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Women's Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment in Liberia's Public Sector

Gbelly Arrington Johnson
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

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Review Committee

Dr. Steven Matarelli, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. George Kieh, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Lydia Forsythe, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Women's Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment in Liberia's Public Sector

by

Gbelly Arrington Johnson

MA, University of Liberia, 2011

BA, African Methodist Episcopal University, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

August 2022

Abstract

Despite progress towards gender equality, women continue to be affected by quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia workplaces. They are often viewed as sexual objects rather than contributing players toward sustainable development. Using Feinberg's harm principle as the interpretive lens and the hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of analysis, women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector were explored. Purposeful sampling employing in-depth semistructured interviews of 13 working women using Zoom was used for thematic content analyses. Analysis of the data produced three major themes: (a) sex for employment or *sexploiment*, (b) hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting, and (c) effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment and 10 subthemes specific to themes 2 and 3. The results show that quid pro quo sexual arrangements harm women's sustained employability, underscoring the need for an interdisciplinary policy approach to resolve the issue. The implications for positive social change include providing data that could serve as a roadmap to facilitate effective anti-sexual harassment policies in Liberia to support the ever-present push for improved equality for Liberian women from newly reported perspectives.

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Dedication

To my parents, the truest reflection of what it means to have someone making sacrifices for another. These words “thank you” are infinitesimal to express my deepest gratitude for the enormous contribution made in my life. I pray you both continue to live to enjoy the fruit of your sweat, tears, and endless sacrifices wrapped with love in Jesus’s name.

To my present (and future) nephews and nieces, this work is dedicated to you, knowing that with God, “ALL THINGS,” not “some things,” are possible. I pray that you all will keep being true to yourself and never stop on the journey of seeking to be the better version of yourself each day.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Consider these vignettes: upon graduating from college, OldLady, 23, applied for a job. She was shortlisted as a potential candidate, which got her more excited. However, after going through the second phase of the hiring process, her potential employer requested that she “*sleep with him*” in exchange for the job. When she refused, she received an email informing her that the company decided to give the position to another “*suitable*” candidate and wished her all the best in her future endeavors. Pinky, 30, worked with her current employer for almost seven years but had not gotten any pay raise or a promotion. Her employer made it impossible because she refused to engage in sexual activities with him.

OldLady’s and Pinky’s stories are just fractions of the stories of many women impacted by quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. Several researchers found that women are continually viewed as sexual objects (Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017) rather than contributing players to sustainable development. They are incessantly being pressured to offer their bodies as collateral in exchange for jobs, regardless of their qualifications. Because of this gross cruelty, many women lack the capabilities and skills needed to compete in the job market (McLaughlin et al., 2017). As a result, they become unemployed or compelled to find jobs with minimal wages and limited or no benefits (Aycock et al., 2019; McLaughlin et al., 2017). These low-level jobs are likely to impact their future economic stability, reinforcing their dependence on men for their financial well-being (Khumalo et al., 2015; MacKinnon, 1979).

This problem is widespread in developing nations, like Liberia, where women are sexually harassed daily, resulting in numerous social ills, including teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other health conditions (Atwood et al., 2011; Medie, 2013; Ulicki, 2011). However, despite the public awareness of this problem, little is known about women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. By exploring Liberian women's lived experiences of the phenomenon, policymakers could have the necessary information to facilitate the design of effective anti-sexual harassment policies to improve the ever-present push for gender equality in Liberia.

The major sections discussed in Chapter 1 include the background, problem statement, purpose, research question, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a chapter summary.

Background

For any nation desiring to improve the ever-present push for gender equality, they cannot ignore quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. *Quid pro quo* is a Latin term for "something for something," where two or more individuals participate in a shared agreement to trade goods or services. In a quid pro quo arrangement, an individual's transfer is contingent upon the transfer from the other individual involved. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (2016) defined quid pro quo sexual harassment as compliance to or refusal of unwanted sexual advances being used as the condition for an individual's employment decisions. Quid pro quo sexual

harassment involves employers promoting or demoting their employees based on their sexual compliance (Anita et al., 2020; Khumalo et al., 2015). In its simplest term, it involves the demands for sexual favors in exchange for employment-related benefits.

Researchers underscored that sexual harassment is a prevalent concern, affecting women's lives from all lifestyles (Aljerian et al., 2017; Halouani et al., 2019; Khumalo et al., 2015). This issue is widespread in employment settings. Researchers found that employers incessantly asked employees and job seekers to engage in sexual activities for job opportunities (Aljerian et al., 2017; Lindquist & McKay, 2018; McLaughlin et al., 2017). Though the reviewed literature highlighted that sexual harassment is a severe issue, it is underreported (Namaganda et al., 2021). Many victims are afraid to share their experiences. They refused to report their experiences because of fear of losing their jobs (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017), lack of awareness (Cassino & Besen, 2019), and the fear of public condemnation (Khumalo et al., 2015; Namaganda et al., 2021). Others associated victims' refusal to come forward with sexual harassment complaints due to the fragile judicial system (Divon & Bøås, 2017; Medie, 2013) and the societal muteness and indifference related to sexual harassment complaints (Armitage, 2022; Khumalo et al., 2015).

These unfair practices resulting from quid pro quo sexual arrangements harm women. Quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment impedes women's career prospects (Aljerian et al., 2017; Anita et al., 2020). Victims, mostly women are forced to take time off from work to deal with the harmful effects of harassment (Anita et al., 2020). Their absence in the workplace has resulted in penalties for nonperformance

(Khumalo et al., 2015). Many sexually harassed women have been written up at work and fired, impacting their prospect of holding a future steady job. McLaughlin et al. (2017) posited that women being unemployed reinforces their dependence on men for their financial well-being. Hence, it limits their rights, including their respect in their homes. Despite this problem, especially in developing nations, like Liberia (Atwood et al., 2011; Divon & Bøås, 2017), there is no empirical data documenting women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working community.

The lack of empirical data is regrettable because such information is needed if progress is to be made in closing the gap between women and men in the workplace, notably in developing countries like Liberia. For example, with such data, policymakers can gain insight into the meaning women in Liberia attach to sexual harassment and their experiences of using the legal system in filing sexual harassment complaints in the workplace. Data, as such, could aid policymakers in designing and implementing policies to improve the ever-present push for improved equality for Liberian women. In this vein, women can have better access to employment opportunities, especially those free of sexual demands.

Throughout Liberia, the culture of silence and victim blaming discourages victims of sexual harassment from speaking out (Medie, 2013). Hence, providing empirical data on the phenomenon could encourage more women to come forward with sexual harassment complaints. In providing working women, and those seeking to enter the workforce, the platform to share their experiences this might curtail incidences of sexual harassment, which, in return, could contribute to women's career growth in Liberia.

Additionally, the access of such data could aid local advocacy groups to develop programs to support victims of sexual harassment and provide these local movements with tools to pressure local government to combat the influx of sexual harassment not only in the workplace but the nation in general. Overall, this positive government movement is likely to bring about positive social change in “Mama” Liberia.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this research is quid pro quo sexual harassment. Despite the influx of public support regarding the push for gender equality, quid pro quo sexual harassment continues to hinder that endeavor. Women continues to be impacted by quid pro quo sexual arrangements in employment (Khumalo et al., 2015). Many employers constantly pressure women to offer their body as collateral in exchange for a job, promotion, a pay raise, or to obtain job training. Those charge with employment-related benefits perceived women as sex objects rather than contributing players to sustainable development. As a result, women's qualifications are not considered essential in determining their suitability for a position rather their bodies become the determinant of obtaining a position. These inexcusable practices harms women as a group. It creates a roadblock to women sustained employability (Khumalo et al., 2015; Mulugeta et al., 2022), reinforces their dependent on men (McLaughlin et al., 2017), distort their self-image, resulting to psychological damage (Nielsen et al., 2019; Mulugeta et al., 2022), and a host of other health problems (Khumalo et al., 2015; Namaganda et al., 2021). These issues contribute to professional gap that exist between women and men.

In developing nations, like Liberia where victims of sexual harassment are thwarted from obtaining justice this employment cycle is problematic. Several researchers noted that women are being sexually harassed daily (Atwood et al., 2011; Medie, 2013). According to Medie (2013), women and girls continue to be the targets of gender-based violence (GBV) despite the end of the 14 years of civil war. Medie revealed that sexual assault and partner cruelty are two forms of violence against women and girls reported to the Women and Children Protection Section (WCPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP). Yet, these incidences are either inadequately addressed or dismissed as unimportant by authorities. Atwood et al. (2011) conducted a study in Liberia among elementary students to determine their understanding of the awareness of transactional sex, and the students reported being victims. Many of the students' participants, notably younger girls acknowledged being assured and offered something in exchange for sex.

However, despite the literature revealing that sexual harassment is pervasive in Liberia (Atwood et al., 2011; Divon & Bøås, 2017), little is known about women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. In this hermeneutic phenomenology study, I closed this information gap. Because in-depth interviews provide a more profound understanding of the intricate dealings of research participants, lawmakers will be provided information to facilitate the design of effective anti-sexual harassment policies regarding the lived experiences of women working in the nation's public sector through their narratives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. To achieve the research goal, I used purposeful sampling employing in-depth semistructured interviews to explore and give meaning to Liberian women's lived experiences of the phenomenon.

