

Perceptions about Indecent Dressing and Female Sexual Harassment among Students of Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta

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Abstract

This study examined university students' perceptions of indecent dressing and its perceived link to female sexual harassment. It explored students' knowledge of indecent dressing, its possible causes, and its perceived influence on sexual harassment. A descriptive survey design was used, with data collected through questionnaires administered to 350 students selected from a population of 2,822 through multi-stage sampling. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed a high level ($\bar{x} = 1.80$) of knowledge of indecent dressing, with many respondents associating it with clothing that exposes private body parts ($\bar{x} = 1.94$; 1.89). Peer pressure ($\bar{x} = 3.30$), internet exposure ($\bar{x} = 3.16$), and foreign cultural influence ($\bar{x} = 3.09$) emerged as the most commonly identified causes. Respondents generally agreed ($\bar{x} = 3.18$) that indecent dressing could contribute to female sexual harassment by provoking unwanted attention. T-test results revealed significant gender differences in perception. Males rated poor parenting ($t = 1.17$) and foreign influence ($t = 1.30$) as stronger causes of indecent dressing and were more likely to view provocative clothing as linked to sexual immorality and advances ($t = 3.16$). However, no significant gender differences were found in views regarding sexual temptation, rape provocation, or lust, indicating a convergence of beliefs between male and female respondents. The study concludes that while knowledge about indecent dressing is high, its persistence reflects broader socio-cultural influences. Addressing the issue requires more than dress codes; it calls for value-based education, gender-sensitive discourse, and institutional policies that promote respect, accountability, and safety for all students.

Keywords: Indecent Dressing, Sexual Harassment, Gender Perception, Dress Code, University Students

Introduction

Sexual harassment in higher education institutions has emerged as a significant social issue, affecting the safety, well-being, and academic performance of students, especially females. It is commonly defined as unwanted sexual

advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2002). While the factors contributing to sexual harassment are complex and multifaceted, one recurring and controversial discourse

in Nigerian academic settings revolves around the perceived role of students' dressing styles, often referred to as "indecent dressing," in attracting such behaviour (Nwikpo, 2020). This perception is particularly pronounced in environments like universities, where diverse cultural, social, and psychological values intersect. In the Nigerian context, concerns about indecent dressing among university students are widespread and often linked to moral, religious, and cultural expectations (Dairo, 2023). Educational institutions, including the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta [FUNAAB], have sometimes implemented dress codes or guidelines aimed at promoting modesty and curbing immoral behaviour. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these policies in preventing sexual harassment remains unclear and sometimes controversial. Although Yohanna et al. (2020) posited that students usually have a negative attitude toward proper campus dress codes, hence many of such dress often meet with non-compliance by the students, rather students frequently adopt their dressing behaviours based on media, peer pressure, religion, and popular culture (Olori, 2003; Sulaiman, 2018).

Dressing, as a cultural expression, varies across societies, and deviations from societal dress codes are often labeled as indecent. Dressing is not only what is worn, but also whatever is added or done to the body before appearing in public. According to Olaoye (2005), the type of clothes or dress that one wears speaks volumes about a person. In a certain group, there are social norms that govern the clothing behaviour of that group. Clothing habits that are related to the control of sexual relationships in a society are part of the mores of a group,

organization, or community. It is considered a healthy practice to put on clothes that adequately cover certain sensitive parts of the body. According to Sadeeq (2015), clothing choices can significantly shape how others perceive an individual. It is therefore necessary to dress in the image one wants to portray oneself.

A common slogan among some undergraduate students of various higher institutions is 'Dress to kill and pepper dem'. This implies dressing to appear sexy or classy while overlooking the need to be responsible. Omode (2011) reported that the way students, especially female students, dress seductively on campuses of learning leaves a lot to be desired. According to reports, public Nigerian universities are fighting a wave of indecency, especially among female students (Ukachukwu et al., 2019; Suleiman, 2024). It has been observed that campuses have increasingly become spaces where provocative dressing is prevalent, reflecting a shift away from conventional standards of decency. Aside from wearing short skirts, some female undergraduates defy convention by revealing their cleavage as a way of drawing attention in a socially provocative manner (Anku et al., 2018). Fareo and Jackson (2018) concluded that the mode of dressing by undergraduates in tertiary institutions is worrisome and unacceptable.

