage and in marriage. They also had to make the participants aware of the acquisition of sexually transmitted diseases and methods of protection against such diseases.

Asked about other forms of harassment they have experienced besides rape, girls mention boys' comments about their legs and hips, the demeaning words like '*khoho ea sesotho*' meaning one is primitive and '*phate*' meaning something to sleep on. After this hot debate, both boys and girls were asked to state how they might cope with incidents of abuse or harassment, whether at home or at school. Adding to their own ways of dealing with abuse or harassment, more strategies drawn from Greathead et al (1998) were provided. The principal concluded this session by making participants aware of the availability of support services by the social welfare department, the school and the police.

Apart from observations in the sessions, the researcher chatted casually with teachers on the issues of sexual abuse or harassment within the school. At this stage, the researcher had to "...listen carefully to phrases and accents...listening both to what was said and how it was said or was implied" (Neuman, 1994:362) in their comments and views on the incidences of abuse on students within the school; and most importantly on how they have helped the survivors. In the course of some of the discussions, the researcher felt the pressure to take sides, but attempted to remain neutral to avoid social breakdowns and failure to obtain more data. Van Maanen approves of this and states "...social breakdowns during data collection produce embarrassment because of the mismatch of cultural meanings [may] cause the researcher to look foolish, ignorant, or uninformed" (1982: 115). From these discussions, the researcher learned that some teachers consider sexual harassment as part of growing up and so that is why they just tell boys to stop it and not take it seriously. For them, sexual harassment entails rape and beating only.

On reading the stories generated in session five, the researcher discovered problems with them. Most of them were not personal accounts but of their friends' experiences and about incidents that occurred outside the school campus. Furthermore, these stories were unsatisfactory as they were about rape only; no other forms of abuse or harassment were discussed. This could have been due to the failure of the researcher to stress other forms of harassment in the sessions. It must also be stated that this was influenced by two factors. First, there was an incident of assault that had just occurred in front of the researcher by a teacher on the boys who were in this group. The researcher, therefore, chose to mention assault in passing being unsure how the boys would react during or after the sessions. The researcher realised that she could have been verbally harassed if she had commented or tried to intervene. Second, the researcher had a mixed group of boys and girls and expected them to talk about their experiences of harassment. However, the girls had not felt as free as the boys and so reflected the same reserve on paper. Because of these factors, the researcher decided to go back to revise the issues of sexual harassment with the target population (girls) and thereafter asked them to rewrite their stories.

This was done in May 15, 2002 and the principal and other female teachers joined the researcher in this session. In this case, the target population was freer than before and was therefore able to relate their experiences of sexual harassment and ask more questions on these issues. However, most of them said their boyfriends and their male teachers harass them. They stated that they do experience unwanted touching, brushing, kissing, insults and demeaning words by classmates and every time they report it teachers do not help them. One girl stated that she reports it to her parents who then come to school and be hard on teachers. She said, 'I know that my class teacher will just ask the boy to stop that behaviour and do nothing serious about it and the boy will do it again.' Another girl who had a disciplinary case with two boys in a senior class said, 'the first time I was massaged by one boy in my classroom I reported it to my class teacher and she laughed at me and said the boy was just playing. Since that day I also insult the boys and I know most of them hate me in this school and I don't care. Teachers call me roughrider.'

Surprisingly, the principal and the other teachers responded to her positively and encouraged other girls to develop ways of dealing with harassment. One teacher narrated to us how she fought a boy while at high school. Although she was not necessarily encouraging the girls to fight boys, she told them that perpetrators are sometimes scared of being known; she stressed the importance of being able to say no to unwanted male behaviour. At the end of this session, the researcher had learned that girls and teachers in this session do not generally normalise sexual harassment.

*One more issue concerns the number of participants who submitted their stories.* The study was designed to collect data from fifty girls. However, forty-three girls submitted their stories and this is considered by the researcher to be an adequate sample.

It must also be noted that in spite of failure of attempts to ensure that professionals from social-welfare department attended the last session so that students would have information about who to consult if need be, the principal and head of Maths and Science department volunteered to join us in this session and contributed by giving guidelines on how to deal with abuse or harassment at the time of occurrence or after

occurrence. Nevertheless, when the researcher left the school the principal assured the researcher that attempts to invite these professionals would continue.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

This chapter presents the data gathered during the research process. The major aim of the research process was to find out the extent of sexual harassment among Form D girls in Fora High School in Lesotho, and consequently how they cope with it.