Research Question

The pivotal question for this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was: What are the lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment among working women in Liberia's public sector?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Feinberg's (1984) harm to others principle served as my theoretical framework. The harm to others principle or harm principle, for short, was developed from Mill's work *On Liberty*. Mill, as cited in Feinberg's, argued that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (p. 14). Mill argued for self-regarding actions, those that do not caused harm to others, not to be interfered with by any lawmaking body. However, unlike Mill, Feinberg's harm principle neglected those activities that interferes with an individual freedom, notably, those that surface from "private associations, public opinion, or the 'despotism of custom . . . [and] the more subtle uses of state power, like taxation, indoctrination, licensure, and selective funding" (p. 3). Feinberg ignored these restrictions to focus on statutory injunctions imposed by punishments. He believed that

these statutory injunctions could underpin group pressure while at the same time establishing effective control of its own. He emphasized that these legal threats placed individualistic thinkers, as in the case of nonconformists, in a state of anxiety because it undermines their life's ambitions, such as their professions. Feinberg's harm principle focuses on the use of political power, as in the case of power exercised by a government by means of the criminal law. In short, it serves as a signpost in guiding lawmakers in their choices when attempting to impose punishment. Chapter 2 will expand on Feinberg's harm principle by providing a thorough analysis of his major theoretical constructs and their application to public policy.

Nature of Study

The rationale for the selection of the hermeneutic phenomenological research design that employs in-depth participant interviews was based on the study's focus. The hermeneutic phenomenological research design offered me the opportunity to explore and analyze the participants' lived experiences of their sustained employability in *quid pro quo* environments, using rich contextual analysis of interview scripts. The hermeneutic phenomenology developed by Heidegger is regarded as the modification of Husserl's descriptive phenomenology (Peoples, 2018). Heidegger developed the hermeneutic phenomenology to explore individuals' perceptions of their existence based on their experiences of being in the world (Tuohy et al., 2013). Hermeneutic in this perspective is neither the discipline of text construct nor is it a methodological basis for the *Geisteswissenschaften*, arts and humanities, rather it is the phenomenological explanation of an individual's lifeworld (see Palmer, 1969).

Heidegger saw being as an integral part of an individual's lived experience. His conceptualization of being in the world was far from the Western notion of being, which centered on unchanging ideologies (see Palmer, 1969). Heidegger theorized that this being in the world derives itself from a preconceived mindset, which is acquired from individuals' experiences of phenomena (Holroyd, 2007; Van Manen, 2014). As such, he asserted that understanding and interpretation are essential methods of an individual's being.

Heidegger (1962) believed that individuals cannot isolate themselves from being in the world since it is the place in which they function. Major concept that forms an intricate part of Heidegger's worldview is *Dasien*. This process of being in the world he called *Dasein*, being there. He believed that each individual forms an integral part of the process when viewing the world in which they live. The individual's lifeworld and their interest in understanding a phenomenon cannot be separated. The hermeneutic phenomenology as method of inquiry, for example, helps researchers gain a better understanding of themselves starting with preconceived knowledge, fore-sight or fore-conception, of their experiences of their own existence (Peoples, 2021). This fore-sight or fore-conception, which is based on existing knowledge, helps researchers develop a new insight of the phenomenon of interest via the hermeneutic circle. The *hermeneutic circle* is a narrative of how people make sense of the world (Holroyd, 2007). By utilizing the hermeneutic circle, I captured the lived experience of working women in Liberia's public sector as they become part of the essence of the participants' narratives. Through the hermeneutic circle, I got to the core of the phenomenon as I approached the issue

understudy with openness. Hence, I became enlightened as I saw quid pro quo sexual harassment in a whole different way.

Moustakas (1994) noted that the phenomenological approach allows the investigator to stay grounded in the study, notably remaining alert to the experiences of the research participants. Although the phenomenon of quid pro quo sexual harassment is widespread (Khumalo et al., 2015), researchers have not explored this phenomenon from Liberian women's perspectives, notably within the public sector in Liberia. As such, with the phenomenological approach, I developed an in-depth understanding of the event of interest and its meaning, as described by Liberian women. A phenomenological approach became a useful tool for my study as I capitalized on Liberian women's love of sharing their experiences about issues affecting them. Analyses of their encounters could be used by policymakers to improve upon the fight for gender equality in the workplace by combating one of, if not the most, challenging impediments to women's career growth: quid pro quo sexual harassment.

The phenomenon under investigation using in-depth interviewing was women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. The use of an in-depth interviewing supported the research participants' experiences of sexual harassment in Liberia's workplace. I conducted individual interviews with 13 women from Liberia's public sector working community to understand their sexual harassment experiences. By providing explanations of the phenomenon as a whole and then as components of the whole and joining it together to form a composite whole (Moustakas, 1994), I provided Liberian women the opportunity to add their voice to workplace sexual

harassment discussion in hopes of beginning to shift public perceptions. In doing so, I contributed to the scholarship.

Using Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenological approach, I collected data through multiple sources, which included purposeful sampling, an intersectional approach, in-depth interviews, reflective journaling, field notes, and audiotaping (O'Sullivan et al., 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). My selected sources were used to target women who have experienced quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. According to O'Sullivan et al. (2017), purposeful sampling brings together individuals with comprehensive understanding or experience about the phenomenon of interest, as well as those who are available and willing to participate in the research. Through purposeful sampling, I recruited working women who can effectively communicate their experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Similarly, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews from the start of the interview process (December 11, 2021) until the point of data saturation. Also, upon participants' approval, I audiotaped the interviews to obtain verbatim transcripts for thematic analyses and took note for data triangulation.

Moreover, I used hermeneutic phenomenology as a foundation for data analyses. The hermeneutic phenomenology, as strategy of inquiry, serves as a deterrent to preconceptions. As noted by Holroyd (2007), it enables researchers to control their preconceived ideologies in understanding phenomena. By utilizing this approach researchers can see how their fixated mindset impedes their knowledge of being in the world. The hermeneutic phenomenology as method of inquiry, in other words, helps

researchers gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. A more detailed explanation of the methodology will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Dasein: A German word meaning “being there.” The term is used to refer to human beings being in the world (Heidegger, 1962).

Geisteswissenschaften: Arts and humanities, which interpret expressions, such as gestures, historical actions, art works, and literature of human’s inner life (Palmer, 1969).

Harm principle: Holds that criminal law is essential to circumvent harm or injury to individuals other than the offender (Feinberg, 1984).

Hermeneutic circle: A narrative of how people make sense of the world (Heidegger, 1962).

Hermeneutic phenomenology: A method of thoughtful reflection on the basic structures of lived experience of human existence (Van Manen, 2014).

Hostile environment sexual harassment: Types of behaviors that degrade others in a way that destroys their career advancement in the workplace (Otsri, 2019).

Lived experience: Aim to explore the ordinary or prereflective realm of human existence: life as we live it (Van Manen, 2014).

Phenomenological research: Focuses on exploring individual’s lived experiences within the world in which they experience a phenomenon (Moustaskas, 1994).

Phenomenology: Letting things become manifest as what they are without imposing our categories or views on them (Van Manen, 2014).

Phenomenon: That which shows itself (Van Manen, 2014).

Quid pro quo sexual harassment: Occurs when those charged with employment opportunities promote or demotes employees based on their sexual compliance (EEOC, 2016).

Sexual harassment: Unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature (EEOC, 2016; Khumalo et al., 2015).

Assumptions

Creswell (2009) posited that researchers bring to the study's pool their philosophical worldviews. As such, it is important to make explicit parts of the research that were assumed but cannot be proven to be factual (Peoples, 2021). Thus, I assumed that women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment impede their active involvement in Liberia's public sector working community. I assumed that quid pro quo sexual harassment hinders women's ability to contribute to a nation's sustainable development. I assumed also that quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector damages platonic female-male employees' relationships that ought to exist. Further, I assumed that the prevalence of quid pro quo sexual harassment give rise to the appointments of incompetent individuals to manage the affairs of the nation.

Additionally, I assumed the research participants will be knowledgeable of the research interest and that they will understand the study's objectives and terminology. I assumed the research participants will have the ability to recall their lived experiences regarding sexual harassment and the information provided will help to fill in the information gap posed by my research question. I also assumed the study participants will

answer the research questions truthfully and without predisposition. Furthermore, I assumed the lack of empirical data regarding Liberian women's experiences of workplace quid pro quo sexual harassment hinders their sustained employability. As such, I assumed illuminating Liberian women's lived experiences of sexual harassment in the public sector would provide data needed to offer positive social change narratives for employment of women in Liberia.

These assumptions are necessary for my research because it helped me make a biased-free decision during the data analyses journey. It also helped make my phenomenon of interest easy to research and understand. Similarly, these assumptions will guide interested readers in authenticating my research findings and could serve as stimulant for anyone interested in challenging the project. Additionally, these assumptions helped Liberian women tell their stories, which in return, provided data needed to offer social change narratives for employment of women in Liberia.

Scope and Delimitations

My research scope focused on working women to explore their lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. I limited the study focus to finding working women who had been employed for at least 1 year and are victims of the phenomenon of interest. By focusing on discrete sample frame, I was able to provide an in-depth analysis to the meaning Liberian women attached to the phenomenon.