Since dressing is a social construct, it is vital to consider what the term "indecent dressing" means; some authors have described it as dressing in an inappropriate or provocative manner in relation to the society and culture in which it is perpetrated (Sulaiman, 2018; Orakwelu, 2012; Esiowu & Igbo, 2008). Indecent dressing, often defined through

a subjective lens, serves as a focal point for discussions around morality, ethics, and personal expression. Indecent dressing, which includes the exposure of sensitive body parts, is perceived to provoke negative attention and may contribute to an unsafe academic environment (Obilo & Okugo, 2013; Sulaiman, 2018). Indecent dressing was additionally reported to disrupt the learning environment by diverting the attention of both students and lecturers during lectures. The discourse around “indecent dressing” often centres on the belief that revealing or suggestive clothing may provoke unwanted sexual attention, particularly in environments such as university campuses. This belief, although widespread, is frequently criticized for shifting responsibility from the perpetrators to the victims and for reinforcing harmful stereotypes about female appearance and sexuality. However, it remains a dominant narrative in many Nigerian institutions (Nwikpo, 2020). While some studies suggest a direct link between provocative dressing and harassment (Bojos & Marquet, 2000), others argue that the focus should be on consent and societal attitudes toward women (Mama, 2000). Many scholars have emphasized that sexual harassment is rooted in power dynamics, sexism, and the normalization of violence against women, rather than in women's appearance or attire. Lewis (2024) posited that sexual harassment is less about the victim's clothing and more about the inequality of power in gendered relationships, where perpetrators use gendered aggression to assert dominance in institutional and social contexts.

Sexual harassment is a global problem that has permeated the fabric of higher education institutions and many

workplaces where human beings interact, and it is not limited to Africa. In Canada, Albert et al. (2023) documented the ambient and non-physical sexual harassment of female undergraduates, emphasizing how such encounters are frequent, normalized, and emotionally distressing. Similarly, the Association of American Universities [AAU] survey in the United States found that nearly one in four female undergraduates reported experiencing non-consensual sexual contact through force or coercion (Cantor et al., 2020). In South Africa, Oni et al. (2019) reported widespread harassment of university students, with female students often being the main targets of both peer and staff misconduct. India has also witnessed a growing discourse on harassment in academia. Chaudhuri (2019) examined the post-#MeToo landscape and revealed persistent structural and cultural challenges that hinder women's safety in educational institutions. In the United Kingdom, the National Union of Students (2018) highlighted systemic failures in responding to staff-to-student misconduct, underlining power imbalances and the fear of retaliation that discourages victims from reporting. Within Nigeria, Dairo (2023) noted that female students are often subtly blamed for harassment through gendered dress codes, which are framed as moral policing rather than protective measures.

Over time, indecent dressing has been identified as a significant cause of multiple assaults and sexual harassment in society (Obilo & Okugo, 2013). Sexual Harassment Support Organization (2007) noted that sexual harassment threatens jobs or academic performance, where the threat is only associated with noncompliance, whereas the benefits are

associated with compliance. Female students who refuse to comply with sexual assault are often punished with failing grades (Olorunda, 2022). Such students' rights are frequently denied and jeopardized. Female students who agreed to the proposal usually receive undeserved benefits at the expense of others. Reports have indicated that some academic staff have coerced students into sexual relationships in exchange for favorable grades (Olorunda, 2018). Numerous accounts also suggest that female students have experienced sexual harassment not only from lecturers but also from fellow students and non-academic staff.

Concurrently, there has been a noticeable rise in indecent dressing among female students, with several studies establishing a positive correlation between this trend and sexual harassment (Amoo & Adeyemi, 2010; Mofoluwawo & Oyelade, 2012). When it comes to conversations around indecent dressing and sexual harassment, the lens through which people view these issues can vary significantly, particularly across gender lines. Studies have shown that men are often more likely to attribute blame to women in cases of sexual harassment, especially when the victim is perceived to be dressed "provocatively" (Grubb & Turner, 2012). These attitudes are shaped by deep-rooted cultural narratives that position women as gatekeepers of sexual behaviour and hold them responsible for how others react to their appearance (Perpetua, 2017). In contrast, many women (who are more likely to experience harassment firsthand) tend to see dressing as an expression of identity or cultural modernity, not as an invitation for misconduct. Yohanna et al. (2020) further support this divide, revealing that while

both genders are aware of what is considered indecent dressing, their interpretations and the implications they draw from it differ. These opposing viewpoints highlight the need to examine gender-based differences in perception, especially in university settings where young adults are negotiating values, identity, and social expectations.

