



## **Impact of Parents and Guardians' Communication Patterns in Preventing Sexual Harassments against the Girl-Child in the Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Sexual harassment against the girl-child is a pervasive and disturbing issue in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger-Delta region. The region's socio-economic challenges, cultural norms, and lack of effective communication have exacerbated the vulnerability of young girls to sexual exploitation. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping the lives of these young girls, and their communication patterns can significantly influence their ability to prevent or respond to sexual harassment. Despite the importance of this issue, there is a dearth of research on the impact of parents and guardians' communication patterns in preventing sexual harassment against the girl-child in the Niger-Delta region.

**Objective:** This study investigated the role of parents' and guardians' communication patterns in preventing sexual harassment against the Girl-Child in the Asaba metropolis, Delta State.

**Method:** The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, employing both survey and interview techniques. A total of 125 respondents (parents/guardians and girl-children aged 8–16) were purposively and randomly selected across eleven communities.

**Results:** The findings revealed a high level of general awareness among parents about sexual harassment. However, a significant gap was identified in the ability of girl-children to recognize subtle forms of harassment, which was attributed to a lack of explicit and consistent parental communication. The study found that while various communication patterns exist, the most effective were open, trust-based dialogues, which empowered the girl-child to identify and report incidents. Conversely, cultural taboos, a lack of parental knowledge, and the belief that other institutions should handle these issues were identified as the most significant barriers to effective communication. A strong, positive relationship was established between specific communication patterns and a girl-child's ability to prevent and report harassment.

**Conclusion:** The study concludes that parental communication is a critical protective factor against sexual harassment in Nigeria.

**Unique Contribution:** The study offered insights on the important role parents and guardians can play in educating the girl-child on preventive measures against sexual harassments in the country.

**Key Recommendation:** It recommends that parents, policymakers, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work collaboratively to dismantle cultural barriers and promote proactive, evidence-based communication strategies.

**Keywords:** Parents, Guardians, Communication Patterns, Prevention, Sexual Harassment, Girl-child and Nigeria



## INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment remains a pervasive global issue, with devastating consequences for its victims, particularly the girl-child. Defined broadly as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual harassment can occur in various settings including homes, schools, public spaces, and online environments (UNICEF, 2021). Its impact on the girl-child extends beyond immediate physical harm, encompassing severe psychological trauma, academic decline, social withdrawal, and long-term mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (World Health Organization, 2020).

Sexual harassment against children, especially the girl child, has increasingly become a pressing social and psychological issue in Nigeria and across the globe. The girl child is particularly vulnerable due to a variety of sociocultural, economic, and psychological factors that expose her to exploitation and abuse. Among the many stakeholders who can significantly contribute to the prevention of such abuse, parents and guardians occupy a central position. Their role as primary caregivers and early socialization agents positions them uniquely to detect, prevent, and respond to early signs of harassment (Aligwe, Nwankwo, & Nwafor, 2017).

In traditional African societies, parenting has long been grounded in communal values, with extended family members playing a role in a child's upbringing. However, with modernization, urbanization, and changing family structures, the dynamics of parenting have evolved. The present-day nuclear family, coupled with the pressures of economic survival, often results in parents spending less time with their children, thereby increasing their vulnerability to abuse, especially sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment encompasses a range of inappropriate behaviors, from verbal remarks to physical molestation, and in some extreme cases, rape. The impact of such experiences on the girl child is devastating. Victims may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, low self-esteem, academic failure, and an impaired ability to form healthy social relationships. Despite this, many cases remain unreported due to fear of stigma, lack of awareness, and ineffective legal frameworks.

In Nigeria, the vulnerability of the girl-child to sexual harassment is exacerbated by socio-cultural factors, gender inequalities, power imbalances, and sometimes, a culture of silence (CEDAW, 2010). Reports from various non-governmental organizations and media outlets consistently highlight the alarming prevalence of sexual abuse and harassment against minors, with girls disproportionately affected. In the country, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, cases of sexual harassment against girls are underreported due to cultural stigma, fear of victimization, and inadequate protective measures (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). Parents and guardians play a crucial role in mitigating this menace through effective communication patterns that educate, empower, and protect girls from potential abuse (Browning & Laumann, 2020). Asaba, as a melting pot of diverse communities, presents a unique context for examining this phenomenon, with varying cultural norms and socio-economic realities influencing child-rearing practices and protective mechanisms.