The study population was 13 working women in Liberia's public sector. My research focused on this group as they are a marginalized subset of Liberia's workforce population. By exposing these Liberian societal problems, policymakers, and well-

meaningful individuals who are seeking to minimize, if not eradicate, gender inequality can effectively develop programs that could help solve the challenges these women encounter daily. Research participants was selected using purposeful sampling, an intersectional approach that targets women who have experience of the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Through this approach, I brought together women who are knowledgeable and willing to share their stories about Liberia's workplace sexual harassment. Theories most related to my area of study that were not explore included organizational theory, inequality theory, and feminist theory.

Limitations

Some potential barriers that hindered the fluidity of my study included the issue of generalizability. Data collection was limited to Liberian women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in their public sector employment. As such, my research was not reflective of Liberia's entire working women population. Another conceivable limitation was the unwillingness of some participants agreeing to be interviewed about their personal experiences. They feared by engaging in the study, which called for the exploration of their prereflective dimensions of the phenomenon as they live it could create external problem for them, notably fear of public condemnation from family members, friends, and employers. Therefore, many potential participants felt reluctant to participate. To ease any fear or uneasiness, I provided an informed consent form, explaining that the research is done on a volunteer basis, and provided the assurance of research confidentiality.

Essential to the above limitations was the lack of internet access. Unlike other developed and some developing countries where internet access forms an integral part of the basic necessitate of life, it is not a commonly available way to network or socially connect in Liberia. Thus, most of my participants had no access to the internet, which hindered the smooth and quick process of conducting the interview. To ease such challenge, I provided prepaid cellular network cards to the participants to be able to have access and communicate with them.

Another study limitation was my participants' suspicion arising from political intent and myself, as an unknown person to them, inquiring about specific workplace sexual harassment they fear might be used against them. Politically, Liberia follows a centric approach and research of this nature is likely to be viewed with a skepticism. Some of the participants saw my research as a strategy to land a government job. Thus, they refused to fully cooperate unless they were remunerated equally using a quid pro quo approach. Hence, I reminded and reassured my potential participants via the inform consent form my intent of conducting the study.

Significance of the Study

This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry provided empirical data on women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. As an original contribution, I expanded on the scholarship by further expounding women's quid pro quo workplace sexual harassment experiences. By allowing Liberian women to come forward in describing their experiences of the phenomenon, policymakers could gain greater problem insight and understanding, both useful for positive social change.

Further, sexual harassment is not just an individual phenomenon, but also an issue that pollutes the health of the world, affecting the lives of millions of people irrespective of their locale, including their socioeconomic standings. For women, the danger presented by sexual harassment influences the overall adverse impact of gender marginalization for them as a group. For instance, when sexual harassment is used as a requirement for women to excel, their influence in the workplace diminished (McLaughlin et al., 2017). My study could serve as a roadmap to improve the ever-present push for improved equality for Liberian women.

My study's findings could help policymakers better understand the adverse implications of quid pro quo workplace sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector leading them to find practical solutions from newly reported perspectives. Additionally, local advocacy groups could benefit as they can use my empirical data collection and theoretical conclusions as a signpost to fuel social change by pressuring government officials to combat this phenomenon.

My research is essential to the Liberian people as it shine a light on an issue practically overlooked in the country (Medie, 2013). Many viewed sexual harassment as an individual's problem, thereby strengthening the culture of silence. However, Khumalo et al. (2015) offered that sexual harassment causes harm not only to its victims but also harm women as a group and society, in general. With Khumalo et al.'s claim and my study's key findings, Liberians can be further informed on the adverse impacts of sexual harassment on women as a group, and the society, encouraging a push for gender equality in Liberia. Similarly, by gaining insights on Liberian women's lived experiences of this

phenomenon the Liberia government could work toward program development that focuses on women, in general, and female jobseekers who are experiencing sexual harassment not only in the workplace, but also throughout the nation.

Summary

Sexual harassment in employment settings is not a new phenomenon. It is a continue problem impacting the lives of women from around the world (Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017). Contrary to women recognized as equal to men, they are still impacted by episodes of sexual harassment at their jobs (Anita et al., 2020; Aycock et al., 2019). Women are consistently harassed for sex-related activities more than they are provided with equal employment opportunities. In developing nations, like Liberia, sexual harassment problem is widespread. Many women and girls are being sexually harassed daily. These harassment incidences, in return, impact their livelihood, such as their job market prospect.

In Chapter 1, I provided an in-depth analysis of the background, problem statement, the study's purpose, research question, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the study's significance. Chapter 2 will contain an introduction, literature search strategy, the theoretical framework, the literature review related to key variables of the phenomenon of interest, and summary with a transition into Chapter 3.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Every single day somewhere, somehow, women are being confronted with sexual harassment. Researchers revealed that women continue to be targets of unwelcomed sexual advances in the workplace (Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017). Women's job market prospects are invariably dependent upon their willingness to succumb to their future employer's sexual demands. Such morally inexplicable conduct has only resulted in employers viewing women as sexual objects rather than being credited for their objective qualifications and experiences. Employers' inability to recognize women as a contributing player to the sustainable development of a nation hinders their sustained employability, which in return, setbacks their ultimate life goals.

This problem is acute in developing nations. In Liberia, for instance, violence against women is one of the most widespread issues (Medie, 2013). Many young women and girls experienced sexual harassment daily (Divon & Bøås, 2017). However, the corrupt judicial system, where judges accept bribes from the accused to have the court rule in their favor, has made it challenging for victims to report sexual harassment complaints. Divon and Bøås (2017) added that Liberians' proclivity towards traditional justice practices over current international laws when addressing disputes has also contributed to the pervasiveness of the problem. Within Liberia's traditional system, women occupy a subordinate role in society. They are to support their male counterparts, which makes their active participation in a dispute irrelevant. Apart from Liberia's fragile legal system, the culture of silence exacerbates the problem. Many individuals viewed

women's grievances as a way of getting back at the alleged harassers for not providing them with job opportunities granted to their male counterparts. As a result, they do not believe these women's stories. This societal indifference has exposed women to numerous health problems. Therefore, in this hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, I explored women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector employment settings.

Sexual harassment in the workplace has hindered women's career prospects and advancement. In developing nations, like Liberia, victims, mostly women, have been forced to exclude themselves from work because of the harmful effects of the harassment (Khumalo et al., 2015). Their nonappearance at work has resulted in penalties, all of which reinforce their job market inferiority. McLaughlin et al. (2017) added that women not having a steady job exposes them to financial hardship. As a result, they become forced to seek employment that could help ease their financial burden. Unfortunately, this cycle often begins again when seeking and obtaining new employment. Eventually, women accept sexual harassment as a workplace condition, which impact their future career prospects and financial independence.

The major sections discussed in this chapter included the literature search strategy, Feinberg's harm to other principle, which is the theoretical foundation of this research, the literature review related to key concepts and summary and conclusions of the main themes addressed in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

I began the literature review by searching Walden's databases: Academic Search Complete, Political Science Complete, Education Source, ProQuest Dissertations, and Theses Global, SAGE Journals, SocINDEX with Full Text, Thoreau Multi-database for literature on women's experiences of sexual harassment. Key search words and phrases used to collect publications pertinent to my research included *quid pro quo sexual harassment at work, sexual harassment in the workplace, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, gender-based violence, violence against women, transactional sex, sexual harassment in Africa, sexual harassment in West Africa, sexual harassment in Liberia*. These key words and phrases were further expanded by using a thesaurus to include *power theory, self-blaming behavior, self-esteem, sexual harassment, quid pro quo sexual harassment, sexual harassment policy, unwelcome advances, culture perceptions, exploitation, unprofessional behavior, offensive sexual advance, intimidation, sexual coercion, victimization, unwanted sexual advances, evocative comments, something in return, and this for that*. I also specified these keywords by the use of a Boolean search to narrow my selection.

Boolean method for searching databases narrows a search by linking keywords with conjunctions such as AND, and OR (Walden, 2010). For example, keywords search using a Boolean method yielded extensive and relevant content for study consideration. To narrow this wide field of relevant literature I focused on peer-review research specific to women's experiences of sexual harassment published between 2016 and 2021.

Theoretical Foundation

Feinberg's (1984) harm to others principle served as my theoretical framework to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. The harm to others principle or harm principle, for short, was developed from Mill's work: *On Liberty*. Mill, as cited in Feinberg, argued that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (p. 14). Mill argued for self-regarding actions not to be interfered with by any lawmaking body. These self-regarding actions are those that do not cause harm to others. However, Feinberg's harm principle neglected those activities that interfere with an individual's freedom, notably, those that surface from "private associations, public opinion, or the 'despotism of custom . . . [and] the more subtle uses of state power, like taxation, indoctrination, licensure, and selective funding'" (p. 3). Feinberg ignored these restrictions to focus on statutory injunctions imposed by punishments. He asserted that these statutory injunctions underpin group pressure and established effective control of its own. He emphasized that these legal threats placed individualistic thinkers, as in the case of nonconformists, in a state of anxiety because it undermines their life's ambitions, such as their professions. Feinberg focused on using political power, as in power exercised by a government employing criminal law. He proposed several conjectures to an ideal lawmaking body within a civilized democracy in establishing the legality of a crime.