Undoubtedly, sexual harassment remains a widespread issue in many countries, particularly within educational institutions and workplace environments. According to Sulaiman (2018), sexual harassment causes a tense and unproductive working and learning environment. Anxiety, depression, headaches, sleep disturbances, weight loss or gain, nausea, lowered self-esteem, and sexual dysfunction are all common psychological consequences of sexual harassment (Sexual Harassment Support Organization, 2007). In addition, in the higher education setting, student victims of sexual harassment may feel pressured to drop a class, change their major or minor, and experience physical and psychological distress. Despite global attention to these issues, there remains a scarcity of localized empirical data in Nigerian universities that explores how students themselves perceive the relationship between clothing choices and experiences of sexual harassment. At FUNAAB, where cultural norms and moral expectations intersect with modern fashion trends, it becomes imperative to understand students' perceptions of this issue. Doing so not only helps identify attitudinal gaps but also contributes to the design of more inclusive, effective, and context-sensitive policies on campus safety and student conduct. Hence, the study aimed to assess students'

perceptions of the link between indecent dressing and female sexual harassment.

Objectives of the Study: The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the knowledge of the students about indecent dressing.
2. investigate the views of the respondents on the possible causes of indecent dressing.
3. determine the perception of the respondents on the influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment.

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the views of male and female students regarding the possible causes of indecent dressing.

H₀₂: There's no significant difference between the perception of male and female students on the influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment.

Methodology

Study design: This study adopted a descriptive survey method to assess the perception of undergraduate students of the Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, about indecent dressing and female sexual harassment.

Population for the study: The target population for this study was a total 2,822 final year students of the university registered in the 2019/2020 session (Information and Communication Technology Resource Centre [ICTREC], FUNAAB, 2021). Final-year students are a particularly suitable population for this study due to their prolonged exposure to the university environment. Having spent about four years on campus, they are more likely to have experienced or observed a

wider range of interactions, policies, and social dynamics related to dress norms and sexual harassment.

Sample and Sampling Techniques: The sample size was determined using the sample size chart by Research Advisors (2006). Hence, the sample size for this study was 346, which was rounded up to 350 students. To select the respondents, a two-stage sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select five (5) colleges from the ten (10) colleges in FUNAAB. Secondly, a purposive and convenient sampling technique was used to select 35 male and 35 female students, each from the 5 selected colleges. This was deliberate to get an equal amount of response from each gender for balanced representation.

Data Collection Instrument: Data was collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of four sections. The first section gathered socio-demographic information such as age, religion, ethnicity, and parental background, and was developed by the researcher. The second section assessed the respondents' knowledge of indecent dressing using a dichotomous Yes/No scale and was adapted from Selase & Mawuli (2013). The third section, also adopted from Selase & Mawuli (2013), explored respondents' views on the perceived causes of indecent dressing. The fourth section, adapted from Anku et al. (2018), focused on the perceived influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment. Responses for sections three and four were rated on a four-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

Validity and Reliability Tests: Face validity of the research instrument was established through expert evaluation to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. To assess the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted among final-year students from a college within FUNAAB that was not selected for inclusion in the main study. Using the test-retest method, 10% of the intended sample size participated in the pilot, and the reliability coefficient, determined through Cronbach's alpha, was 0.78, which indicates an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Method of data collection: The research employed a structured questionnaire to collect data from final-year students in selected departments. The instrument was designed to elicit information relevant to the research questions. Questionnaires were administered in lecture halls, and participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents completing the survey based on their willingness to contribute to the study.

Data and Statistical Analysis: Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize responses. A mean score of ≥ 1.5 indicated adequate knowledge, while < 1.5 denoted insufficient knowledge. Similarly, a mean of ≥ 2.5 reflected agreement with perceptual statements, whereas < 2.5 indicated disagreement. Hypotheses were tested using an

independent samples T-test. All analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM-SPSS), version 21.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the students.

