

Cyberstalking as an Online Sexual Harassment: Evidence from Experience from Female University Students in Tanzanian Institutions of Higher Learning

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Abstract : Sexual harassment directed at women is reported in many societies, including in Tanzania. The advent of ICT technology, especially in universities, seems to aggravate the situation by extending harassment to cyberspace in various forms, including cyberstalking. Evidence shows that online violence is more dangerous than physical one due to the ability to access multiple private information, attack many victims, mask the perpetrator's identity, suspend the threat for a long time and spread over time and space. The study aimed to measure the magnitude of cyber harassment in Tanzanian higher learning institutions and to assess institutional sensitivity to ICT-mediated gender-based violence. It was carried out in 4 higher learning institutions in Tanzania: Mwalimu Nyerere Memorial Academy and Institute of Finance Management in Dar es Salaam and SAUT, and the University of Dodoma, where a survey questionnaire was distributed to 400 students and 40 key informants were interviewed. It was found that in each institution, the majority of female students experienced online harassment on social media perpetrated by ex-partners, male students, and university male teaching staff. The perpetrators compelled the female students to post nude pictures, have sexual relations with them, or utilize the posted private photographs to force female students to practice online or offline sexual relations. These threats seem to emanate from social-cultural beliefs about the subordinate position of women in society and that women's bodies are perceived as sex objects. It is therefore concluded that cyberspace provides an alternative space for perpetrators to exercise violence towards women.

Keywords : cyberstalking, embodiment, gender-based violence, internet

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