The Concept of Moral Legitimacy

Feinberg (1984) offered that the underlying assumption of the moral legitimacy claim is that there should and ought to be a moral justification for one's action towards another. According to Feinberg, that moral threshold should be in the benefits of those affected by the act. He argued that nobody has a right to infringe on another's rights except if those acted upon are accountable to the actor. Either the actor is their lender or master. He made explicit his argument by applying moral legitimacy to an individual's everyday life. He argues, for example, that an individual cannot infringe on the rights of another without providing good reasoning for doing so. He went on to say if they do not offer a valid explanation for their infringement but insist on encroaching on the individual's rights, their intrusion, whatever it may be, on the victim's freedom is illegal and morally unlawful.

A classic example of conduct that many condemned to be morally wrong is the issuing of a *State of Emergency and Lockdown* by President George Weah on April 8, 2020 to reduce the spread of the novel SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19) virus. In a joint statement issued by some of the nation's international partners, Oxfam, Medica Liberia, Plan International, Action Aid, Tearfund, International Rescue Committee, and Kvinna till Kvinna, such policies were morally wrong as these policies harm marginalized populations, notably women and girls (AllAfrica.com, 2020). Liberia's international partners argued that the lockdown, which was poorly planned, compelled women and girls to remain homebound and put them at risk of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). These lock policies also reduce their chances to escape from their harassers,

often persons living in the home. Liberia's international partners also reported that the stay-at-home order, which restricts traveling and selling, resulted in financial hardship for women whose only means of generating income is to sell in the market and on the streets. Hence, with limited or no source of income, many women will be compelled to engage in prostitution as a means of generating income to support themselves and their families.

The Idea of a Liberty-limiting Principle

Feinberg (1984) theorized that a liberty-limiting principle becomes a morally substantial justification for imposing punishments against an offender, even if there exist other explanations that may overshadow it. Feinberg noted that a liberty-limiting theory offers a rationale in understanding acts that can make individuals subjected to legal punishment. These acts include those an individual may be allowed to do or not allow to do. He argued that liberty, as understood in this principle, is not the loss of any restriction that inhibits a person from doing something; instead, it is the absence of those restrictions imposed by legal rules. As such, scholars endorsed a kind of supposition supporting liberty. They argued that lawmakers, in a civilized democracy, when faced with a decision to either impose a legal duty on residents or leave them alone to make their own decisions, they should choose the latter choice (Mills as cited in Feinberg, 1984).

This presumptive endorsement is known as the presumptive case for liberty, which is essential for an individual's flourishing. Feinberg noted that when individuals are free to make choices, there is a possibility that they may end up being profoundly goal driven. He argued that individuals at liberty have the upper chance of having the

flexibility to express themselves adequately without fear, resulting in them being productive individuals in society.

The Way Acts Harms Interests

Feinberg (1984) theorized that acts that harm others are those that setback, defeat, thwart, and impede their interests. These terms provide a clear picture of how an individual's interests are undesirably affected by events. Feinberg posited that:

. . . To set back an interest is to reverse its course, turn it away, put it back toward the point from which it started. In terms of its associated goals, it is to reverse its progress s, to put it to utter rout, to conclusively and irrevocably set it back by destroying the conditions that are necessary for its advancement or fulfillment . . . to thwart (or block or frustrate) an interest is to stop its progress without necessarily putting it in reverse; to successfully oppose it, and prevent it, at least for the time being, from making an advancement or improvement. To impede an interest is to slow its advancement without necessarily stopping or reversing it, to hinder or delay. (p. 53)

To this end, individuals harm others “by invading, and thereby thwarting or setting back [their] interest (Feinberg, 1984, p. 34). Harm, in this sense is produced when an individual set back the interest of another. Feinberg (1984) further contended that:

A harms B when 1) A acts 2) in a manner which is defective or faulty in respect to the risks it creates to B, that is, with the intention of producing the consequences for B that follow, or similarly adverse ones, or with negligence or recklessness in respect to those consequences; and 3) A's acting in that manner is

morally indefensible, that is, neither excusable nor justifiable; and 4) A's action is the cause of a setback to B's interests, which is also 5) a violation of B's right.

(pp. 105-106)

As specified in the harm principle, the first requirement for A to harm B, is for A to participate in an activity. Employers and their associates can be regarded as A, as these are individuals who are participating in the activities of sexual favor solicitation in exchange for jobs. These actions result in harming women as a group. Feinberg's (1984) second requirement has to do with defect. In the context of workplace sexual harassment, employers' and their associates' mannerisms are flawed concerning the risks these mannerisms create for women since workplace quid pro quo sexual harassment intrudes on women's sustained employability. In this view, then, I argue that such conduct satisfies the second requirement of Feinberg's harm principle because offenders of quid pro quo sexual harassment have either purposely or through negligence produced consequences that harm women in the workplace.

Feinberg's (1984) third requirement needed in justifying that A harms B is for A's conduct to be morally inexcusable. Employers' and their associates' decision to demand that women offer their bodies as collateral in exchange for employment-related benefits, such as jobs, promotions, or a pay raise is morally unjustifiable as it interferes with women's liberty. The fourth requirement, in which A's action harm B, is when A's conduct sets back B's interest. When working women and those women seeking to enter the workforce are sexually harassed by employers and their associates, it results in exposing them to numerous social problems, such as depression, anxiety, and the

inability to afford birth control, potentially leading to unwanted pregnancies. These social problems, in return, become a roadblock to women achieving their future goals, whatever those goals may be. Feinberg theorized that the final requirement that must be met for A's action to be considered harm is for such conduct to be a violation of B's right. Quid pro quo sexual harassment is a violation of women's rights as it deprives them of the equal possibility to pursue careers (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Researchers have not applied Feinberg's (1984) harm principle within the framework of hermeneutic phenomenology inquiry to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector employment setting. However, Hancock (2007) used Feinberg's harm principle to argue that toxic pollution creates harm. According to Hancock, the death rates resulting from toxic pollutants are greater than those resulting from terrorist incidents each year. He explained that chemicals from toxic pollution might result in cancers or heart and lung diseases and other health complications. Hancock argued that human beings and organizations act alone or in groups producing toxic pollutants released into the environment exposing others to its harmful effects. He contended that these individuals' or institutions' decisions are faulty because the toxin harms human physiology, as it damages its victims' physical body. He added that the perpetrators' actions are morally inexcusable because these actions set back the victims' interests. Their actions also violate the most fundamental right, the right to life, because the toxin pollution can lead to death. Hancock concluded that toxic pollution satisfied Feinberg's criteria to establish harm because its effects on people are much worse than its economic impacts.

Baker (1994) used the harm principle to argue the criminalization of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. Baker posited that sexual harassment is no longer a problem of the victim but rather that of collective concern, notably for women and society. She argued that quid pro quo sexual harassment denied women an opportunity to achieve their more meaningful goals, whether in the proceeding of a career or improving their socioeconomic status. She also argued that sexual harassment harms the institution from where it occurred. When supervisors, for example, used their positions to solicit sexual favors, notably from their female employees, the institution from which this happens undoubtedly suffers. Such morally indefensible conduct reduced employees' confidence and it likely impacts their job performance.

Employees being unable to effectively carry out their jobs' responsibilities could impact the institution's productivity. As such, she argued for the criminalization of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. As noted by Baker the criminalization of quid pro quo sexual harassment would boost victims' confidence in reporting sexual harassment threats as soon as possible rather than waiting to suffer from the harassment's impact before reporting it. It gives victims, mostly women, the legal right to be free from harassment episodes in the workplace.

Baker (1994) theorized that viewing quid pro quo sexual harassment as a crime strengthened women's efforts to combat employers' unwanted sexual advances. Baker noted that women might be able to take legal action against the harassers before they suffer punishment for their unwillingness to succumb to these unwanted sexual advances. She added that legal authorities could take on the burden of bringing the perpetrators to

justice, which, in return, may free victims from any financial struggles that may arise when they were to pursue the case on their own. This process can also help the victims avoid their harassers as these individuals are almost always influential people in society. Baker concluded that criminalizing quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment may free individuals and the community from where it occurred from the morally inexplicable conduct of the offender's use of power.

Other researchers utilized the harm principle extensively in various arguments. Plessis (2016) used the harm principle to establish its legality, notably in understanding whether it is a legitimate source in restricting parents from blocking their kids from acquiring an education that goes against their religious beliefs. Plessis argued that religious freedom is no moral ground for harmful practices. Neither is it acceptable for religious individuals to block their loved ones from engaging in activities that could enhance their future endeavors. For example, he argued that parents should not prevent their children from acquiring education, increasing their future development simply because such education goes against their religious beliefs. By doing so, the parents limit the child's educational progress, which becomes an encroachment on the child's autonomy. He added that when parents allowed their children to explore different academic opportunities, children are more likely to decide their future and be autonomous and highly functioning individuals in the environment.

Feinberg (1984) argued that autonomy serves as a crucial pedagogical goal because it aligns with the individual's will and helps them become more productive in society. Plessis (2016) confirmed that the harm principle is useful in limiting parents'

action because, by doing so, children can gain an insight into the world, which ultimately helps critical thinking skills development. A failure to do so may harm the children.