The findings that follow are organized so that they investigate the places where harassment occurred, who the perpetrators were and the nature or form of harassment. As described in the previous chapter, some narratives were written in class and some were written at home. They have been analyzed in relation to the question posed:

Provide a written account (narrative) of your personal experience of sexual harassment; or of someone's you have observed or heard about at the school". You may use the following points to guide you:

- Who abuses?
- Where did it occur- within the school or on the way to or from school?
- What kind of harassment/form was it?
- Did you consider it as harassment at the time of occurrence?
- How often does it occur?
- What action did you take? (Also see appendix 1)

The participants were requested to write their names and age on their papers in order to identify those who may need special attention and were also assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the study.

I have collected the findings and each narrative has been numbered from 1-43 to facilitate the discussion and analysis for the study. To ensure anonymity these numbers therefore, refer to students and narratives and teachers' names are also excluded.

As stated in the previous chapter 43 girls only submitted narratives; and two of these narratives could not be analysed. Narrative 15 was considered as reporting the case

of child abuse while narrative 22 reflected misunderstanding of the issues of harassment discussed in the sessions (see Appendix 2 a & b) which therefore explains the total of 41 responses as shown on the Tables 1 & 2. The narratives have been analysed according to the place where harassment occurred, the identity of perpetrator and the form of harassment that was experienced.

In the literature review there were certain concepts that were described – ‘*quid pro quo*’ sexual harassment and hostile environment sexual harassment and these have been considered significant in the analysis of some findings in this study.

### **Analysis of the findings**

#### Place where harassment occurred

According to the information shown on Table 1, all the young girls who have submitted their narratives had experienced and observed sexual harassment in this school. 11 (26%) of 43 said they have been harassed in the classrooms, 6 (14%) on the way from school, 5 (12%) in other non-specified areas within the school and 2 (5%) at the school entrance. The ‘other’ as shown on the table included home, on the street and in their hostels in the villages and this was reported as 9 (14%) of 43 participants; 4 (9%) said they have experienced harassment but did not specify the place, 2 (5%) during the school trip, 1 (2%) in the office and 1 (2%) at the sports field.

Table 1 Places where harassment occurred

Place	number of responses	responses in %
School entrance	2	5
School trip	2	5
In class	11	26
Office	1	2
Sports field	1	2
From school	6	14
School but not specific	5	12
Not specific	4	9
Other	9	14
TOTAL	41	95
(Number of respondents)	(43)	

#### Perpetrator

In terms of who perpetuated harassment, 16 (37%) of 43 girls in this study have reported that their teachers have harassed them: 13 identify their mathematics teachers, 1 her religion teacher and 1 her computer teacher. Moreover, 7 (16%) of 43 participants said that strangers harassed them and most of these incidents were those that occurred on their way to and from school, 5 (12%) by their boyfriends and another 5 (12%) by their classmates. A low percentage said that a taxi driver (1 or 2%) or a male administrator of the school (1 or 2%) have harassed them.

Table 2 Perpetrators of harassment

Perpetrator	number of responses	responses in %
Teacher	16	37
Classmate	5	12
Boyfriend	5	12
Stranger	7	16
Father	2	5
Taxi driver	1	2
School administrator (male)	1	2
Other (relatives, husband and wife & primary school teacher)	4	9
TOTAL	41	95
(Number of respondents)	(43)	

### Forms of harassment

#### Physical harassment

In terms of the forms of harassment, the narratives reveal that 29 (67%) of 43 girls in this class have experienced and observed physical harassment. This involved brushing shoulders and head, unwanted touching, dating, forced sex, threatening, beating, slapping, blocking, forced kissing and lifting their legs. Of the 29 girls, 21% of them reported having experienced unwanted touching, stroking shoulders and head by their teachers and 3% by their classmates; and most of these incidents were accompanied by threats and bribing. Threatening and bribing girls into sexual relationship by teachers has been described as '*quid pro quo*' sexual harassment in this study (Larkin, 1994). Most girls who have reported this say teachers promise them high marks or grades in the subjects these teachers teach. For example, narrative 43 relates a friend's experience:

My friend told me that the maths teacher asked her to have sex with him and she fell for it. I asked her why she did it; she said he promised to make her pass maths that's why she did.

Narrative 8 also reporting on a friend's experience says:

Tichere ha a bona ka mokhoa oo ngoana oa batho a leng thahasellong ea ho thusoa a nka monyetla oa ho iphumanela phate 'me ea re ho eena: 'haeba u batla ho pasa, lumela re robale'.