Despite growing awareness and advocacy efforts against sexual harassment in Nigeria, the problem persists, particularly affecting the girl-child (Aligwe et al., 2017). Despite existing child protection policies in Nigeria, sexual harassment against the girl-child persists, particularly in urban and peri-urban communities (NBS, 2022). Many parents and guardians either lack adequate knowledge or avoid discussing sexuality-related topics due to cultural taboos (Akinmayowa, 2020). This communication gap leaves girls ill-equipped to recognize, resist, or report harassment. While legal frameworks and public campaigns exist, the daily realities of many girls suggest a gap in effective prevention at the grassroots level, particularly within the family unit. Many parents and guardians, due to cultural norms, lack of knowledge, discomfort with sensitive topics, or simply a lack of understanding of effective communication strategies, may not adequately prepare their daughters to recognize, resist, or report sexual harassment. This often results in girls being unprepared, vulnerable, and silent victims.

There is limited empirical research on how parental communication patterns influence the prevention of sexual harassment in Asaba. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the effectiveness of parent-guardian communication in safeguarding the girl-child. What is particularly alarming is the growing number of cases occurring within environments presumed to be safe—homes, schools, religious institutions—and often involving trusted figures. This underscores the necessity of examining how much parents know about sexual harassment, how proactive they are in discussing sexual safety with their children, and the extent to which they supervise and monitor their child's interactions.

Anecdotal evidence and reports from child protection agencies in Asaba, suggest that many cases of sexual harassment go unreported or are poorly managed due to a lack of open communication between children and their caregivers. Questions arise regarding the specific communication patterns employed by parents/guardians: Do they proactively discuss personal safety and boundaries? Are they approachable when children need to disclose sensitive information? Do they provide age-appropriate education on sexual harassment? What are the perceived barriers that hinder such crucial conversations? A significant lacuna exists in empirical research specifically examining the direct link between parental/guardian communication patterns and the prevention of sexual harassment among the girl-child in selected communities of Asaba. Without a clear understanding of what constitutes effective communication in this context, efforts to empower girls and their caregivers remain fragmented and potentially ineffective. This study seeks to address this critical gap by systematically investigating the efficacy of these communication patterns.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1. To assess the level of awareness among girl-children regarding sexual harassment and their self-protective strategies based on communication received from parents/guardians.
2. To identify the prevalent communication patterns adopted by parents and guardians regarding sexual harassment and personal safety with their girl-children in selected communities of Asaba.
3. To determine the perceived barriers to open communication between parents/guardians and the girl-child on issues related to sexuality and sexual harassment.



4. To examine the relationship between specific parental/guardian communication patterns (e.g., frequency, openness, content) and the girl-child's reported ability to identify, resist, or report sexual harassment.
5. To proffer recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of parent/guardian communication in preventing sexual harassment among the girl-child in Asaba.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was primarily guided by two complementary theoretical frameworks: Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) posits that individuals learn behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions through observation and modeling. In the context of this study, it suggests that children learn about sexual harassment, personal safety, and appropriate responses by observing their parents' or guardians' communication patterns and behaviors. If parents openly discuss these topics, model healthy boundaries, and demonstrate responsiveness to sensitive issues, children are more likely to internalize these behaviors and feel empowered to act. Conversely, a lack of communication or dismissive attitudes can lead to a child feeling unprepared or unwilling to address sexual harassment. The theory also emphasizes the role of self-efficacy – a child's belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations – which can be significantly influenced by parental encouragement and consistent safety messaging.

Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles, (1973) was initially developed for intergroup communication, Communication Accommodation Theory can be applied to the parent-child dynamic. It suggests that individuals adjust their communication styles to converge with or diverge from others. In this study, it implies that effective parent-child communication regarding sensitive topics like sexual harassment involves parents accommodating their language, tone, and content to the child's age, developmental stage, and comprehension level. When parents fail to accommodate, communication can become ineffective, leading to misunderstandings, disengagement, or a child's inability to grasp crucial safety messages. Conversely, when parents actively strive to converge their communication style with that of their child, it can foster trust, facilitate understanding, and encourage open dialogue about challenging subjects.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design- survey and in-depth interview. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect numerical data from a larger sample of parents/guardians and girl-children. In-depth semi-structured interviews was conducted with a smaller subset of parents/guardians and girl-children. This provided rich, nuanced data on their experiences, perceptions, challenges, and specific communication strategies, offering deeper insights into the "how" and "why" behind the observed patterns. The target population for this study comprises: Parents and guardians of girl-children within the age range of 8-16 years residing in selected communities of Asaba. Girl-children aged 8-16 years residing in selected communities of Asaba. The target sample size for the survey is 60 parents/guardians and 60 girl-children to ensure sufficient statistical power. An initial target of 20-30 parents/guardians and 20-30 girl-children were set for the in-depth interviews. However, the researcher was able to interviewed 10 parents/guardians and 10 girl-children. A purposive sampling approach was used



to select participants for interviews, while A multi-stage sampling technique was employed for the suvery to captured multiple communities. Stage 1: Purposive Sampling of Communities: Selected communities within Asaba, was be purposively chosen based on criteria such as diversity (e.g., urban/semi-urban mix, different socio-economic strata if feasible), accessibility, and the willingness of community leaders to grant access. Stage 2: Simple Random Sampling of Households: Within each selected community, a systematic random sampling or simple random sampling approach was used to select households with girl-children in the specified age range. Stage 3: Purposive Sampling within Households.

The questionnaire format is primarily closed-ended questions (Likert scales, multiple-choice), with some open-ended questions for additional insights. Semi-structured interview guide was used for the qualitative data.

Validity and Reliability: The instruments were developed based on extensive literature review and expert consultations (e.g., child psychologists, gender specialists, educators). A pilot study was conducted with a small group of participants similar to the target population to assess the clarity, readability, and comprehensibility of the instruments. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the instruments before the main data collection. For scale-based questions in the questionnaire, the internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A coefficient of 0.70 or higher will be considered acceptable.

Quantitative Data Analysis was done using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation. The qualitative data were analysed thematically.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Respondents Gender**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Male	42	40%
Female	63	60%
Total	105	100%

**Table 2: Age of Respondents**

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
14-18 Years	52	49.5%
25-34 Years	12	11.4%
35-44 Years	24	23.4%
45-54 Years	13	12.2%
55 Years and Above	4	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Table 3: Educational Qualification**

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary Education	20	19.0%
Secondary Education	39	37.1%
Tertiary Education	35	33.3%
Postgraduate Education	10	9.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4: Marital Status**

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	49	46.6%
Married	48	45.7%
Widowed	5	4.8%
Divorced	3	2.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 5: Awareness Level Sexual Harassment among Girl-Children and Parents/Guardians**

Awareness	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	OVERALL (%)
I am aware that girls can be victims of sexual harassment	9.2	14.3	7.6	30.3	38.6	3.75	1.34	75
I can identify various forms of sexual harassment	6.2	8.9	10.0	33.8	41.1	3.95	1.19	79
Sexual harassment often occurs in homes and schools	7.8	6.5	7.8	24.3	53.5	4.09	1.25	81.8
I reported self-protective strategies (e.g., saying no, moving away, telling a trusted adult)	7.8	15.1	10.3	19.7	47.0	3.83	1.36	76.6
I reported comfort level in disclosing incidents to their parents/guardians.	6.5	14.3	5.1	24.1	50.0	3.97	1.31	79.4
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>3.92</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>78.4</b>

Source: Researchers field work 2025 Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table

The data in table two shows that to Sexual harassment often occurs in homes and schools (M=4.09, SD=1.25). Therefore, people spread disinformation on social media so as to achieve a desire selfish objective. Over 78.4% of respondents demonstrated awareness of sexual harassment and its occurrence in various settings, confirming high levels of awareness among parents/guardians.