Feinberg's (1984) harm principle is useful for my study because it shows that employers' and their associates' decision to demand sexual favors from women in exchange for a job, a promotion, or adequate training is an abuse of their office. It also shows their action distorts women's persona and has damaging effects on women as a group. Employers' and their associates' behaviors set back women's interests, whether in the proceeding of a career or improving their socioeconomic status.

Similarly, Feinberg's (1984) harm principle is essential for my study because it illustrates that the public cry for gender equality or those directed towards combating sexual harassment at work is not a *political loss* for any government. As humans, if we did not grieve for the transition from childhood to adulthood, why should we, then, mourn for the pursuit of equal treatment for women as a group in society? By exploring this phenomenon of workplace sexual harassment through the lens of the harm principle, those deeply entrenched in their disregard for women's equality and those in denial of the prevalence of sexual harassment in Liberia's workplace may be willing to reconsider their position. Recognizing and improving policy design to combat sexual harassment in Liberia's working environment could open the door for more young women to express themselves without fear of retaliation, thus improving their employment opportunities and the employment opportunities for women in general.

In the context of Feinberg's (1984) harm principle, as specified by the liberty-limiting theory, employers' decision to deny women job opportunities because of their

unwillingness to succumb to their sexual advances is not a justifiable reason against the possible case for liberty. There is nowhere in this our civilized society where it is legal or specifies in an institution's policy manual that unwanted sexual advances at work are a condition for women's job opportunities, such as getting a job, promotion, or a pay raise. Therefore, employers' decision to do so is unlawful and morally wrong as these decisions intrude on women's sustained employability. Khumalo et al. (2015) posited that when working women and women seeking to enter the workforce, for example, are pressured to offer their bodies as collateral in exchange for jobs, they may lack the opportunity they need to improve their career development. In combination with a similar study, these findings indicate that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment reinforces women's inferiority at work (Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

The below sections addressed the literature review related to key concepts of the study.

Sexual Harassment

Section 2.8 (b) of the Decent Work Act adapted on June 25, 2015 in Liberia defined sexual harassment as:

- i) sexual conduct which is unwelcome, unreasonable, or offensive to the recipient, and which occurs in circumstances where a person's rejection of, or submission to, such conduct is used explicitly or implicitly as a basis for a decision which affects that person's job; or

ii) sexual conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the person that is subject to that conduct.

Sexual conduct under this law means the conduct of a sexual nature, whether physical, verbal, or non-verbal, or behavior predicated on sex that impacts individuals' integrity. The Liberian definition of sexual harassment involves behaviors that are harmful to the victims. Liberia's interpretation of sexual harassment is akin to that of the EEOC, an agency set up for enforcing laws that prohibits discriminate against employees and those jobseekers because of their identity, namely, race, color, sex, religion, or political affiliation. For example, like the EEOC, the Decent Work Act considered behavior harassment when such conduct results in an individual's dismissal from their job or when such behavior creates a hostile working environment for the victim (Republic of Liberia, 2015).

The EEOC (2016) under Title VII of the civil rights acts defined sexual harassment as unwanted sexual advances and demands for sexual favors. The EEOC considered sexual harassment behaviors a condition for an individual's, mostly, women's job opportunities. Under the EEOC, behaviors are regarded as sexual harassment when such action creates an unconducive working environment for an individual, mostly women, or that such conduct impedes their workplace's job performance.

The EEOC's (2016) definition focused on different forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, such as quid pro quo sexual harassment and hostile work sexual harassment. Quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment involves the demands for sexual favors in exchange for employment-related benefits. Quid pro quo sexual

harassment occurs when employers promote or demote employees based on their sexual compliance. It is centered on the victims benefiting from their willingness to succumb to the harassers' sexual advances. These benefits may include getting a job, a promotion, a pay raise, or desirable work assignment and training. A plausible example of this kind of behavior would be when employers based their hiring or promotion decisions of women on their willingness or unwillingness to give in to their sexual advances (Aycock et al., 2019).

Hostile environment sexual harassment includes types of behaviors that degrade others in a way that destroys their career advancement (Otsri, 2020). Hostile sexual harassment is gender sexual harassment (e.g., dirty joking, degrading, sexual teasing) and unwelcome sexual advances and attention. The legal connotation of a hostile environment is an environment that infringes on employees' job performance (Otsri, 2020). To establish a prima facie episode of a hostile environment sexual harassment, an employee must demonstrate that (a) she was subject to unwelcome sexual advances, (b) she is a member of a protected group, (c) the harassment was due to her affiliation in a specific group, (d) the harassment was a precondition of the job, and (e) the employer failed to take corrective action against the offender(s). An example of hostile sexual harassment is when an employee makes a sexual joke directed toward another employee or in their presence, thus making them uncomfortable.

Reese and Lindenberg (1999) showed that many individuals regard extreme staring, touching, and sexual nature jokes as sexual harassment and noted a consensus among women and men in defining what constitutes sexual harassment. They found an

agreement between both sexes when classifying behaviors, such as comments made by other men about women's dress codes or those directed towards their bodies, as sexual harassment. The acceptance among women and men regarding sexual harassment definitions might increase over time. One factor for such change could be increasing public awareness of sexual harassment by many local and international events such as the #MeToo movement. These researchers' findings suggest that public awareness of the severity of sexual harassment on the victims, mostly women, is likely to encourage employers to invest in sexual harassment training, which is likely to strengthen employees' perceptions of the issue.

In this same study, Reese and Lindenberg (1999) found a considerable difference in older and younger women's sexual harassment perceptions and noted that older women were more likely than younger women to consider improper behaviors, like touching and constant requests for dates, as sexual harassment. They perceived these behaviors as unacceptable and unprofessional and were less tolerant of the same.

Contrary to Reese and Lindenberg's (1999) research, Fineran (2002) found substantial differences in gender regarding sexual harassment among high school students in Massachusetts and these student's understanding of their sexual harassment experiences. Of the participants interviewed, one-third of the younger women reported being sexually harassed and were more likely to consider inappropriate behaviors, like name-calling, as sexual harassment. Younger women acknowledged they were intimidated by their sexual harassment experiences and were less tolerant of these behaviors.

After examining whether younger individuals' values and perceptions of sexual harassment influenced those experiences they attached to their work and the social support they received from their parents, Kriegh (2019) found that individual's value regarding their work influenced their perceptions of sexual harassment. Their findings showed that young adults who viewed their jobs as the source of their survival were less likely to perceive behaviors as sexual harassment than those who do not see their jobs as central to their livelihood. As a result, they were more likely to cope with the harassment at work because, by doing so, they can take care of their financial responsibilities, such as paying their bills and other expenses.

Kriegh (2019) noted that young individuals who viewed their work as central to their survival had more trust in their employers' decision-making apparatus to the extent, they may avoid reporting sexually harassing conduct if their employers were to punish those who report these incidences. Kriegh added that young adults who do not view their work as central to their livelihood had less trust in their employers and were more likely to report sexually harassing behaviors or quit the job regardless if the employer punished others for reporting. Kriegh found also that parental social support played an essential role in your young adult views of sexual harassment, notably gender harassment in the context of sexist and sexual malevolence.

Kriegh's (2019) research supported other research underlying the challenges in defining sexual harassment (Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Harnois & Bastos, 2018). Estrada and Berggren (2009) found that individuals' perceptions of sexual harassment rest on personal and observational experiences. They elucidated that how individuals defined

sexual harassment may depend on the harassment effects on them or the nature of the harassment. For instance, past sexual harassment victims are more likely to consider behaviors that led to harassment as sexual harassment when compared to those without such experience. As a result, they may feel threatened by these behaviors if it occurs. They may also feel upset and less considerate of these behaviors, which made them more likely to report these behaviors.

Harnois and Bastos (2018) conducted a study on discrimination, harassment, and inequalities in the health industry and found that health conditions influenced women's perceptions of sexual harassment. Their results indicated that women who suffered an enormous amount of emotional stress from a specific type of sexually harassing behavior might perceive the resurgence of these behaviors as sexual harassment. Harnois and Bastos found also that victim's sexual harassment experiences made them insensitive to inappropriate behaviors displayed by others. As a result, they become less considerate of these sexually harassing conducts than those who had not experienced it. In contrast, several researchers argued that there is no significant link between individuals' perceptions of sexual harassment and their experiences of the harassment (see Gowan & Zimmerman, 1996).

Additionally, McCabe and Hardman (2005) investigated individuals' attitudes towards and perceptions of sexual harassment in employment settings and found significant differences. McCabe and Hardman found that gender stereotypes, employees' knowledge of the organization's sexual harassment policies, and cultural beliefs determine the acceptability and unacceptability of sexual harassment. They noted that in

a male-working environment, where men received rewards for their sexual prowess, their somehow emphatic and pestering attitudes towards women may be viewed as usual rather than taken as sexual harassment. These men may engage in this conduct rigorously as a means of being rewarded for their sex appeal, which could enhance their network of support. McCabe and Hardman's research supports past studies that emphasized the role gender stereotypes played in shaping people's views regarding sexual harassment (see Mazer & Percival, 1989). These findings suggest that gender role stereotypes are a driving factor in individuals' sexual harassment perceptions. For example, individuals who welcomed such behavior were more considerate of sexual harassment than those who did not welcome such behavior.