This translates roughly as “The teacher took advantage of the girl’s desperation for help in this subject and therefore asked her to have sex in return.”

Narrative 28 reporting her own case says:

It happened that I asked one of my teachers to help me with mathematics. He agreed and said I should meet him at 4 o’clock after school. After helping me he touched my hand and told me to wait.... I saw him touching my breast taking my jacket off took my school back and started to massage me all over. After that he gave me money and asked me not to tell anyone. He asked me to come the next day again but I did not go that day.

If ‘*quid pro quo*’ formed one form of harassment, hostile environment sexual harassment constituted the other (Larkin, 1994). This as explained by Stein (1995) occurs when a teacher creates an intimidating hostile offensive environment that interferes with a person’s right or benefit. This is reflected in narrative 3, in which case the perpetrator (member of the administration) threatens the victim by telling her that he will expel her from school if she discloses what he did to her. The narrative reads:

I had a friend of mine at school [that] was abused by the teacher. This teacher was the deputy headmaster. She told me the man called her to his office after school. While in the office he has been kissing and touching her thighs....since this was friend of mine I was the first person she told this miracle. She was scared and frustrated and I was also scared. I asked her to report this but she refused. She told me that this teacher said no one will believe her. He is telling her that he will expel her from school every time he sees her. She was angry because she did not think this respectful and responsible man can behave this way.

Those who reported to have had experienced forced sex by their boyfriends say they were threatened. For example, narrative 17 reads: ‘he told me that if I reach 15 with my virginity I am going to die’. Narrative 18, whose story was considered to be very serious, reports that two men raped her after school. She writes, ‘ Two men raped me until I could not feel my muscles any more. I was taken to the hospital to be checked if I was pregnant. I was afraid to go for blood test, even now. I don’t want to hear anything about HIV’.

### Verbal harassment

Another form of harassment experienced by a significant number, namely 17 (40%) of 43 girls, was verbal harassment by their boyfriends and classmates. It included insults, name-calling, comments about their bodies, nasty remarks, whistling, demeaning and degrading words like 'bitch', 'sefebe', 'letekatse' 'phate', 'hustler', 'selahla' [all these words refer to someone who sleeps around] and 'lipotongoane' meaning the calf muscles of the leg. Most girls stated that these words make them feel low, depressed or sick. They have reported that they get called these names when they end an affair or refuse the boy's proposal or when they refuse to have sexual intercourse with them.

Narrative 12 reads:

I refused to have sex with him; he started to say bad things about me to one of our schoolmate. He said that I am a 'beach' (sic), 'hustler' and a prostitute. All of his says (sic) hurt me. The whole school had known about it. This made me to have unconcentration in class.

### Visual harassment

3 (7%) of the 43 girls reported to have experienced visual harassment by their teachers. Narrative 7 says, 'my former class teacher was funny. He used to look at me with funny looks thinking I will be interested in him unfortunately I was not because I hate boys when they look at me like that.'

A 16-year girl also writes: ' My Geography teacher look at me like I am filthy. I don't know why. It makes me feel down, down on the feet.'

Another girl (18 years old) says, 'I refused to his proposal during the school trip. When we arrive at school he called me and I refused. Since that day he gives me a bad look.'

### Other

The forms of harassment that have been analysed as 'other' include incest, teachers not marking their class work while marking that of others, a teacher throwing a piece of chalk down a girl's dress, being let down by a boyfriend and a nephew who was 21 years showing a girl his genitals. These were reported by 3 (7%) of 43 girls in the study.

Table 3 Form of harassment experienced

Form of harassment	number of responses	responses in %
Physical	29	67
Verbal	17	40
Visual (leering)	3	7
Other	3	7
<b>TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>53<sup>10</sup></b>	
(Number of respondents)	(43)	

### Coping with sexual harassment

Asked about the frequency of harassment and how they dealt with it, most narratives reveal that being beaten by their male teachers occurs almost everyday for many girls in this class especially when they have refused the teacher's sexual advances. Most of them have reported that whenever they report sexual harassment, no help is offered and the beating continues. One narrative reads:

...I am afraid to tell other teachers because sometimes they will tell me that is because I love him and yet I need help. And now I am trouble and annoy continually because I cannot learn properly...another problem that we have is that if we tell sir [A]<sup>11</sup> or any male teacher that a boy or male teacher has done such a thing like that, he will tell you that is your own problem. But if you tell your parents surely you are going to be expelled. So I am having that problem, I don't know what to do (16 year girl).