**Qualitative Analysis**

Overall, the awareness level among interviewed girl-children about sexual harassment is moderate, with a significant number having an average understanding, while a smaller percentage have either high or low



awareness. While most of the girls can identify overt acts of sexual harassment, like unwanted physical touching, they often struggle to recognize more subtle forms, such as inappropriate verbal comments, sexual jokes, or psychological manipulation. This gap in awareness is largely due to the societal and cultural barriers that limit open discussions about sexuality and abuse. Below are the major areas of their awareness on the issue of sexual harassment:

**Ability to Identify:** According to four respondents, when parents engage in open, direct, and explicit conversations about boundaries, consent, and different types of sexual harassment, girls are better equipped to identify inappropriate behaviour.

**Ability to Resist:** The girls who are taught to assert their boundaries and say "no" from a young age are more likely to resist sexual harassment. Parental communication that focuses on empowerment and self-worth, rather than obedience, builds a girl's confidence to refuse unwanted advances.

**Ability to Report:** This is perhaps the most critical area affected by parental communication. In a society where sexual assault victims are often blamed or shamed, the existence of a safe, non-judgmental space at home is crucial.

**Table 6: Prevalent Communication Patterns Adopted by Parents/Guardians as Preventive Measures**

Communication Patterns	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	OVERALL (%)
I talk to my daughter about sexual safety	4.6	8.1	5.7	33.8	47.8	4.12	1.12	82.4
I monitor supervise who my daughter associates with	4.6	10.0	10.3	30.8	44.3	4.00	1.17	80
I limit media content my daughter consumes	5.9	6.8	5.4	37.0	44.9	4.08	1.14	81.6
I train my daughter to report inappropriate behavior	0.0	19.5	8.9	23.0	48.6	4.02	1.18	80.4
Frequency of discussions on personal safety, boundaries, and sexual harassment	4.6	8.1	5.7	33.8	47.8	4.12	1.12	82.4
Topics typically covered in these discussions (e.g., "good touch/bad touch," body parts, secrets, reporting).	13.2	13.8	15.1	28.9	28.9	3.46	1.38	69.2
Reported level of openness in communication	9.2	14.9	7.8	29.7	38.4	3.73	1.35	74.6
Parental comfort levels in discussing sensitive topics	6.2	8.9	10.5	33.2	41.1	3.94	1.20	78.8
Regularly revisiting and reinforcing safety messages	5.9	6.8	5.4	37.0	44.9	4.08	1.12	81.6
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>3.91</b>	<b>1.22</b>	<b>78.14</b>

Source: Researchers field work 2025. Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table



Generally, the study shows that majority of the respondents (78.14%) agreed on the prevalent communication patterns adopted by parents and guardians regarding sexual harassment and personal safety with their girl-children in selected communities of Asaba ( $M=3.91$ ,  $SD=1.22$ ). Therefore, respondents are aware of the prevalent communication patterns adopted by parents and guardians regarding sexual harassment and personal safety with their girl-children in selected communities. Majority of parents actively engage in preventive strategies such as discussions on sexual safety and monitoring associations. However, media exposure control is less consistently practiced.

### Qualitative Analysis

All the respondents interviewed acknowledged that parents and guardians most often communicate about sexual harassment and personal safety through “**warnings, moral/religious framing, and “stranger-danger” talks**”. These conversations are typically “**reactive, brief**”, and “**mother-led**”, and they often “**avoid explicit language**” about bodies, consent, or digital risks. Where open, age-appropriate dialogue occurs, girls show “**better knowledge and safer behaviors; but cultural taboos, parental discomfort, and fear of “encouraging immorality”**” keep many families from discussing specifics—especially with younger adolescents. These communication patterns are enunciated below:

**Avoidance and Silence:** This is the most prevalent pattern, where parents and guardians avoid all conversations about sexuality and sexual harassment. This is driven by deep-seated cultural and religious beliefs that view such topics as taboo, believing that discussing them will encourage promiscuity.

**Indirect and Euphemistic Communication:** This pattern involves parents communicating personal safety rules implicitly, without ever using explicit language about sexual harassment.

**Authoritarian and Fear-Based Warnings:** In this pattern, parents adopt a strict, authoritative tone, giving commands and rules without offering explanations or inviting dialogue. The focus is on obedience and compliance.