Others have studied the effects of sex differences in conceptualizing sexual harassment. Shechory-Bitton and Shaul (2013) found that women were less likely to endure sexual harassment episodes, regardless of the victims' sex. For example, they were more likely to perceive most behaviors, such as the constant request for dates, and name-calling, such as *babe*, *sweetheart*, as sexual harassment signals. Shechory-Bitton and Shaul also found that women base their moderate attitudes towards sexual harassment episodes on their low tolerance level, making them more likely to view inappropriate behaviors by men as sexual harassment.

Furthermore, irrespective of women's victimization by sexual harassment, attitudes towards and perceptions of sexual harassment lies in the explainer's hands. Researchers found that women in a male-dominated work environment were less likely to regard ambiguous behaviors as sexual harassment when compared to other women in a

gender-inclusive work environment (Harris et al., 2018; Kara & Toygar, 2019). For example, women in a male-dominated working environment interpreted naughty jokes and other behaviors regarded as inappropriate as part of the work culture. As such, they do not consider these behaviors as sexual harassment. These women, in a predominantly male job environment, might consider naughty jokes to play an integral part in creating a stress-free working environment. Several other researchers posited that the contrast regarding women's perceptions of sexual harassment rest on the type of behaviors shown and the condition in which it occurs (Kara & Toygar, 2019; see Rotundo et al., 2001; Sakalli-Ugurlu et al., 2010). Accordingly, they illustrated that no single understanding of sexual harassment serves as a signpost in finding practical solutions in addressing sexual harassment.

Using a snowballing sampling, Khumalo et al. (2015) selected eight single black women with college degrees to explore their sexual harassment perceptions in the workplace in Johannesburg, South Africa. Khumalo et al. showed that sexual harassment was perceived differently among these women. Khumalo et al. noted that some of the women viewed unwelcomed conduct, such as unwanted touching, spoken and non-spoken types of sexual harassment, and quid pro quo sexual harassment as sexual harassment and considered these sexually harassing behaviors as invasive uncomfortable to experience. Others of the women interviewed perceived sexual harassment from men as a form of embarrassment because they believed defamatory comments about a woman's body, such as her breasts, are likely to embarrass her. These women also concurred that gift-giving and awards in exchange for sex are sexual harassment forms

and they viewed sexual harassment as a way of having favorable treatment at employees' expense. This kind of sexual transaction is evident in many employment settings where those in a subordinate position engaged in sexual harassment as a means of gaining control within the organization, especially among managers. However, despite this dissimilarity, Khumalo et al. (2015) found that participants recognized sexual harassment as a violation of human rights, notably, women's rights. Khumalo et al. also suggested that employers using their office for sexual gains deprives women of the freedom to choose their sexual partner.

McLaughlin et al. (2012) and Popovich and Warren (2010) discovered that power shaped individuals' perceptions of sexual harassment. According to McLaughlin et al. (2012), offenders' use of their power presents them with the opportunity to achieve their sexual objectives. By taking such a route, they can subtly coerce their victims into succumbing to their sexual demands while avoiding public criticism. As such, victims are caught up in a dilemma to either agree to their sexual advances to preserve their jobs or resist and run the risk of losing their job or other job opportunities, like promotions and pay raises. McLaughlin et al. found that victims, mostly women, run the risk of losing job opportunities because of their unwillingness to succumb to employers' and their associates' sexual advances. This is due in part because power is an integral part of the relationships between individuals within social settings (Popovich & Warren, 2010). Popovich and Warren noted that power determined the outcome of most social exchange. A plausible explanation is the demands of sexual favors in exchange for jobs by bosses

and sometimes their associates, especially in emerging democracies, such as Liberia, which is regarded as sexual harassment by victims.

Other researchers found that employers' approach in handling episodes of sexual harassment shaped attitudes and perceptions toward sexual harassment (Breant, 2017). Breant (2017) underscored that manager handling of sexual harassment complaints at work might influence employees' perceptions of sexual harassment. For instance, if employers viewed the constant request for dates as having no harmful effects on the one being asked, then, these behaviors are likely to be viewed as normal, rather as sexual harassment. As such, these sexual interactions may continue to exist and are likely to affect their targets', notably women's job performance. To this end, it is prudent for employers to formulate policy to address unwelcome sexual advances at work to stop offenders from violating the rights of their potential victims.

Researchers have also examined the impact religion and culture plays in the conceptualization of sexual harassment (Ali, 2013; 2015; Merkin, 2008; Toker & Sumer, 2010). For example, Toker and Sumer (2010) purported that affectionate term, like *sweetheart*, *darling*, or those inquiries that showed interest in an individual's personal life are received differently between western women, notably those of Christian and Islamic faiths. They found that Christian women considered these remarks normal while traditional Muslim women may see it as sexual harassment.

In the same study, Toker and Sumer (2010) found that unlike Western Christian women, conservative Muslim women may find the prohibited use of niqab or hijab while at work as an incentive for sexual harassment; hence, they may find these experiences

threatening and socially unhealthy. These findings indicate that conservative Muslim women have different views of what constitutes sexual harassment when compared to less conservative Western women who are non-Muslim. It showed that individuals' interpretations of what constitutes good behaviors from improper behaviors is undoubtedly a function of their religious belief. The next section discusses the response to the problem of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Response to Problem of Sexual Harassment in Employment

As the push for women's inclusion in society deepens, so too is the issue of sexual harassment at work. Researchers have shown that sexual harassment is on the rise in the workplace (Halouani et al., 2019; see McDonald, 2012). Halouani et al. (2019) examined women physicians' awareness of sexual harassment in the workplace, and their findings showed that sexual harassment is prevalent in healthcare. Most of the women interviewed reported that they experienced sexual harassment. As the victims recalled, these incidents were caused by co-workers, with a host of them pointing the fingers at supervisors. They stated that most of their experiences came from the supervisor's sexual advances. These women explained that due to the enormous authority bestowed upon supervisors, they used it as an opportunity to solicit sex, as they are aware of the power they have to positively or negatively shape an employee job's future.

More recently, Lindquist and McKay (2018) studied 340 women from various professions in understanding their experiences of sexual harassment. Lindquist and McKay found that most of the women interviewed reported that they experienced numerous forms of sexual harassment on the job. They acknowledged being victims of

unwelcome sexual advances and sexual assault. They also acknowledged that their employers have asked them to perform other sexual acts. After interviewing medical professionals in Saudi Arabia in exploring the prevalence of sexual harassment, Algerian et al. (2017) found that sexual harassment is a widespread problem. One-third of the respondents' reported that they were victims of sexual harassment, and they excused their supervisors of being the harassers. Algerian's findings also showed that single women were harassed more often when compared to married women. One possible explanation for the high rate of harassment among single women could be because single women are mostly perceived in a negative way. They are often viewed as individuals who would do almost anything to improve their socioeconomic status or gain fame, which they associate with what it means to be successful. As a result, many individuals are using their economic power to exploit single women's vulnerability.

Algerian et al. (2017) noted also that age played an essential role in determining sexual harassment victims. Their findings showed that younger women, notably those in the early 20s, were targets of sexual harassment when compared to other age group. Algerian et al. concluded that cultural practices and the lack of transparency within Saudi Arabia are the results of the prevalence of sexual harassment among the medical professionals. These findings, in combination with other studies, highlights the need to hold employers accountable for the inappropriate conducts of managers or supervisors (Halouani et al., 2019; Lindquist & McKay, 2018).

Moylan and Wood (2016) conducted a study among students obtaining a degree in social work to examine their sexual harassment experiences. Those who participated

reported that they experienced various forms of sexual harassment during their academic journey. These students explained that their experiences of sexual harassment occurred during their field training. They stated that their perpetrators were mostly their clients, coworkers, and supervisors. The participants explained that their harassers capitalized on their inexperience and desperation to excel during their field placement. Moylan and Wood also found that among those sexually harassed, Latino women were the most victimized.

Researchers have also reported that younger women experienced sexual harassment at work (Fineran, 2002; Strauss & Espeland, 1992). Fineran (2002) found that younger women reported being sexually harassed on the job because of their age. They noted that their supervisors and co-workers harassed them. Fineran's research supports the claim made by the EEOC (2016) regarding younger women being the subjects of workplace sexual harassment. Conversely, Murthy (2013) found the opposite to be true in that supervisors accounted for the lowest rate of sexual harassment cases in the studied work settings. For example, Murthy's participants rejected the claim that supervisors were the leading perpetrators of sexual harassment, and they named their co-workers as the master minds of most sexual harassment experiences. Because of the level of cohesiveness expected to exist among employees, it is easy for some employees to take advantage of this to harass their co-workers, mostly women. The differing views in the scholarship, notably in recognizing the perpetrators, become apparent that the problem is not a one size fit all type of phenomenon. Instead, it shows that the issue requires a global

approach, where everyone's or group's accounts of sexual harassment received serious attention.

