



WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT: DEVELOPING STATE-LEVEL POLICIES

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Background

The Southwest (SW) Women in Governance, through the Active Women Initiative (AWI), conducted a situation analysis ahead of the development of Workplace Sexual Harassment (WSH) policies in the public service of two states (Ekiti and Ogun). The overarching goal is to provide a guide for developing state-level WSH policies to reduce incidences of sexual

harassment within the workplace. This was one of the key issues identified with the public service. WSH policies will deter potential harassers and bring to book those that have been identified and investigated.



Sexual Harassment Behaviours

Sexual harassment is broadly categorised as *gender harassment*, *unwanted sexual attention* and *sexual coercion*:

1. Gender harassment:

Use of derogatory or unprofessional terms related to sex or gender, unwelcome sexual teasing, jokes, comments or questions, exposure to sexually oriented material, exposure to sexually oriented conversations.

2. Unwanted sexual attention:

Unwelcome invasion of personal space, unwelcome communications, and unwelcome sexually suggestive looks or gestures.

3. Sexual coercion:

Offer of preferential treatment in the workplace in exchange for sexual favours, pressure for sexual favours, pressure for dates, stalking and sexual assault or attempted sexual assault.



Did you Know?

1. There is a high prevalence of WSH in public service and mostly, females are affected.
2. Up to 84% of female public officers are aware that 75% of WSH behaviours are perpetuated by males.
3. Subtle sexual expressions such as “je ki je isu e”, [Yoruba, literal meaning is “Let me eat your yam”], “Ma toju e” [Yoruba, literal meaning is “I’ll take care of you”], and “uncle efun mi ni omo kan. Ko need ko je oruko yin”, [Yoruba, literal meaning is “Uncle let me have a child. He/she does not have to bear your name”].
4. Public officers in levels 10 and below are mainly harassed by those in levels 12 above.
5. Officers in level 12 – 14 and those who have stayed 10 years in public service are likely to have experienced WSH at least twice.
6. Access to work benefits and intimidation/superiority are major reasons for WSH in public service.
7. More females actively respond against WSH by slapping, shouting and threatening perpetrators, some avoid the perpetrator by changing job or unit and only very few passively respond.
8. Reduced productivity and transfer-seeking are effects and possibly indicators of WSH in public service.
9. More than 90% will opt for verbal reports of WSH to friends, colleagues and less to superiors for fear of negative outcomes, blame-shifting, negative tagging and victimisation.
10. WSH is not an agenda for discussion when addressing welfare issues in public service.
11. The Public Service Rules for states either do not have WSH or it is captioned but reporting is still limited due to rigid public service hierarchy.



Legal and Policy environment

In 2015, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPPA) was enacted in addition to existing laws in Ekiti, Lagos and Oyo States to combat gender-based violence. Despite these efforts, the legal and policy environment remains weak, without an adequate institutional framework for implementation included in the public service rules.

Many more states need to enact state laws that protect from WSH and gender-based violence. In addition, these laws need to be integrated into institutional framework, such as the public service rules, to increase its effectiveness.



Framework for Developing WSH Policy

This framework uses 7 steps: definition, awareness, training, committee set up, policy development, sensitisation and inclusion into the public service rules in the state.

1. Definition of terms: Standard definitions of sexual harassment behaviours and subtle sexual expressions that are contextual to WSH should be identified and captured.

2. Awareness creation: Creation of awareness against WSH should be done at state level to show the state's zero tolerance commitment. This awareness sends a strong first message of deterrence to existing and potential perpetrators in the public service.

3. Training public officers: Training and re-orientation of public officers to identify and deal with WSH behaviours should be done by the state. This training could be included as priority on continuous professional development plans for public service.

4. Set up committee: A special purpose committee should be set up to address WSH issues in public service and lead the WSH policy development. This committee should have the backing of the Head of Service to perform this responsibility.

5. Policy development: The WSH policy development should have clear sessions to address definitions, training and re-orientation, reporting mechanisms, use of modern technology, protection of the harassed, penalties for sexual harassment and periodic surveys. Signing of undertaking against WSH behaviours and false WSH accusation should be considered in the WSH policy.

6. Policy sensitisation: Sensitisation and enlightenment of the public service on the development and operations of a WSH policy should be done by the state. Also, information dissemination on policy details and implementation should be through all means possible.

7. Public service rules: The public service rules (PSR) is the 'sacred book' of public officers, so anything written in it yields commitment. Hence, state PSR books should be reviewed with a goal to integrate the WSH policy, VAPPA and relevant state laws.