Narrative 21 reads:

Some teachers touch us in such a way that you feel uncomfortable and that happens especially to girls by male teachers. They ask us to go out with them or even visit them at their home and when you report that to your parents and they come to school the person becomes mean to you and talks about you to some of his male teacher friends (16 year girl).

<sup>10</sup> This figure is different from those on Tables 1 & 2 to indicate that some participants have experienced more than one form of harassment.

<sup>11</sup> This letter represents the name of a teacher that was mentioned in this narrative.

Another narrative of a girl victim (18 years) about her mathematics teacher reports that she could not report her teacher's unwanted behaviour because she was sure she would not be helped. She reports that she is no longer asking for his assistance and the teacher now hates her and it is as though he is her enemy. She is not alone in this response. Most girls who have been harassed by their male teachers report hating them and say that they fail their subjects. Some say they get most support from their parents especially when the harassment occurs during weekends. Another girl who reports that her teacher harassed her more than twice at the sports field says she told some boys and they made him to feel scared.

Narrative 20 says every time she refuses a boy's proposal she is sure of either being verbally or physically harassed. It reads: '...in return boys will feel down or blame himself by saying "I am not supposed to be denied by this girl, I will do something that will hurt her as revenge". I just look at him and say do anything you want to do.'

Asked about how they cope with sexual harassment one girl who does not normalise it says:

Being harassed by boys at school has become part of my daily life. It makes me sick to hear the kind of things they say and I comfort myself by saying in my heart, "you ugly son of a gun, you can look but you cannot touch." This actually makes me feel better, but I know I cannot say it loud because I don't want to find myself caught in the middle of a fight with a boy (a 19-year girl in narrative 14).

Some narratives reveal that other girls, who also do not normalise sexual harassment, are assertive and can protect themselves. Five of these participants say they approach the boy and look at him in the eyes and make him apologise. One of them says, 'It is too much and we should stand up and fight for our rights, our future which is 'gonna' be destroyed by [these] boys'. Sometimes they reply with insults or put the boys down by threatening them with their strong brothers. However, in spite of these tactics one of them has written that she always feels bad and blames herself, as she is a girl.

But one 16-year-old girl (narrative 26) deals with sexual harassment differently. She writes:

I felt so angry and hurt, I asked myself why he would hit me and call me that when he doesn't know me at all. What made me angry is that he was a newcomer to the school and I have not done anything to him. I was so hurt and every time people ask me about [it] I just tell them I don't know why he hit me. It took some time for me to get over it and cope again because all the time I would be saying, 'is something going to happen to me, for somebody to just hit me like that when I don't know him'...I am doing better now and they do tend to harass me now and then but I am getting used to it.

This reveals that this girl is one of those girls who have accepted this behaviour as 'normal', especially because when they report it to teachers it is dismissed as being their problem or sometimes it increases the harassment. One narrative reports that class teachers tell the girls to agree to fall in love to solve the problem of boys harassing them. Some reported that if they tell their friends, they laugh at them or start spreading stories to other girls and boys; or when they report to their parents they are reportedly inclined to disbelieve them because of their past misdemeanours.

Nevertheless, at the end of their narratives, some have stated that after talking about the issues of sexual harassment has been helpful. Narrative 7 reads, 'It feels like some part of me has been satisfied'. Narrative 6 reads, 'after talking about abuse and harassment, I have learned to have self-confidence and also to stand up for myself. Even some of the questions that I had were discussed and solved out. Thank you.'

The above findings relate to the target group under study. The researcher has observed boys and male teachers harassing girls in this school and has always wondered how the girls feel about it. I remain unsure how to explain why a teacher would choose to do that to a student. Why would he not consider his behaviour as destructive to the future life of pupils is still to be answered. Again what about teachers who ignore girls when they report these incidents? Is the behaviour considered as part of growing up or as 'normal? The next chapter offers a tentative conclusion to the findings of this study and recommendations on developing a gender justice policy that will help dealing with sexual harassment in schools.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the limited amount of time under which the data for this study was collected, the researcher hopes that the findings will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of issues of sexual harassment to both learners and teachers in this school. It is evident from the findings that girls in this class have experienced sexual harassment at this school; and more specifically in the classrooms than anywhere else. This, therefore, shows that the school is not safe for these girls.