Few researchers have studied sexual harassment in the hospitality industry. Hejase (2015) examined sexual harassment in Lebanon and found it to be widespread toward women in the hospitality industry. These incidences range from unwelcoming advances, inappropriate touching, forceful kissing, and other acts of a sexual nature. However, these incidences were typically not reported. Hejase asserted that victims chose to remain silent as the issue is a taboo in the Lebanese culture and such reporting often led to workplace stigmatization for these women. As such, incidents and reporting of sexual harassment incidents are often brushed aside and labelled as unimportant.

This problem is severe in developing nations where victims of sexual harassment is thwarted from obtaining justice. In Liberia, for instance, researchers showed that sexual harassment is one of the most prevalent issues in the nation (Atwood et al., 2011; Divon, & Bøås, 2017; Medie, 2013). Atwood et al. conducted a study among elementary students ages 14-17 from four schools in Monrovia, Liberia, to determine their understanding of the awareness of transactional sex and whether they have engaged in such activities. Regarding the reporting experiences of sexual harassment, young girls reported engaging in transactional sex. Among the female participants, some acknowledged only being offer something in exchange for sex. Others reported being assured something in exchange for sex and that they had provided someone something in exchange for sex. The third group of the female participants revealed only giving something to another person in return for sex. The findings, in other words, aligned with

other studies in highlighting the prevalence of sexual harassment in Liberia (Medie, 2013).

Medie (2013) postulated that women and girls are at higher risk of sexual harassment in the nation. Medie explained that women vulnerability to episodes of sexual harassment could be traced to the socioeconomic hardships in Liberia, where they are compelled to find other ways to support themselves and their families. As such, those with the financial capabilities are taking advantage of these women's circumstances to sexually harass them. Other researchers associated women's vulnerability to the government's unwillingness to enact policies that effectively address sexual harassment (Divon & Bøås, 2017). Contrary to the government, being a signatory to many laws to combat issues impacting the lives of women, such as sexual harassment, these crimes are often dismissed or construed as strategies by the oppositions (e.g., individuals and groups who are not members of the ruling party) to taint the so-called good image of the government. Hence, law enforcement officers withdraw sexual harassment cases from the police station and sometimes force the hands of the victims to accept settlements without bringing the perpetrators to justice (Medie, 2013). As a result, victims are left with no other choice but to prematurely withdraw their complaints because those who summoned the courage to report these incidents, are either blamed for the attacks, or their accusations are often met with skepticism and public ridicule. Such indifference makes it challenging for anti-sexual harassment policies to have any significant impact on the lives of women in Liberia (Divon & Bøås, 2017; Medie, 2013). Yet, the research conducted in Liberia have focus on sexual harassment in schools (Atwood et al., 2011), with no

research addressing sexual harassment in the workplace. The next section provides an in-depth understanding of women's dilemmas in reporting sexual harassment.

Women's Failure of Reporting Sexual Harassment in Employment

Since those in positions of authority mostly perpetrate sexual harassment, reporting its occurrences at work proves challenging for the victims. Findings by other researchers illuminated that victims lack of awareness encumbers them from reporting their experiences (Cassino & Besen, 2019). They may regard sharing their experiences as a petrifying endeavor because the harassers often used their influence to silence them. For example, the harassers could ensure the victims' complaints received no public attention whatsoever. In return, this approach could result in the victims being targets of unfair practices at work (Khumalo et al., 2015). Khumalo et al. asserted that victims fear that they could lose their jobs or intimate partner relationship by coming forward. Their partners may blame them for the harassment, as they might think the victims were flirting with the harassers.

Victims' socioeconomic standings, notably their financial struggles may deter them from reporting their experiences. The fear of the negative ramifications that could surface regarding sexual harassment complaints make reporting least of their concerns. McLaughlin et al. (2017) found that victim choose to remain silent, fearing they could lose their jobs if they do otherwise. Hence, victims ignored the pain they feel for the sake of enjoying the benefits of having a job, then to come forward and drained in poverty. These benefits include paying bills, providing for their family, and preserving their respect in their communities. Similarly, the culture of silence that normalized sexual

harassment may prevent victims from reporting sexual harassment complaints (Mcewen et al., 2021). They perceived sharing their experience may lead to public criticism and future harassment (Ford et al., 2021; Namaganda et al., 2021). Sexually harassed women fear they might be violently targeted. Others fears the public might not believe their stories, resulting into public ridicule (Foster & Fullagar, 2018). As a result, they might go about their daily activity while pretending all is normal. These findings highlights that societal muteness and the sexually harassed women socioeconomic powerlessness encumbers them from reporting sexual harassment cases.

Nielsen et al. (2017) conducted a study in Denmark among essential workers in the health industry, exploring their experiences and how they cope with sexual harassment. Nielsen et al. found that essential workers experienced numerous forms of sexual harassment at work. The interviewees reported that some of their patients have touched their breasts and caressed their arms during care encounters. Others reported that they have been called by the “B* word.” Nielsen et al. found also that most of the harassment took place when the healthcare workers were providing care to patients with mental impairment. Despite the prevalence of this issue, Nielsen et al. found that victims struggled in reporting incidences of sexual harassment at work. They reported that sexual harassment cases often received mixed reactions because most harassers are individuals with mental impairment, making the gravity of the issue being ignored or not taking seriously. Hence, the participants have reported that they have refrained from using the word harassment irrespective if the offenders' conduct fits the definition of what constitutes harassment. Harassment as the participants revealed, denotes that the

incidence was intentional. As such, they used phrases like “sexualized behaviour”, “externalising behaviour”, or “disinhibited behaviour” to refer to incidences of sexual harassment from patients with mental impairment (p. 125). Nielsen et al found that participants used these phrases to avoid upsetting the patients' families. They concluded that limited support for reporting incidences of sexual harassment within healthcare employment, notably when the harassers is mentally incapacitated, made the issue a grey area.

Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment as Harm

Overwhelming evidence exists to show that quid pro quo sexual harassment causes harm. Feminist scholar, Mackinnon (1979), argued that quid pro quo sexual harassment in the workplace is morally wrong because it harms women as a group. She argued that quid pro quo sexual harassment reinforces discriminatory practices against women, which makes it challenging for them to advance in the workplaces. An example of such unfair practices is the decision of an employer to favor a male candidate for a position over a female candidate or an employer refuser to acknowledge a woman’s idea in the formulation of a project simply because she is a woman but considered the plan proposed by the woman as brilliant when a male co-worker recommended it. Mackinnon concluded that by acknowledging sexual harassment as morally illicit, the push for women’s socio-economic empowerment could be attainable.

Quid pro quo sexual harassment affects women’s active involvement in an organization. Women who are targets of sexually harassing behaviors at work are likely to withdraw from the organization (Ford et al., 2021; McEwen et al., 2021). They may

find their work environment not interesting anymore because of the harassment. As such, they may withdraw from their areas of work to cope with the harassment or avoid their harassers (Khumalo et al., 2015; Nielsen et al., 2017). Their withdrawal may limit their active engagement in the activities at work as they may lack the concentration needed to perform their work duties effectively. Women's work absence may result in punishment for under-performance and is likely to hinder their future job prospects (McLaughlin et al., 2017).

Similarly, sexual harassment can lead to decreased self-confidence and respect. Throughout the harassment, victims might develop negative thoughts about themselves. Aljerian et al. (2017) found that victims often accused themselves of the harassment. For example, they might feel the harassment would not have happened if they had not initiated contact with the perpetrator. Many of them lives in isolation at work, as they feel ashamed of facing their colleagues and the harassers. These negative emotions impaired their self-esteem, resulting in burnout at work (Takeuchi et al., 2018).

Norcott et al. (2019) examined relationships between teenagers' experiences of sexual harassment and the carefree sexual activity that transpires in their adult life. Norcott et al. found that the harassment impacted sexually harassed teenagers. Their findings showed that sexually harassed teenagers were more prone to having sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), urinary tract infections (UTIs), premature pregnancy, and a host of other health issues. These health issues, in return, hindered their prospects of enjoying a stress-free life, as they had to deal with the backlash that comes from society regarding these health complications. Norcott et al. added that harassed teenagers who

were actively engaged in sexual activities before the harassment were more than likely to have numerous sexual partners in a month. This promiscuity attitude, which owes its existence to victims developing low self-esteem from their experience with the harassment, leads to them having a negative image of their physical features. In return, this affects their ability to establish a well-meaningful sexual relationship and preserve those already present.

Sexual harassment might result into victims, mostly women being promiscuous (Dunlap et al., 2003). They may interpret the harassment as a way of developing and preserving their love affairs or as a means through which they can obtain material goods, like iPhone, cars, designers' handbags, and shoes. Dunlap et al. postulated that it might also impact women's sexual relationship. For example, women who had been sexually harassed may find it challenging to adequately communicate their sexual needs with their partners. One possible explanation for which they might become incommunicado is the desire of not wanting to be touched. Their refusal, however, may upset their partners, who are more likely to interpret their silence or refusal as a sign of not having an interest in the relationships. This lack of communication is likely to put a strain on the relationship, which is likely to lead to breakups.

Thurston et al. (2018) investigated the impact sexual harassment has on women's natural and psychological health and noted that harassed women suffered from numerous health problems, such as increased blood pressure, insomnia, depression, and anxiety. These health issues are likely to affect their quality of life. For example, they might exhibit negative attitudes towards themselves and the quality of their work. Friberg et al.