The respondents were evenly distributed by gender (50% male, 50% female), with the majority (61.4%) aged between 21 and 25 years. Most were Yoruba (90%) and single (91.4%), with a majority identifying as Christians (77.1%). Regarding parental education, 53.1% of respondents' fathers and 42.9% of their mothers had attained tertiary education.

Respondents' knowledge about indecent dressing

Table 1 presents data on the respondents' knowledge of indecent dressing. The result showed that many of the respondents are aware of the following acts of indecent dressing: pulling trousers below the waistline ($\bar{x} = 1.94$), wearing clothes that expose breasts and chest ($\bar{x} = 1.84$), wearing miniskirts or shorts that expose sensitive parts of the body ($\bar{x} = 1.80$) and wearing sleeveless tops that reveal armpits or cleavage ($\bar{x} = 1.78$). The item with the lowest mean score was wearing tight clothes that reveal all body shapes ($\bar{x} = 1.58$). The grand mean of their knowledge was ($\bar{x} = 1.80$) with a standard deviation of 0.369. These findings suggest that the respondents are generally knowledgeable about what constitutes indecent dressing, as all items surpassed the minimum threshold for knowledge.

Table 1: Respondents' knowledge about indecent dressing

Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)	\bar{X}	Std. Dev
Pulling trousers below the waistline is indecent dressing	329 (94.00)	21(6.00)	1.94	0.24
Wearing clothing that exposes breast and chest is indecent dressing	310 (88.60)	40(11.40)	1.89	0.32
Wearing short dresses that expose the thigh and underwear is indecent dressing	299 (85.40)	51(14.60)	1.85	0.35
Wearing torn or ripped clothes is indecent dressing	258 (73.70)	92(26.30)	1.74	0.44
Wearing tight dresses that show all body contours is indecent dressing	204 (58.30)	146(41.70)	1.58	0.49
Grand Mean			1.80	0.37

Causes of indecent dressing

Table 2 presents the results on perceived causes of indecent dressing. The highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.30$) indicates strong agreement among respondents that peer pressure plays a significant role in influencing indecent dressing.

Conversely, the lowest mean score ($\bar{x} = 2.46$) suggests that greed is not widely viewed as a contributing factor. With a grand mean of $\bar{x} = 2.97$ and a standard deviation of 0.767, the results demonstrate that respondents generally agree with the identified causes of indecent dressing.

Table 2: Respondents' view on the possible causes of indecent dressing

Statements	\bar{X}	Std. Dev
Peer pressure contributes to indecent dressing	3.30	0.73
Poor parenting contributes to indecent dressing	2.94	0.82
Greediness is part of the causes of indecent dressing	2.46	0.81
Foreign influence contributed to the rise of indecent dressing	3.09	0.71
Freedom from punishment contributes to indecent dressing	2.90	0.78
Wrong use of the internet influences indecent dressing	3.16	0.75
Grand Mean	2.97	0.77

Influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment

Table 3 presents the results on the perceived influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment. The highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.40$) reflects strong agreement among respondents that indecent dressing may provoke sexual temptation. The lowest mean score ($\bar{x} =$

2.71) indicates relatively less agreement with the view that individuals who dress indecently are seen as sexually immoral. With a grand mean of $\bar{x} = 3.18$ and a standard deviation of 0.683, the results suggest that respondents generally perceive a connection between indecent dressing and various forms of sexual harassment experienced by females.

Table 3: Respondents' views on the influence of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment

Statements	\bar{x}	Std. Dev
Indecent dressing may lead to sexual temptation	3.40	0.58
Tight dresses are always very provocative and may spur sexual advances	3.24	0.69
Those who dress indecently are perceived to be sexually immoral	2.71	0.84
indecent dressing usually provokes sexual harassment and rape	3.18	0.73
indecent dressing stirs up indiscriminate sexual behavior	3.11	0.69
Female indecent dressing arouses sexual thoughts in men	3.31	0.67
Men tend to sexually objectify women, especially when they are indecently dressed	3.27	0.64
Female indecent dressing incite lust in men	3.23	0.64
Grand Mean	3.18	0.68

Hypotheses results

H₀₁: Difference between the Views of Male and Female Students Regarding the Possible Causes of Indecent Dressing.

