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# Mental health correlates of sexual harassment among students in Nigerian universities

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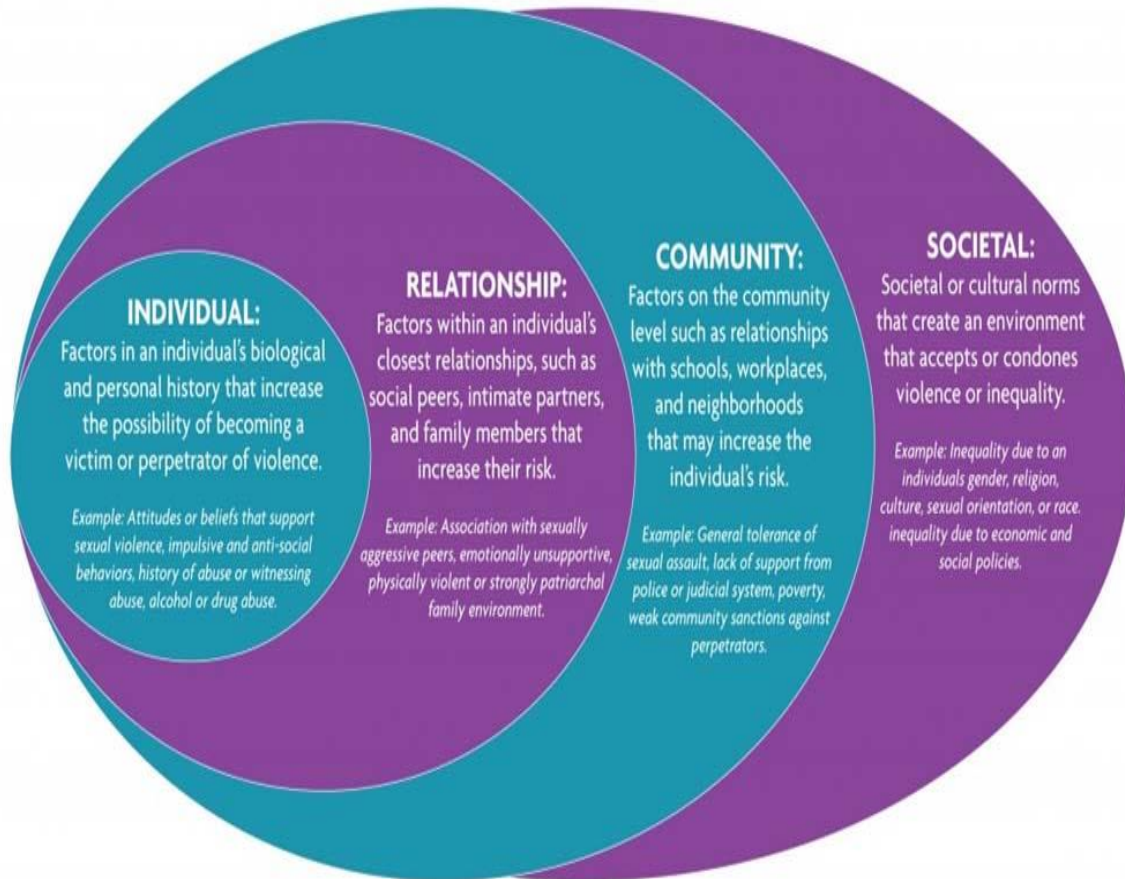
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# Determinants of the experience

## SOCIAL ECOLOGICAL MODEL



The experience of sexual harassment is not the same for all individuals and may be compounded by other factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability status.

Individuals with a history of trauma, such as childhood sexual abuse, may be more vulnerable to sexual harassment and its effects.



# Mental Health effects of sexual harassment

Severe psychological distress and self-harm higher among survivors in campus setting

Depression, stress, and anxiety, self-blame, lowered self-esteem and impaired psychological well-being

Survivors may also utilize risky behaviours, such as substance use, which can increase the likelihood of sexual harassment



# The present study



**BREAKING THE SILENCE**

This study aimed:

to determine the mental health correlates of heterosexual and same-sex sexual harassment

to explore the mental health sequelae of sexual harassment among students of three first-generation universities in South-west Nigeria.