According to the findings, the teacher seems to be the major perpetrator of harassment against girls in this study. The second largest number, as shown on Table 2, shows that strangers and their classmates and their boyfriends harass girls in this study. It would therefore be unrealistic for one to expect boys in this school to stop harassing girls when they frequently observe it being perpetuated by teachers.

The students who comprise the research sample reveal that physical harassment is the most frequently experienced with the highest number reporting that they have been harassed by their teachers. The researcher has considered this as *'quid pro quo'* sexual harassment. It is also fascinating that one member of the school administration perpetuates hostile environment sexual harassment against girls in this school as the researcher has always considered this as a problem for female teachers in this school only and did not imagine it as a similar problem for the girls.

Braun (1988) and Skinner (2001) have argued that after the family, teachers are the next line of defence for a child at school. But according to the findings and observations in this study, teachers in this school provide minimum security on issues of sexual harassment against girls. Findings reveal that teachers ignore pupils when they report incidents of sexual harassment. This could mean that teachers normalise this behaviour and yet victims do so less. By so doing, they are promoting the dominant patriarchal discourse of hegemonic masculinity.

Based on these findings, the researcher feels that, as a way of introducing a gender justice discourse, teachers and pupils in this school need to be made aware of the importance of understanding the issues of sexuality and sexual harassment. With this in mind, the researcher would therefore recommend that sexuality and sex education be introduced in this school in the first instance. However, the problem cannot be seen to be limited to this school and serious thought should be given to this problem by the ministry of education in Lesotho.

The researcher has realised that the National Curriculum Development Centre in Lesotho has included some issues of gender studies in other subjects, for example, in Geography and Development Studies but sexual harassment is not addressed in these subjects and schools are not sure how to deal with these issues. It is, therefore, from this position of gender justice that one would propose that- to counter the dominant masculinity discourse, schools revise the policies that govern them and develop those that are inclusive and address sexual violence within them.

In concluding, the following plan for dealing with sexual violence is offered as an example of a possible school-based initiative from the discursive position that advocates gender justice, one that has been adapted from [www.straussconsult.com/article2.htm](http://www.straussconsult.com/article2.htm):

1. Develop a comprehensive sexual harassment/violence policy for wide dissemination to administrators, staff, students and parents. It should include:
  - A statement of the rights and responsibilities of students and the school;
  - A definition of sexual harassment, including listing of specific behaviours that constitute sexual harassment;
  - A strong statement that sexual harassment is illegal and will not be tolerated;
  - Sanctions for harassers, students and staff;
  - Procedures for reporting and investigating incidents of sexual harassment, including rules regarding confidentiality, reprisal and appeal;
  - A time frame for investigating complaints;
  - Appointment of a complaint manager [who may be referred to as] Human Rights Officer;

- Requirement that staff intervene to stop any harassment observed, with specific consequences for staff that do not comply.
- 2. Involve parents, students, staff and lawyers in writing the policy.
- 3. Provide student support groups for students in non-traditional classes.
- 4. Develop a process to monitor and evaluate your policy, procedure and complaints.
- 5. Explain the student policy in age-appropriate settings.
- 6. Survey the school to determine the extent of the problem.
- 7. Train administrators, staff and students about the sexual harassment.
- 8. Make the sexual harassment reporting procedure “user friendly”.
- 9. Make use of the “teachable moment” – whenever you encounter harassment or discrimination, confront and explain the issues there and then to participants and observers.
- 10. Use gender inclusive language.

However, it must be stressed that a gender-justice discourse will only begin to compete more effectively with the normal patriarchal discourses prevailing in Lesotho when such interventions receive the broad support of, and in fact are driven by, the ministry of education, and are then enacted in all schools.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **A module on sex, sexuality and sexual harassment**

The purpose of this module is to facilitate the process of collecting data on experiences of sexual abuse or harassment of fifty girls in school X and consequently how they cope with it. To enhance this, a module of five sessions, all drawn from Greathead et al (1998), dealing with sexuality and sexual abuse will be offered to the participants. First session will deal with sex and sexuality while the other four sessions will deal with sexual abuse /harassment. It is expected that at the end of all these sessions, pupils will

1. Be able to differentiate between sex and sexuality
2. Show a broader understanding of sex role stereotypes and their implications for how they understand their femininity.
3. Identify different forms of sexual abuse or harassment within their school
4. Identify situations that may be considered potentially dangerous for abuse or harassment.
5. Develop skills and methods of dealing with abuse or harassment.

Thereafter, each participant will be expected to present an account of her personal experiences of sexual abuse or harassment; or that of someone she observed or heard about at the school and consequently how she copes or has coped with it.