Table 4 presents the result of the t-test conducted to examine gender differences in respondents' views on the possible causes of indecent dressing. Significant differences ($p < 0.05$) were found in respondents' views on poor parenting ($t = 1.17$), foreign influence ($t = 0.30$), and freedom from punishment ($t = -0.55$). Regarding poor parenting, males ($\bar{x} = 2.99$) rated its influence on indecent dressing higher than females ($\bar{x} = 2.89$). In terms of foreign influence, male respondents ($\bar{x} = 3.10$) also reported slightly stronger agreement than their female counterparts ($\bar{x} = 3.07$).

Interestingly, females ($\bar{x} = 2.93$) were more likely than males ($\bar{x} = 2.88$) to agree that freedom from punishment contributes to indecent dressing. The result also shows that there is no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between male and female respondents on the following causes: peer pressure ($t = 1.17$), greediness ($t = 0.40$), and wrong use of the internet ($t = 1.94$). However, with reference to the mean scores, males slightly agreed more that peer pressure ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) and internet misuse ($\bar{x} = 3.23$) contribute to indecent dressing, compared to females ($\bar{x} = 3.26$ and $\bar{x} = 3.08$ respectively). In the case of greediness, both genders reported similarly low agreement, with males at ($\bar{x} = 2.47$) and females at ($\bar{x} = 2.44$). Hypothesis 1 was therefore partly rejected.

Table 4: Mean Gender Difference on the Possible Causes of Indecent Dressing

Statements	Male	Female	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
Peer pressure contributes to indecent dressing	3.35	3.26	1.17	0.28	NS
Poor parenting contributes to indecent dressing	2.99	2.89	1.17	0.00	S
Greediness is part of the causes of indecent dressing	2.47	2.44	0.40	0.30	NS
Foreign influence contributed to the rise of indecent dressing	3.10	3.07	0.30	0.04	S
Freedom from punishment contributes to indecent dressing	2.88	2.93	-0.55	0.00	S
Wrong use of the internet influences indecent dressing	3.23	3.08	1.94	0.10	NS

Difference between the Perception of Male and Female Students on the Influence of Indecent Dressing on Female Sexual Harassment

Table 5 presents the results of the t-test conducted to examine gender differences in respondents' views on the effect of indecent dressing on female sexual harassment. The hypothesis was partly rejected in that significant ($p < 0.05$) gender differences ($p < 0.05$) were found in the belief that tight dresses are very provocative and may spur sexual advances, showing a significant difference ($t = 3.16$), with males ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) more likely than females ($\bar{x} = 3.13$) to agree with this perception. Also, the idea that those who dress indecently are perceived to be sexually immoral differed significantly ($t = 2.37$, $p = 0.01$), with males again scoring higher ($\bar{x} = 2.82$) compared to females ($\bar{x} =$

2.61). The findings also show that there is no significant difference ($p > 0.05$) between male and female respondents on the majority of the statements, including: indecent dressing may lead to sexual temptation ($t = 3.07$), indecent dressing provokes harassment and rape ($t = -0.37$), indecent dressing stirs indiscriminate sexual behaviour ($t = -0.08$), female indecent dressing arouses sexual thoughts in men ($t = 2.68$), sexual objectification of women due to indecent dressing ($t = 2.28$) and female dressing inciting lust in men ($t = 2.96$). For instance, males scored slightly higher on average in most of these items, such as sexual temptation ($\bar{x} = 3.50$ for males vs. 3.31 for females) and lust ($\bar{x} = 3.33$ for males vs. 3.13 for females), but the differences were not statistically significant.

Table 5: Difference between the Perception of Male and Female Students on the Influence of Indecent Dressing on Female Sexual Harassment Using T-Test

Statements	Male	Female	t-Value	p-Value	Decision
Indecent dressing may lead to sexual temptation	3.50	3.31	3.07	0.30	NS
Tight dresses are always very provocative and may spur sexual advances.	3.35	3.13	3.16	0.02	S
Those who dress indecently are perceived to be sexually immoral	2.82	2.61	2.37	0.01	S
Indecent dressing usually provokes sexual harassment and rape	3.17	3.19	-0.37	0.43	NS
Indecent dressing stirs up indiscriminate sexual behavior	3.10	3.11	-0.08	0.89	NS
Female indecent dressing arouses sexual thoughts in men	3.40	3.21	2.68	0.39	NS
Men tend to sexually objectify women especially when they are indecently dress	3.35	3.19	2.28	0.79	NS
Female indecent dressing incites lust in men	3.33	3.13	2.96	0.11	NS