# Methods



A concurrent mixed methods design in three universities in Southwest Nigeria.

A cross-sectional survey was done and in depth interviews were conducted with survivors.

Ethical clearance received and consent sought.

The total sample size was 1650 respondents with a margin of error of 2.5%, a 95% confidence level and a population estimate of 120,000.

Students and staff were categorised by faculties using proportionate sampling.

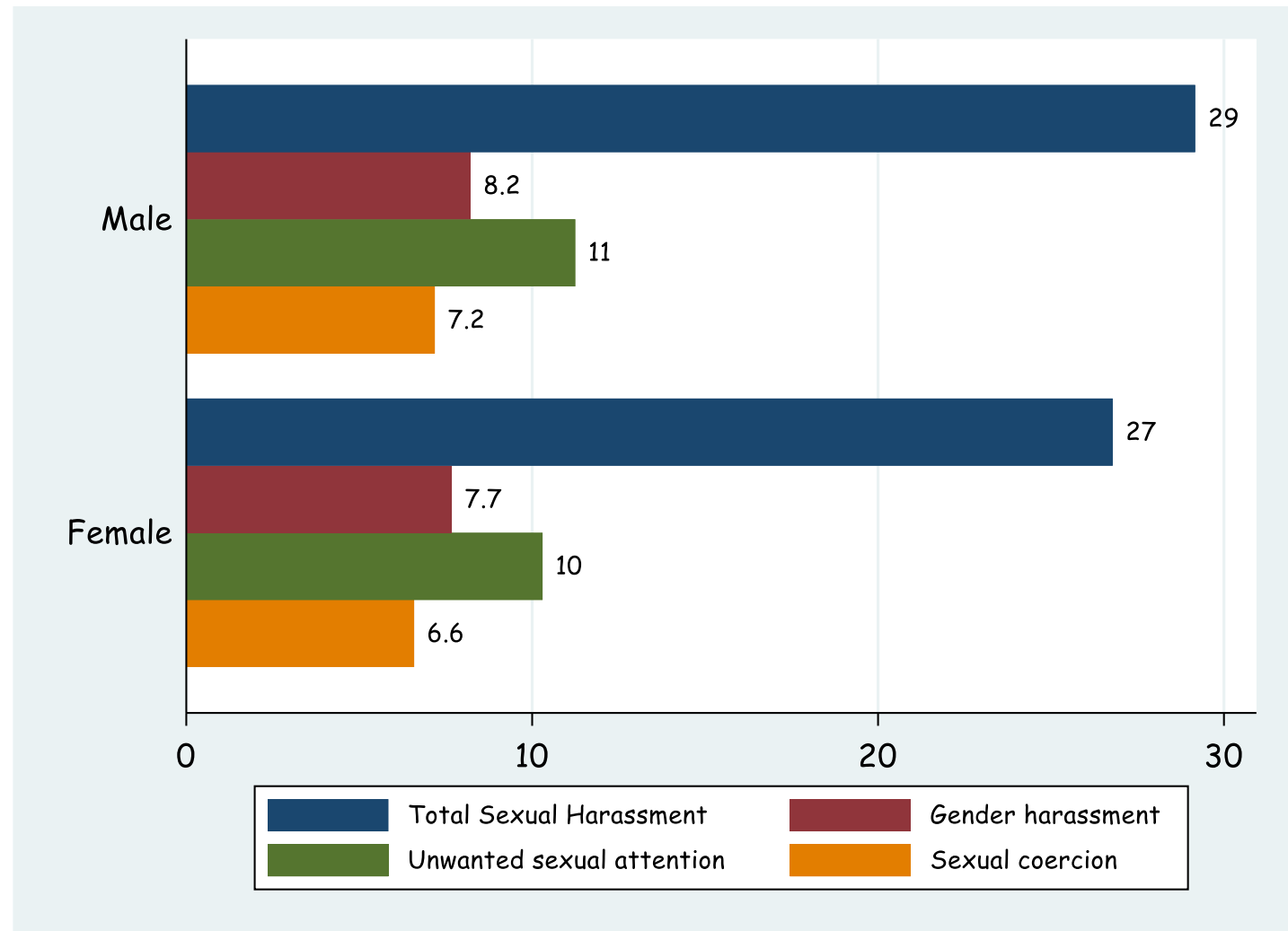
A purposive participant selection approach was adopted for the qualitative aspect to identify and recruit survivors.