### **Methodology**

Looking at the nature of the concepts to be discussed, group interactive method will be appropriate. This method does not undermine the knowledge that participants already have about the concepts to be discussed. Above all, it allows participants to engage in debates and arguments and thereby improving their interactive skills.

# LESSON PLANS

**Session one**

**Time: 40 minutes**

**Topic: Sex and Sexuality**

**General outcome:** Broaden participants' understanding of the difference between sex and sexuality and the stereotypes involved in the construction of their sexuality.

## **Outcomes**

1. List words used to describe men and women or boys and girls.
2. Then from explaining these words, they will develop an understanding of why people use stereotypes to describe men and women or boys and girls.
3. Drawing on their own experiences, participants will be able to explore the implications of these stereotypes on the individual and society and consider whether they are useful or harmful or destructive.

## **Introduction:**

Discussion for today is on **Sex and Sexuality** (Participants may be requested to say what they know about sex).

**Sex** relates to whether one is a boy or a girl or a man or a woman. It involves our biological difference as boys and girls or as men and women. It may also refer to the act of sexual intercourse. Our gender determines the way we express ourselves, the way we behave, the way we feel and the images we create about ourselves; and that is called **sexuality**. Our sexuality is largely affected by a number of factors around us; and by the end of this session we shall have identified all those factors and their implications in our lives. First, we will look at the images that people have about each other and their implications on our lives.

5 n

## **Presentation**

### **Step one**

Participants will divide into groups of five.

**Activity one:** make a list of words used to describe men and women or boys and girls.

5

**Activity two:** presentation of group work

As groups present, their words will be documented on the board. This will be followed by discussion on the following points:

- ⇒ The implications of using gender stereotypes on the individual or society- are they useful or destructive
- ⇒ Why gender stereotypes develop
- ⇒ Why people tend to use stereotypes to describe men and women or boys and girls.

1

### **Step two**

#### **Group activity**

While participants are still in their groups, they are given magazines and asked to identify the images of men and women or boys and girls created by the media.

1

**Teacher Activity: Use of the transparency that shows other stereotypes listed by Greathead et al (1998).**

## **Conclusion**

Sex may indicate whether people are female or male by identification of anatomical differences.

- ⇒ It refers to one's physical characteristics as men and women and gender behaviour as male or female.
- ⇒ It may also refer to the act of sexual intercourse.
- ⇒ It is an expression of one's sexuality.

Sexuality is the total expression of who we are as human beings. It indicates the following:

- The physical body
- Feelings and attitudes
- The way people walk, dress, behave
- The decisions we make
- Our beliefs and values
- Sexual intercourse
- Inherited characteristics

- Relationship between people
- Social aspects of people's lives
- Spiritual aspects of people's lives

Our sexuality is influenced by a number of factors, i.e. parents, friends, media, teachers, religious institutions, culture and society. The words and other factors used to influence our sexuality are stereotypes. Some of them might be useful and some might be destructive.

## Session two

**TIME:** 40 minutes

**Topic:** *sexual abuse*

**General outcome:** the purpose of this session is to broaden the participants' understanding of sexual abuse or harassment.

### Outcomes:

1. An understanding of and awareness of what constitutes sexual abuse
2. To identify potentially dangerous situations for abuse

### Introduction

The word sexual abuse will be written on the board and participants are asked to state what they know about sexual abuse. Their responses will be written on the board and then put together to define sexual abuse.

**Sexual abuse** is defined as any unwanted or non-consensual touching, act or exploitation achieved through physical force, threat, intimidation and or coercion, humiliation and violence. It occurs in every community, irrespective of wealth, race or religion and can occur anywhere at any time.

5 min

### Presentation

Participants divide into their previous groups. They are given a list of potentially dangerous situations drawn from Greathead (1998; 275).

**Group activity one:** discuss the situations and answer the following questions:

- ⇒ Could the situation be dangerous or lead to difficulties in any way?
- ⇒ How would you cope with the situation?

15 m

**Activity two:** group work presentation

As groups present, their work is documented on the board and further discussed by the whole group. Participants may give examples of their own of dangerous situations they have experienced or heard about. The facilitator may as well give examples of her own experiences. **(Some data may be collected during this part of the session).**

15 min

## **Content/conclusion**

Any of the situations discussed above are more likely to expose one to sexual abuse or harassment. Most of them occur around the places where we spent most of our time, for example, at school, home, recreational centres and along the streets. The perpetrator may not only be a stranger. It can be a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend, any adult or any family member.