Discussion of Findings

Results revealed that the respondents had high knowledge about indecent dressing. The high level of knowledge demonstrated by the respondents regarding indecent dressing may be deeply rooted in the cultural and societal norms that define acceptable appearance within Nigerian communities. In many parts of the country, what people wear is more than just a personal choice; it reflects shared values, traditions, and moral expectations. From an early age, individuals are socialized into these norms through family, religious institutions, and communal interactions. As a result, many students internalize a strong sense of what is considered decent or indecent long before entering a higher institution. This strong cultural foundation appears to have contributed significantly to the respondents' understanding of indecent dressing, as reflected in the results of the present study, which indicate a high level of knowledge about acts commonly regarded as indecent dressing. This aligns

with the study of Asaju (2013), who found that students in tertiary institutions are well aware of institutional dress codes, even if they do not always comply with them. Similarly, Akpan (2018) reported that undergraduate students at the University of Uyo were knowledgeable about appropriate dressing but did not always translate this knowledge into practice, often due to personal or social pressures. The respondents of this study agreed that pulling trousers below the waistline, wearing clothes that expose breasts and chest, wearing miniskirts or shorts that expose sensitive parts of the body, and wearing sleeveless tops that reveal armpits or cleavage are all indecent dressing. These characteristics align with the definition of Oyeleye (2013), who described indecent dressing as a deliberate exposure of one's body to the public in a way that is contrary to the accepted norms and values of society and also in ways that are inappropriate for a particular occasion or situation. Oyeleye (2013) also emphasized that indecent dressing contradicts the societal values

and moral expectations upheld by many Nigerian communities. His description of indecent dressing as a “social malady” reflects how deeply the issue is tied to communal identity and perceptions of decency. These findings reinforce the idea that students’ understanding of indecent dressing is shaped not only by formal education or university regulations but also by the broader cultural environment in which they live. Even though students’ knowledge is evident, the ongoing tension between societal expectations and individual expression may continue to challenge efforts at curbing indecent dressing. Nonetheless, cultural upbringing plays a significant role in shaping students’ perceptions and understanding of what is considered appropriate in public spaces.

Results also revealed that the respondents agreed that indecent dressing can mainly be traced to peer pressure, wrong use of the internet, and foreign influence. When students were asked about the causes of indecent dressing, they pointed most strongly to these three factors, and it is not surprising. In the university environment, the desire to fit in or be seen as “trendy” often pushes young people to adopt styles that might go against traditional or institutional norms. Peer influence is powerful at this stage of life. Many students, especially those who are still figuring out their identity, are easily swayed by the behaviour and expectations of their friends or classmates. This reflects the findings of Fadipe et al. (2022), who emphasized that peer groups can play a major role in shaping how students dress, particularly when the goal is to gain social approval or avoid being left out. The internet and social media have also opened a whole new world of fashion inspiration; some of it positive,

and some not so much. Students today are constantly exposed to celebrities, influencers, and viral trends that often promote revealing or provocative clothing as symbols of success, beauty, or empowerment. As Yohanna et al. (2020) noted, students are deeply influenced by what they see online, and they often emulate these styles without fully considering the cultural context or consequences. Then there is the subtle but strong pull of foreign culture. As global media becomes more accessible, young people may gradually drift away from local dressing norms and begin to adopt styles that reflect Western ideals of fashion and freedom. This shift does not happen overnight, but over time, it can blur the lines between what is considered “acceptable” in their own culture and what is seen as modern or fashionable. Perpetua (2017) pointed out that many students are not necessarily trying to be indecent; rather, they are caught between two worlds, one rooted in tradition and the other shaped by global influence. This suggests that indecent dressing is not simply about rebellion or a lack of morals; it is part of a larger story about identity, belonging, and the complex world students are trying to navigate. Culture and societal values still matter; they shape what students know and believe about decency, but they now compete with stronger, more immediate influences like peer trends and online fashion.