Twelve IDIs were conducted across the three institutions.



**RESULTS**

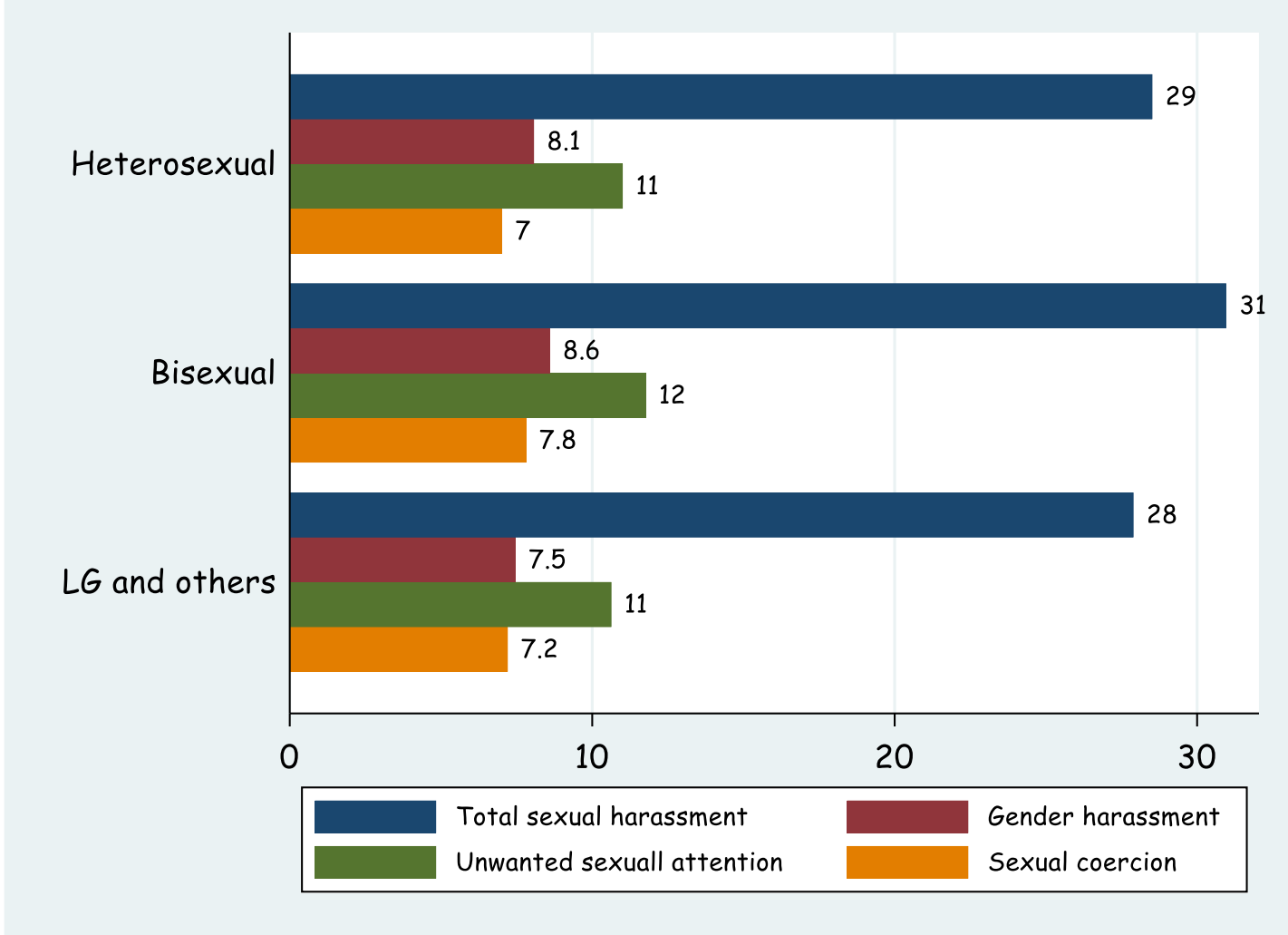
Mean sexual harassment for males and females.