**Open, Trust-Based Communication:** The most effective communication pattern, though less common, is one built on trust, empathy, and open dialogue. This involves parents creating a safe space where the girl-child feels comfortable discussing anything without fear of judgment.

**Gender-Specific Restrictions:** Girls receive more warnings than boys, reinforcing gender stereotypes: “Don’t stay out late.” “Don’t sit close to male teachers.” Boys are rarely taught about respecting boundaries, perpetuating a cycle of harassment.

**Progressive and Open Dialogue (Emerging Trend):** Educated, urban, and younger parents are gradually adopting open discussions



**Table 7: Barriers to Prevention issues Related to Sexuality and Sexual Harassment**

S/n	Identified Barrier	Level of Agreement (%)					M	SD	Ovall(%)
		1	2	3	4	5			
1	Cultural taboos against discussing sex with children	0.0	1.5	27.3	37.9	33.3	4.0	.82	80
2	Lack of knowledge or training	1.5	13.6	43.9	30.3	10.6	3.3	.90	67
3	Fear of being misunderstood or judged by others	0.0	0.0	50.0	40.9	9.1	3.5	.66	71.8
4	Belief that schools or religious centers should handle it	1.5	3.0	28.8	66.7	0.0	3.6	.63	72.2
5	Parental discomfort with their own lack of knowledge or past experiences	0.0	3.0	39.4	57.6	0.0	3.5	.56	71
6	Practical challenges such as busy schedules or lack of privacy	1.5	4.5	69.7	24.2	0.0	3.1	.57	63.4
7	Children's fear of judgment, disbelief, or causing distress to parents	3.0	9.1	53.0	34.8	0.0	3.2	.73	64
8	Differences in perception of barriers between parents and children	4.5	13.6	24.2	39.4	18.2	3.4	1.2	69.4
9	There is discomfort discussing sexuality	3.0	18.2	33.3	19.7	25.8	3.5	1.0	70.6
<b>Total</b>							<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>69.9</b>
							<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	

Source: Research Field work, 2025 **Note:** 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table, M=Mean, SD; Standard Deviation, 1; Strongly Disagree, 2; Disagree, 3; Neutral, 4; Agree, and 5; strongly Agree.

Generally, most (69.9%) respondents agreed on the barriers hinder parents and guardians from actively preventing sexual harassment of the girl child in Nigeria (M=3.50, SD=0.79). It is obvious that both parent/guardian and girl-child are concerned regarding perceived barriers (e.g., discomfort, lack of knowledge, cultural taboos, time constraints, fear of upsetting the child/parent) to open communication between parents/guardians and the girl-child on issues related to sexuality and sexual harassment.



### Qualitative Analysis

In-depth interviews with both groups provided rich narratives on:

**Cultural and Religious Taboos:** According to most parents/guardians, many Nigerian cultures and religions consider sexuality a private and taboo topic. Discussing it openly, especially with children, is often seen as inappropriate and can be viewed as encouraging early sexual experimentation or promiscuity.

**Lack of Parental Knowledge and Self-Efficacy:** Many parents themselves lack accurate, comprehensive knowledge about sexual health and harassment (Respondent One). They may have been raised in an environment where these topics were never discussed, and as a result, they feel ill-equipped or too embarrassed to initiate conversations with their daughters.

**Socioeconomic and Time Constraints:** Poverty and the need for parents to work multiple jobs to support their families can leave them with little to no time to have meaningful, in-depth conversations with their children.

**Gender Norms and Power Dynamics:** Traditional Nigerian gender roles often place the responsibility for a girl's sexual purity on her shoulders, but without providing her with the tools to protect herself. Girls are taught to be submissive and obedient, which can make it difficult for them to assert boundaries or speak up about abuse.