### **Assignment**

On a piece of paper answer the following questions:

1. Do any of the situations discussed today occur more often to boys or girls (males vs. females)?
2. Do you have any idea why the other sex is more likely to be abused than the other?

**This work will be discussed on the next session.**

5 mi

## Session three

Time: 80 minutes

Topic: Forms of sexual abuse

**General outcome:** to develop awareness of how society perpetuates myths that support sexual abuse.

**Outcomes:** at the end of this session participants will be able to:

1. Mention at least five myths and realities about sexual abuse or harassment.
2. Identify the perpetrators of abuse and sex that is at the high risk of being abused.
3. Mention or give at least four examples of forms of sexual abuse or harassment.

### Introduction:

Remember yesterday we said abuse is more likely to occur around the places where we spend most of our time, i.e, at home, school etc.

In our society children are taught to obey, trust and not to question adults. In Lesotho children are not supposed to refuse orders from any adult from within the community because *“lefura la ngoana ke ho rongoa,”* or *‘thupa e otolloa e sa le metsi’* or *‘ngoana ke oa bohle’*. All of these things make it easier for children to be taken advantage of. This also makes children to ignore their own feelings because they are told not to be rude, thereby losing a valuable tool for protecting themselves. I know even at this moment, most of you are beginning to wonder what is wrong with me. The principal and I, and the ministry of education of course, really feel it is important that you become aware of these issues at your age in order for you to be able to protect yourselves in situations where the society fails to protect you. A lot of research studies indicate that most young people are the ones that are most vulnerable to sexual abuse and the scars left are tragic and last a lifetime to individuals and the society at large. Again, research and our experiences down the years show that sexual abuse or harassment affects boys and girls or men and women differently. So today we are coming to explore myths around sexual abuse or harassment, who is most vulnerable to abuse or harassment and forms of abuse or harassment.

5 mi

## Presentation

**Step one:** participants' are asked to give responses to the assignment questions. These responses will make participants aware of who abuses and who is abused between boys and girls or between men and women.

### **Step two: forms of sexual abuse or harassment**

*Facilitator and participants' activity (to be highly interactive)*

So how are women and men or boys and girls abused or harassed? Participants may be asked to discuss this question in pairs and then respond back. As they respond facilitator writes the responses on the board.

### **Step three: forms of sexual abuse or harassment**

1. Verbal abuse or harassment: it is the form of harassment whereby the harasser passes lewd remarks or actually swears to the victim. This form of abuse appears to be inherent in the lives of female students. It involves demeaning words like bitch, witch, and whore etc. It also includes sexually flattering comments about one's body.
2. Physical harassment: it involves touching, grabbing and rubbing, assault, incest, rape and any aggressive sexual advances.
3. Visual harassment / Leering: it is form a form of invasive watching, a look that continues for a length of time and is experienced by the recipient as intimidating or intrusive (a wrong kind of interested look).

A discussion of the myths and realities/facts about each form of sexual abuse or harassment drawn from Greathead et al (1998:270-272) is done.

**Step four:** each group is provided with one of the following statements about sexual abuse or harassment:

1. A woman cannot be raped against her will.
2. Some women ask to be raped by the way they dress and act.
3. Women can be raped by their husbands.
4. Children often tell untrue stories about being abused.
5. Men cannot control their sex drive.

5 min

10 min

30 min

**N.b.:** Through this discussion the facilitator will be able to identify participants' feelings about abuse or harassment. Do they say '**no**' or '**yes**' to abuse or harassment?

**Group activity**

1. Discuss the statements given and identify the myths and realities of the statements-where they come from and whose interests they serve.
2. Presentation of the analysis of the statements.

15 n

**Conclusion**

So abuse or harassment is perpetuated by the society. It can occur to anyone, anywhere and at any time. It leaves tragic scars to victims or survivors. Every one has the right to live without intimidation, threat and or free from any form of action that produces a victim.

15 m

**Participants will be made aware of the presence of the social worker in the next session.**

## Session four

**Time:** 80 minutes

**Topic:** Methods of protection against sexual abuse or harassment

**Outcomes:** at the end of this session participants will have acquired strategies that will help them deal with sexual abuse or harassment.

**Introduction:** introduce the social worker and give instructions for the role-play.

**Presentation:** role-play adopted from Greathead (1998:268)

After the play, the players report to the whole class how it feels to say 'no' as well as to receive a 'no' answer to ordinary things; and how it feels to say 'no' and receive 'no' to and from someone you love.