If we want to help students make more thoughtful clothing choices, we need to go beyond just enforcing dress codes. We need conversations that invite them to reflect on why they dress the way they do, what messages their clothing sends, and how cultural values and self-respect can coexist with self-expression.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that many students strongly believe that indecent dressing plays a significant role in the prevalence of female sexual harassment. This perception is expected, considering the broader cultural and moral frameworks that define many Nigerian higher institutions. In societies where modesty in appearance is deeply intertwined with notions of respectability, it is understandable that clothing choices might be viewed not only as personal expressions but also as moral statements. These cultural expectations likely inform students' understanding of harassment, positioning certain types of dress as contributing factors. This perception closely aligns with the findings of Fadipe et al. (2024), who observed that female students at Oke Ogun Polytechnic often identified clothing as a trigger for harassment. Their study emphasized that while students are aware of appropriate dress standards, adherence varies, often influenced by social and peer pressure. The study also underscores how institutional dress codes, though in place, are sometimes disregarded, leading to complex outcomes where clothing becomes both a personal choice and a point of public critique. Similarly, Yohanna et al. (2020) noted in their research at Adamawa State institutions that students widely perceive indecent dressing as a facilitator of sexual harassment. Their participants linked provocative attire to increased vulnerability, echoing the views of the respondents of this present study. Moreover, Perpetua (2017) offered a theoretical lens on this topic, arguing that dressing styles among female undergraduates often reflect broader socio-economic and psychological influences, including the desire for social

belonging or visibility. She observed that some students use fashion to gain recognition or acceptance, which unfortunately, may also invite misinterpretation or unwanted attention in conservative environments. However, it is essential to acknowledge that while these perceptions are valid within their cultural and institutional contexts, they are not without contestation. Globally, a growing body of scholarship challenges the notion that sexual harassment can be blamed on clothing choices. Scholars argue that this belief often shifts the focus from the perpetrators to the victims, fostering a culture of victim-blaming. As Lewis (2024) argues, harassment is less about what women wear and more about power imbalances and gendered control. International organizations like UN Women (2022) have also emphasized that sexual harassment is a systemic issue that persists across clothing types, settings, and cultural boundaries. Therefore, on one hand, students' perceptions reflect their everyday encounters and moral education, shaped by Nigerian societal norms. On the other hand, research from more global perspectives urges caution against conflating attire with consent or culpability.

Statistically, the results provide meaningful insights into how gender influences students' perceptions of the causes of indecent dressing, partly upholding the tested hypotheses. The statistically significant gender differences observed in the perception of poor parenting, foreign influence, and freedom from punishment reflect the complex interplay of societal expectations, cultural exposure, and individual experiences. Particularly, the finding that male respondents were more likely to attribute indecent dressing to poor parenting aligns

with the perspective presented in Perpetua (2017), who emphasized that weakened family control and lack of value-based upbringing contribute significantly to the erosion of modest dressing among young women in higher institutions. Her study suggested that when moral values are not adequately instilled at home, students become more susceptible to deviant dressing styles under societal and peer pressures. Similarly, the significant difference in views on foreign influence, with males again scoring slightly higher, supports earlier research by Yohanna et al. (2020), who observed that Western fashion trends, global media exposure, and celebrity culture were primary drivers of provocative dressing in Adamawa State's higher education institutions. The slight gender variance could be interpreted through the lens of how cultural conservatism is often differently internalized by males and females. Males, particularly in patriarchal societies, may perceive foreign cultural expressions, especially those that defy traditional dress codes, as more disruptive or threatening to local norms.

Moreover, the result that females were more likely than males to agree that freedom from punishment encourages indecent dressing suggests an awareness of institutional leniency or inconsistent enforcement of dress codes. This finding aligns with the argument put forward by Mofoluwawo and Oyelade (2012), who emphasized that without clear consequences or campus-level monitoring systems, dress codes become symbolic rather than functional. Female students, being the primary targets of most dress code policies, may be more attuned to the gaps between policy and practice and may see the lack of deterrent measures as an

enabling factor. On the other hand, the lack of significant gender differences in perceptions of peer pressure, internet misuse, and greediness points to a shared understanding of these influences among both male and female students. Peer pressure has been widely cited across studies, including by Fareo and Jackson (2018), as a potent force in shaping behaviour among university students. Likewise, the internet's role as a medium for promoting fashion trends and alternative identities is a well-established driver of dressing choices (Yohanna et al., 2020). Both genders appear to recognize these influences, similarly, suggesting a convergence of experiences in digital and peer-mediated spaces.