**Table 8: Relationship between specific parental/guardian communication patterns and the girl-child's reported ability to identify, resist, or report sexual harassment**

S/ no	Relationship	Level of Agreement (%)					M	SD	Ovall(%)
		1	2	3	4	5			
1	Frequency of discussions and awareness scores	1.5	0.0	40.9	30.3	27.3	3.8	.89	76
2	Perceived openness and comfort in reporting	0.0	3.0	62.1	25.8	9.1	3.4	.70	68.2
3	Parent constant reminder and the girl-child's ability to identify, and resist sexual harassment	3.0	6.1	42.4	31.8	16.7	3.5	.95	70.6
4	Parent monitoring and supervision makes girl-child to report sexual harassment	0.0	7.6	16.7	37.9	37.9	4.0	.92	81.2
5	Parental comfort levels in discussing sensitive topics foster open communication	3.0	7.6	33.3	18.2	37.9	3.8	1.1	76
6	Frequency of discussions on personal safety, boundaries, and sexual harassment enabled self-protective outcome	3.0	6.1	42.4	31.8	16.7	3.5	.95	70.6
<b>Total</b>							<b>3.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>74.4</b>
							<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	

Source: Research Field work, 2025 **Note:** 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table, M=Mean, SD; Standard Deviation, 1; Strongly Disagree, 2; Disagree, 3; Neutral, 4; Agree, and 5; strongly Agree.



Generally, respondents slightly agreed ( $M=3.72$ ,  $SD=0.93$ ) there a significant relationship between specific parental/guardian communication patterns (e.g., frequency, openness, content) and the girl-child's reported ability to identify, resist, or report sexual harassment (74.4%). This shows that parental communication enhances awareness, protective behaviors, and prevention of sexual harassment among girls. Interventions that improve parental knowledge and self-efficacy lead to more frequent and effective communication, which is critical for reducing incidents of sexual harassment.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

While qualitative data cannot establish statistical relationships, it provided illustrative examples and narratives that support or contradict the quantitative findings. For instance, children who report feeling safe with their parents will offer stories of discussions that empowered them, reinforcing the quantitative correlation. Conversely, children who report little communication may describe feelings of vulnerability.

The relationship between parental communication and a girl-child's ability to identify, resist, and report sexual harassment in Nigeria is a strong and direct one. Certain communication patterns can empower girls, while others can leave them vulnerable.

**Open and Consistent Communication:** When parents and guardians in Nigeria engage in open, non-judgmental, and consistent communication about sexuality, body safety, and boundaries, it significantly increases a girl's ability to identify sexual harassment (Respondents Eight & Ten).

**Lack of Communication and Cultural Barriers:** Conversely, the absence of communication, often due to cultural taboos, embarrassment, or a belief that discussing sex promotes promiscuity, creates a knowledge gap for the girl-child.

### **Authoritarian vs. Authoritative Parenting:**

- Authoritarian: This style, which relies on strict rules and punishment without explanation, can discourage open communication.
- Authoritative: This parenting style, which combines clear boundaries with open dialogue and warmth, is most effective.



**Table 9: The strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of parent/guardian communication in preventing sexual harassment**

Recommendations	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	OVER ALL (%)
Parental Education Programs such as organizing workshops and seminars for parents and guardians.	4.6	9.7	10.3	22.2	53.2	4.1	1.20	82
Creating a Safe Communication Environment such as encouraging open and non-Judgmental dialogue	4.3	10.8	6.8	25.7	52.4	4.11	1.19	82.2
Parent Regular and Casual Conversations	3.8	10.3	6.5	33.8	45.7	4.07	1.13	81.4
School-based Initiatives	3.2	11.9	10.5	35.7	38.6	3.95	1.12	79
Community and Religious Leaders' Involvement	4.9	6.8	12.4	35.9	40.0	3.99	1.11	79.8
Partnerships with NGOs and Government Agencies	0.0	18.4	14.1	21.6	46.0	3.96	1.17	79.2
Developing a "Safety Plan	13.0	13.8	13.5	30.3	29.5	3.49	1.38	69.8
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>3.95</b>	<b>1.19</b>	<b>79</b>

*Source: Researchers field work 2025 Note: 2.5 is the cut-off point between agreement & disagreement on table*

Generally, respondents level of agreement on the recommendations on the strategies that can enhance the effectiveness of parent/guardian communication in preventing sexual harassment (M=3.95, SD=1.19). It shows that to enhance the effectiveness of parent/guardian communication in preventing sexual harassment among the girl-child in Nigeria, several strategies can be implemented. These strategies focus on empowering parents with knowledge and skills, creating a safe environment for communication, and leveraging community and institutional support.