**Conclusion:** to be conducted with help of the social worker

**N.b.** the social worker may not use the guidelines listed below.

Suggested guidelines for a young person who has been sexually abused drawn from Greathead et al (1998; 273):

- ⇒ Tell a trusted adult as soon as possible.
- ⇒ Sometimes people do not believe children; keep trying till a person is found who believes you.
- ⇒ If the abuse is within the family, a teacher, doctor, nurse, minister or social worker may help, or phone a counselling service.
- ⇒ If abuse is outside the family, parents can help or any of the other persons mentioned above.
- ⇒ If laypeople are told, ask them to help you approach professionals.
- ⇒ Professionals are trained to deal with these situations and can help if police involvement is requires or necessary.
- ⇒ Young people think they are the only person to be abused, but many people have been abused.
- ⇒ Often children feel it is their fault and something is wrong with them. The adult is to be blamed, not he child!
- ⇒ The situation is confusing, as sometimes they love the person who is abusing them.

5 mi

20 m

55 m

- ⇒ Guild is a common feeling, especially when the sexual experience was pleasurable.
- ⇒ Do not fear the abuser will carry out his threats- he is more frightened of being “found out”.

## **Session five: individual work**

**Time: 40 minutes**

Provide a written account (narrative) of your personal experience of sexual abuse or harassment: or of someone's you observed or heard about at the school. Please use the following points to guide you in reporting sexual abuse or harassment event:

- ⇒ Who abuses
- ⇒ Where did it occur-within the school or on the way to or from school
- ⇒ What kind of harassment was it/ what form
- ⇒ Did you consider it as abuse or harassment at the time of occurrence
- ⇒ How often does it occur
- ⇒ What action did you take?

30 m

Please use your real name and age. No one will know about it; it is between me and you and I will not use your name in my writing. State how you feel after talking about the issues of sexual abuse or harassment.

Participants will be requested to use their real names and age: and will be assured of confidentiality and use of pseudonyms in the research.

## **EVALUATION**

Participants will be provided with a piece of paper and will be requested to state how they feel after talking about the issues of sexual abuse or harassment.

## **Conclusion**

Closing words by the researcher, any participant, social worker and the principal.

10 m

## Appendix 2 (a)

### Narrative 15 (a 17 year old girl)

One day a close friend of mine, she was the only daughter of her mother and father. Her mother died two years ago and she lived with her father only for she is the only one child in her family.

She attends school at Morija Girls High School. Her father is the rich man of many cows. Every time when the girl has to go to school the father will tell her many stories of who will look after the animals and clean the house.

Every time when the girl went to school she makes sure that she had cleaned the house. After school there is no time for her to look after her schoolwork. She has to start cooking for the dinner and doing some other jobs. Eventually her father told to plough every day after school and she end up leaving school.

Everyone has right to learn and relaxed but her father did not think for the small girl. He did not think of her future life just because he had been grown and used to the olden days life. He did disagree with the improved life. He always said that going to school is a waist of time and money and make the child to be adopted to other nations culture. He always tells the small girl many stories about his past life and what were the girls did in the past.

Parents should not compare the past or their background life with which we are living now. They have to go on with the new improvements. Now the small girl is doing all her best to satisfy her father but not seeing the problem she will be facing in her future when her father died. What will happen with her future life?

## Appendix 2 (b)

### Narrative 22 (a 16 year old girl)

#### SEXUAL HARASMENT I EXPERIENCED IN LIFE

I hate being accused blamelessly by my mother. Sometimes when my sister is guilty of anything, she confirms to my mother that I am to blame, and then my mother starts scolding at me saying that I have got to handle responsibilities, as I am old.

It was at my early age, still in primary school when one of my friends blamed me for the loss of her money. I could not believe her for I was not with her at a moment. She brought the report to the class teacher and stating that I had taken it. That teacher was very disappointed with me and instructed me to bring it back to the owner. It was further reported to my parents who were very angry with me and decided to give me a bit of lashing. Ever since then I still believe in the saying that 'love them all but trust none'. Where would I be if it were not because of my so-called best friend?

In my village there are boys who commend about girls who hate being in relationships. As I am one of those girls, I hate them giving me bad remarks like ' *oa ikhantsa*' meaning highly reserved. I told this to my mother then she said that I have got to live my own life without anyone uncontrolled, so should not mind their sayings. Because of this remarks being sent outside my home premises becomes a shock to me.