**Total sexual harassment and all the subscales were significantly higher among the males**

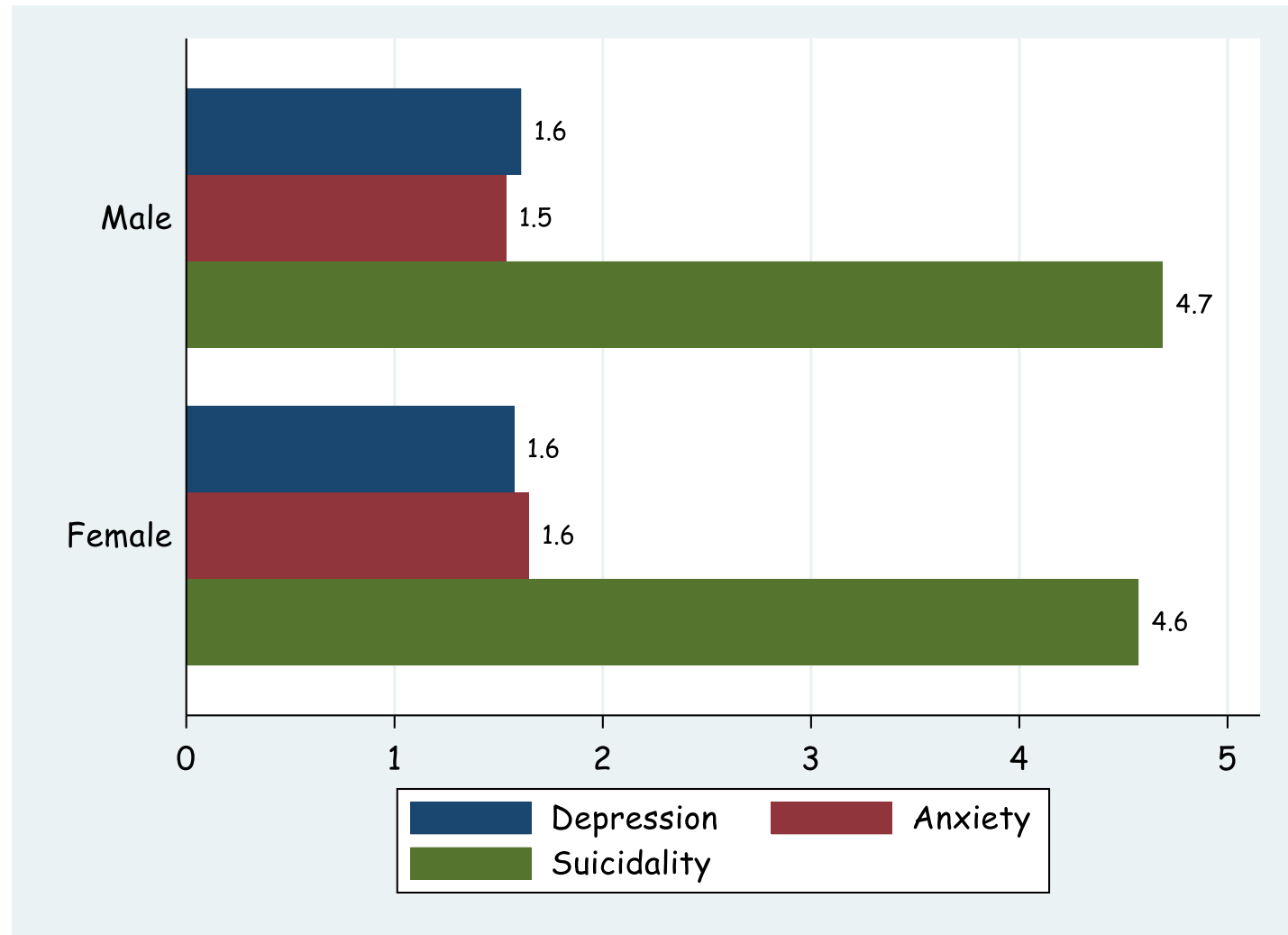


Mean sexual harassment across sexual orientation.