Also, the results offer important insights into gender-based perceptions of the relationship between indecent dressing and female sexual harassment. The analysis revealed statistically significant gender differences in two key areas: the belief that tight clothing provokes sexual advances and that women who dress indecently are perceived as sexually immoral. Males consistently agreed more strongly with these statements than their female counterparts, highlighting gendered interpretations of modesty, responsibility, and moral judgments. The stronger male agreement with the notion that tight dresses are provocative reflects traditional gender norms that associate women's clothing with male behaviour. This perception aligns with the findings of Perpetua (2017), who emphasized that many male students in Nigerian universities tend to blame women's fashion choices for provoking sexual attention, rather than acknowledging the autonomy of female expression. This victim-blaming narrative is also reported

in Yohanna et al. (2020), where a significant number of male respondents linked female clothing with the justification of sexual advances, reinforcing deeply ingrained patriarchal beliefs. Similarly, the finding that women who dress indecently are perceived as sexually immoral is not surprising, given the socio-cultural context of many Nigerian communities. This view has been consistently challenged in scholarly literature. For instance, Fareo and Jackson (2018) argued that labeling women based on clothing perpetuates gender bias and undermines efforts to combat sexual violence. While male respondents in the present study were more likely to hold this view, such perceptions reflect moral policing that contributes to harmful stereotypes, which can ultimately shape institutional responses to harassment.

Interestingly, the results also indicate that no statistically significant gender differences were found in several key areas, such as beliefs that indecent dressing leads to sexual temptation, provokes rape, or arouses lustful thoughts. While males had slightly higher mean scores in most of these items, both male and female respondents generally expressed similar views. This could imply that male respondents are more likely to associate indecent dressing with sexual provocation and moral judgment. In contrast, female respondents may be more critical or cautious of attributing moral character or harassment incidents solely to dressing style. Although, this shared perception may be rooted in deeply embedded cultural beliefs common in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, where notions linking a woman's appearance to her sexual morality are widely accepted. Over time, many women may internalize these societal expectations, adopting the

same views that hold them responsible for managing male behaviour through their dress. As Yohanna et al. (2020) and Perpetua (2017) observed, female students in such contexts often unconsciously endorse values that legitimize victim-blaming, not necessarily out of agreement, but due to prolonged exposure to cultural norms that equate modest dressing with virtue and indecency with provocation. This internalization blurs gender lines in perceptions and helps explain why both male and female students might similarly associate indecent dressing with sexual harassment.

Conclusion

This study examined students' perceptions of indecent dressing and its connection to female sexual harassment at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. Findings revealed that while students demonstrated strong awareness of what constitutes indecent dressing, likely shaped by institutional norms and cultural expectations, its persistence on campus points to influential factors such as peer pressure, internet exposure, and foreign cultural trends. Importantly, the t-test results highlighted significant gender-based differences in students' views on the causes of indecent dressing and its perceived role in sexual harassment. Males were more likely to attribute indecent dressing to poor parenting and foreign influence, and to view certain dressing styles as provocative or suggestive of immorality. However, on key issues such as the link between dressing and rape provocation, both male and female students shared similar views, suggesting that cultural narratives common in patriarchal societies, where women are often held accountable for male behaviour, may have been

internalized across gender lines. Overall, the study shows that students' perceptions are shaped by a complex interplay of personal experiences, gender roles, cultural conditioning, and institutional messaging. The hypotheses tested confirmed that gender significantly influences how students interpret and respond to indecent dressing and its consequences. Therefore, addressing indecent dressing and sexual harassment on campus requires more than enforcing dress codes. Universities must foster a culture rooted in dignity, respect, and critical awareness. Interventions should include gender-sensitive education, open dialogue on social values, and proactive measures that challenge harmful stereotypes. Such a holistic strategy can help create a safer, more respectful academic environment for all students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Universities should organize continuous awareness programs on appropriate dressing, gender sensitivity, and sexual harassment.
2. Dialogue platforms that encourage both male and female students to share perspectives on dress and conduct should be promoted.
3. Anti-sexual harassment policies must be strengthened, clearly communicated, and strictly enforced across campuses.
4. The influence of media and peer groups should be harnessed positively through peer education and social media campaigns.
5. Cultural and ethical education should be integrated into general studies to promote values-based behaviour.
6. Further research should be encouraged across institutions to deepen

understanding and inform policy on dress and harassment issues.

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