The Qualitative data showed that to enhance the effectiveness of parent/guardian communication in preventing sexual harassment among the girl-child in Nigeria, several strategies can be implemented. These strategies focus on empowering parents with knowledge and skills, creating a safe environment for communication, and leveraging community and institutional support.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of parents' and guardians' communication patterns in preventing sexual harassment among the girl-child in Abuja is a critical protective factor. While a high level of general awareness of the problem exists, cultural taboos and a lack of specific knowledge act as significant barriers, preventing the necessary open and proactive dialogue within families. The study definitively shows that when parents adopt open, trust-based, and consistent communication, coupled with active supervision and a non-



judgmental attitude, they significantly empower their daughters to recognize, resist, and report harassment. The absence of such communication leaves the girl-child vulnerable, uninformed, and often silent. Therefore, parental communication is not just a desirable tool but a fundamental necessity in the prevention of sexual harassment.

The study concludes that parents and guardians remain the most critical line of defense against sexual harassment of the girl-child. Effective prevention requires more than restrictive rules; it demands consistent, open, and age-appropriate communication that empowers the girl-child with knowledge and self-protective skills. Cultural silence and parental discomfort, if unaddressed, perpetuate vulnerability. Thus, communication patterns rooted in trust, empathy, and openness are indispensable in safeguarding the girl-child in Nigeria.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered to various stakeholders:

### **For Parents and Guardians:**

1. **Prioritize Open Communication:** Parents should actively initiate open, honest, and age-appropriate conversations with their daughters about personal safety, bodily autonomy, and boundaries from an early age.
2. **Enhance Knowledge:** Parents should seek out resources, training, and educational materials to improve their own knowledge and comfort levels in discussing sensitive topics.
3. **Foster a Safe Space:** Parents should assure their daughters that they can be approached with any concern without fear of judgment, shame, or disbelief.
4. **Parents expressed the need for formal education or guidance on how to approach conversations around sex, body autonomy, and abuse prevention with their daughters in an age-appropriate and culturally sensitive manner.**
5. **Monitoring Digital Exposure:** In today's digital age, it is imperative that parents supervise the type of content their children consume online and provide guidance on handling online predators.
6. **Collaboration with Law Enforcement and Social Services:** Parents and guardians must be made aware of the procedures for reporting abuse and should be encouraged to take immediate action when suspicions arise.

### **For Policymakers and Government Agencies:**

1. **Develop Parent-Focused Interventions:** Government agencies and policymakers should design and implement culturally sensitive and contextually relevant parental education programs. These programs should focus on equipping parents with the knowledge and communication skills needed to protect their children, as such interventions have been proven effective. Government and non-governmental organizations should create community based educational workshops that train parents on how to communicate with their children about body safety and sexual abuse prevention.



2. Inclusion of Sexual Safety in Parenting Curriculums: Parenting classes, whether formal or informal, should include components on understanding, detecting, and preventing child sexual abuse and harassment.
3. Launch Public Awareness Campaigns: Public campaigns should be developed to address the cultural taboos and misconceptions surrounding discussions of sexuality, highlighting the importance of family dialogue as a preventative tool. Public enlightenment campaigns should promote positive parent-child communication and debunk myths that discussing sexuality encourages immorality.
4. Support Systems for Parents and Victims: The government should strengthen reporting and support systems where parents and victims can receive counseling, legal aid, and child protection services.

#### **For Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Child Protection Advocates:**

1. Provide Accessible Training: NGOs should offer accessible, community-based training workshops for parents and guardians on how to effectively communicate with children about sexual harassment.
2. Collaborate with Community Leaders: Advocacy efforts should involve community and religious leaders to help dismantle cultural barriers and promote open discussions within local communities.
3. Integration of Protective Policies in Schools and Religious Centers: Schools and religious institutions should implement policies that involve parents as stakeholders in protecting children and promoting safe environments.

#### **Ethical clearance**

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the parents/guardians and girls used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

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#### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

#### **Availability of data and materials**

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

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