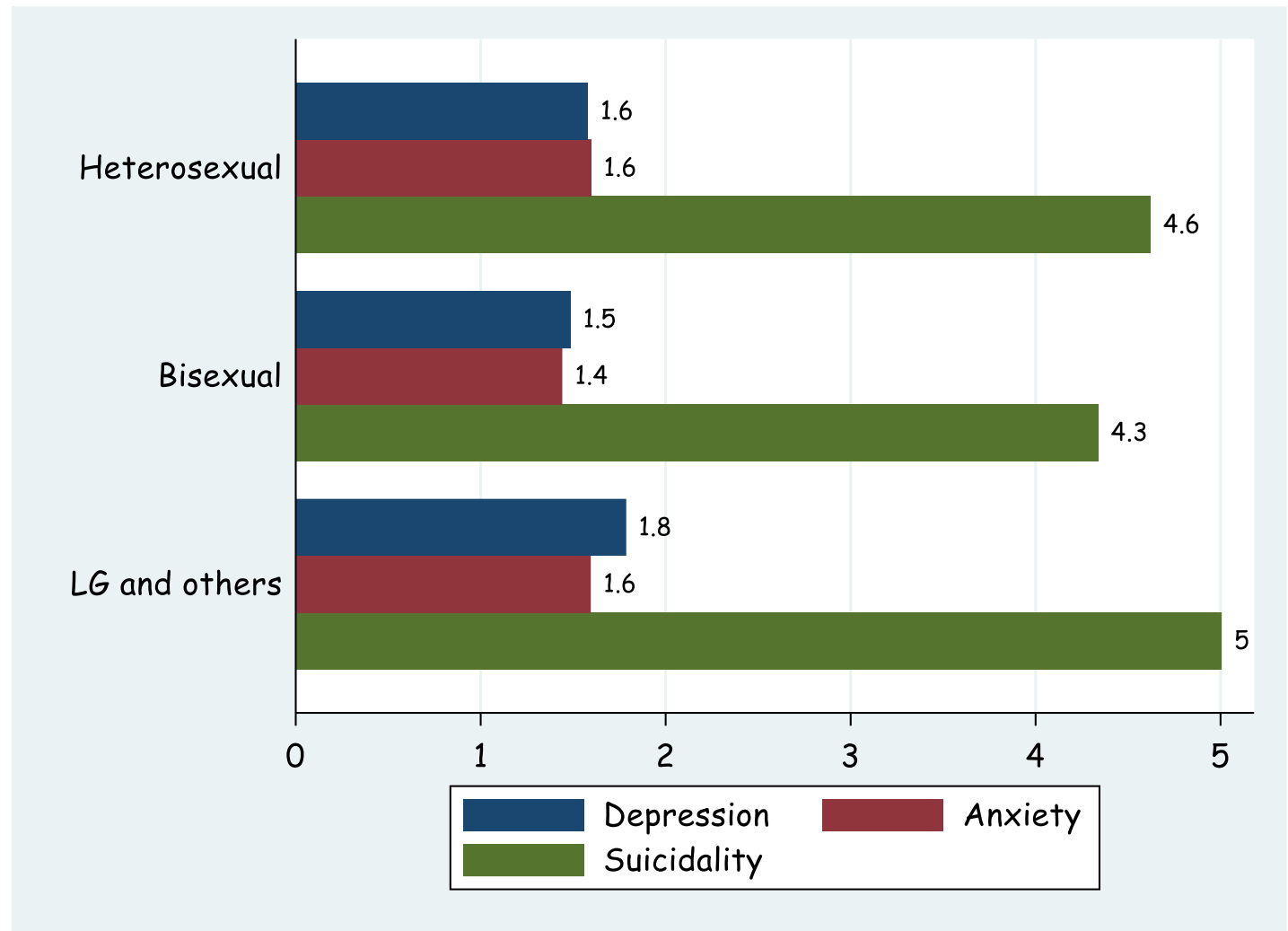
**Total sexual harassment and all the subscales were significantly higher among bisexuals compared to heterosexuals, Lesbians, and Gay respondents**

## Mental health status for males and females



**There were no statistically significant differences in the levels of depression, anxiety and suicidality among males and females**

## Mental health status across sexual orientation



**There were no statistically significant differences in the levels of depression, anxiety, and suicidality across the different sexual orientations**

## Relationships between Mental health status and sexual harassment (all respondents)

- Suicidality was significantly positively correlated with total sexual harassment ( $r=0.058$ ;  $p=0.021$ ), unwanted sexual attention ( $r=0.051$ ;  $p=0.042$ ), sexual coercion ( $r=0.061$ ;  $p=0.015$ ), and symptoms of anxiety and depression ( $r=0.430$ ;  $p<0.001$ ).

**Table 1: Pairwise correlations for all participants**

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>(1) Age</b>	1.000						
<b>(2) Total SH</b>	<b>0.083*</b> <b>(0.001)</b>	1.000					
<b>(3) Gender H</b>	<b>0.069*</b> <b>(0.005)</b>	<b>0.926*</b> <b>(0.000)</b>	1.000				
<b>(4) Unwanted sexual attention</b>	<b>0.073*</b> <b>(0.003)</b>	<b>0.970*</b> <b>(0.000)</b>	0.873* (0.000)	1.000			
<b>(5) Sexual coercion</b>	<b>0.092*</b> <b>(0.000)</b>	<b>0.936*</b> <b>(0.000)</b>	0.801* (0.000)	0.874* (0.000)	1.000		
<b>(6) Suicidality</b>	0.019 (0.448)	<b>0.058*</b> <b>(0.021)</b>	0.041 (0.101)	<b>0.051*</b> <b>(0.042)</b>	<b>0.061*</b> <b>(0.015)</b>	1.000	
<b>(7) Anxiety and depression</b>	0.004 (0.877)	0.033 (0.181)	<b>0.052*</b> <b>(0.037)</b>	0.018 (0.463)	0.038 (0.126)	<b>0.430*</b> <b>(0.000)</b>	1.000



## Results: stifled screams

- More peer reportage
- Few same sex reportage
- The experience of SH ranged from sexual assault to unsolicited physical touch and verbal harassment.
- Perpetrators ranged from lecturers and non-academic staff to students.
- Survivors experienced low self-esteem, had problems in their relationships, became less trusting, and increased risk-taking behaviour.



## Results: Stifled screams

- *“... I feel like it is my fault and there is something that I could have done to change it but I did not .... so, I just have to just leave it and live with the pain and guilt.”*  
(Female survivor 11 Uni 3)
- *“I have like suicidal thoughts, so I try as much as possible not to stay alone (hmm) I don't stay alone... I try to surround myself with people ... that is the only thing keeping me alive.”* (Female survivor 1, Uni 1)
- *“I think it just makes me suspicious, but at the same time, to be honest... I think the negativity around these sexual encounters and my sexual orientation just makes me suspicious”* (Male survivor 2, Uni 1)

# Discussion

The study used a widely used instrument that allows for comparison of findings with data from other climes



High levels of sexual harassment shows a highly prevalent culture that requires urgent intervention

Levels of depression, anxiety and suicidality comparable with other campus studies in the region



## Discussion

Total sexual harassment was positively correlated with suicidality, which is similar to previous findings from other studies

Unwanted sexual attention and sexual coercion were also positively correlated with suicidality

The finding from the interviews suggests a wide range of mental health sequelae ranging from low self esteem, depression, suicidal ideations and unhealthy use of substances



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Thank you