(2017) conducted a cross-sectional study assessing sexual harassment perpetrated by customers and employees among workers in Denmark and found that sexual harassment creates enormous stress for victims. Friberg et al. findings showed that sexual harassment resulted in psychological and physical damage to the victim's well-being. Victims reported being angry, anxious, and depressed, feelings of guilt, stress, and a host of other health symptoms. Sexual harassment affects victims' physical health. Sexually harassed women, for instance, are more susceptible to numerous health conditions, including unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (Khumalo et al., 2015). Akin to the physical health implications, victims of sexual harassment endure psychological problems. Most victims reported suffering from depression, anxiety, low-esteem, and insomnia (Boyle, 2017; Hakimi et al., 2018). Other health-related concerns include substance use conditions, mood change, and difficulty concentrating (Dworkin et al., 2017). Overall, sexually harassed victims suffer from cognitive, psychological, and behavioral problems, affecting their quality of life.

Other researchers investigating the impacts of sexual harassment showed that it has prolonged adverse effects on women as a group. Because women are mostly victims of sexual harassment, their employment opportunities are likely to be impacted. For example, they are likely to take time off from work to deal with the harassment (Khumalo et al., 2015). Their absence may limit their active participation at work, impacting their performance review and limiting their chances of a pay raise or promotion. Such statistic shows that sexual harassment establishes a culture that perceives women and girls as sex objects rather than contributing players to the growth of an institution. For this reason,

women, irrespective of their objective qualification or experiences, find it hard to obtain a job free from sexual invitations, especially in countries, like Liberia with fragile judicial system and limited job opportunities

Summary and Conclusion

The major themes in the literature included a comprehensive definition of sexual harassment with emphasis on two of the most widely discussed forms of sexual harassment in the workplace, quid pro quo sexual harassment and hostile work sexual harassment. Quid pro quo sexual harassment occurs when employers, and sometimes their associates, demand sexual favors in exchange for jobs, including promoting, demoting, and hiring employees and jobseekers based on their sexual compliance (Khumalo et al., 2015). Whereas hostile work sexual harassment involves behaviors that degrade others in a way that damage their professional growth in the workplace (Otsri, 2020). Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology and Feinberg's harm principle were discussed as the methodological approach and theoretical framework that informed my research.

Heidegger developed the hermeneutic phenomenology to explore individuals' perceptions of their existence based on their experiences of the world. Whereas Feinberg's harm principle provides the rationale for acts that are morally justifiable when imposing legal punishments. Feinberg (1984) theorized that these acts are those that set back, defeat, thwart, and impede an individual's interest. Through Feinberg's harm principle, the effects of sexual harassment on victims', notably women's interest, for example, sustained employability become clearer. Ambiguity in individuals' perceptions

of sexual harassment and how these differing views inform policies in combating incidences of sexual harassment in the workplaces was discussed. Addressed in the literature also was the responses to the problem of sexual harassment and the effects it has on women.

Women continue to be impacted by quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment despite tremendous progress towards gender equality. Khumalo et al. (2015) revealed that working women, and those seeking to enter the workforce, are repeatedly asked by employers to perform sexual acts in exchange for jobs. Women who refused to succumb to these unwelcome sexual advances are either fired or received poor performance review, which, in return, leads to possible demotion at work. Further, sexually harassed women are compelled to take time off from work to deal with the harassment. Additionally, victims' absence leads to possible punishments, which, in return, may impact their future career development (Avendaño, 2018; McLaughlin et al., 2017).

A specific gap in the research is that little research in West Africa has explored women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in the workplace. I closed the information gap by exploring women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working community. Such data is crucial in the discussion of sexual harassment in Liberian workplaces. For example, policymakers could use my study's findings to effectively create policies and programs that could enhance the laws and policies that safeguard women from workplace sexual harassment. Political leaders and managers could use the study's results to formulate new policies or

redesign current policies regarding sexual harassment in the workplace. By doing so, they could create a haven for women to thrive without being considered as sexual objects.

Chapter 3 discusses my research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methods used to collect data, participants selection and recruitment, the research setting, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns. This hermeneutic phenomenological research design that employs in-depth qualitative interviews provided empirical data to support public policy actions to address quid pro quo sexual harassment in the Liberian workplace.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This hermeneutic phenomenological research explored women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. Women's perceptions and lived experiences was explored using qualitative in-depth interviews. I described also in this chapter the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, the methods used to collect data, participants selection and recruitment, the research setting, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns. I also provided a summary of the main points of the chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

The pivotal question for this hermeneutic phenomenological research was: What are the lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment among working women in Liberia's public sector?

Based on the gap in the scholarship regarding sexual harassment, I used the hermeneutic phenomenological research design, employing in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore women's lived experiences of the phenomenon of interest. The hermeneutic phenomenological research design was appropriate for this research because it offered me the opportunity to explore and analyze women's lived experiences that may have impacted their sustained employability. According to Moustakas (1994), phenomenological approach allows the investigator to stay grounded in the study, notably remaining alert to the experiences of the research participants. Through this method of

inquiry, researchers can explore the meaning of the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants. As such, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed me to develop an in-depth understanding of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment, notably those described by working women. The phenomenological approach was a useful tool for my research because Liberian women loved to share their experiences about issues. As such, this process helped them achieve that goal.

Similarly, the use of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach rather than a quantitative approach, gave me an insight into women's lived experiences of sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. This method of inquiry enabled me to provide an insight into the meaning Liberian women attached to the issue under study. Additionally, with a qualitative method of inquiry I became aware that an issue, such as quid pro sexual harassment, might be interpreted differently by a diverse group of people. As such, each individual data was transcribed in accordance with the meaning they attached to the phenomenon rather than imposing my preconceived knowledge of the issue.

More to this, I employed an in-depth interviewing technique during the collection of data. The use of an in-depth interviewing supported women's lived experiences of sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. I conducted individual interviews with 13 women from the public sector in Monrovia, Liberia, to investigate their workplace sexual harassment experiences. By providing explanations of the phenomenon as a whole and then as components, and joining it together again

(Moustakas, 1994), I was able to provide working women and women seeking to enter the workforce the opportunity to add their voice to workplace sexual harassment discussion in hopes of beginning to shift public perceptions.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is crucial for qualitative research in relation to its interpretive outcome and usefulness (Babbie, 2016). In qualitative research, for instance, researchers become the principal instrument in collecting data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As such, they can positively or negatively impact a study as they have control over the data being collected (Saldaña, 2016). For instance, researchers bring with them their values, assumptions, and biases at the onset of the research., which makes their input to the research site helpful as they have first-hand knowledge of the data being collected.

Based on the above information as it relates to the researcher's role in a study, it is without argument that as a doctorate student, I brought to this study an issue of positionality. I assumed that quid pro quo sexual harassment has adverse effects on women's career development. I assumed also that this issue is severe in emerging democracies, like Liberia, where the legal system is ineffective in addressing episodes of sexual harassment. My position stems from my awareness of the effects sexual harassment have on the victims, mostly women and girls in Liberia (the research site). This issue of positionality owes its existence to the simple fact that I was born and raised in Liberia. I assumed this gives me an added advantage to the attitudes, behaviors, and values of this group of people. However, to obtain information rich case from which

meanings and the essences of lived experiences can be described, I put my biases aside to view quid pro quo sexual harassment through the perspectives of the participants. To achieve this, I used a journal to reflectively write what I know about the topic as a way of being open to new ideas that may arise regarding the phenomenon.

With such awareness, I was able to build trust among the interviewees, which in return smoothed the validation process of the study; hence, ensuring the accuracy of the recordings and writings. With regards to any personal relationship with my potential interviewees, I have none except that I am a strong supporter of women's rights. However, I ensured neutrality in the conclusions of the data by reporting what was discovered during the study.

Methodology

I used the hermeneutic phenomenological research design that employs in-depth participant interviews. The hermeneutic phenomenological research design was appropriate for this research because it offered me the opportunity to explore and analyze women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment that may have impacted their sustained employability. By utilizing this design, I developed an in-depth understanding of the event of interest, as described by Liberian women (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology, as a method of inquiry, provides a humanistic deliberation of human experience or seeks to understand human phenomena. Researchers utilizing this method become cognizant of biases, preconceptions, and a need to be receptive when exploring phenomenon of interest. Hermeneutic phenomenology inquiry, in other words, makes explicit the circumstances that serves as a clue in understanding

lived experiences (Holroyd, 2007). Through hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers become aware that an attempt in understanding each participant's experience involve not only a rational approach, but rather a way of being in the world (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Van Manen, 2014). This process of being in the world is not based on an orthodox way of understanding, which centers around preexisting politics, but rather it is nurtured from the individual's life worlds and the connotation they attached to it (Holroyd, 2007).

It is within the realm of the individual's life worlds that they become aware of how their unwillingness to set aside their prejudices regarding a phenomenon blind them from grasping that which they do not know (Holroyd, 2007). It is, in other words, within individuals' experiences that they become aware of the limitations that exist within their preconceived modes of understanding human phenomena. This awareness leads to the realization that there is no such thing as absolute truth. As such, from the hermeneutic perspective, individuals' interests in exploring a phenomenon become geared towards "not in knowing more, but on knowing differently" (Holroyd, 2007, p. 3).

Moustakas (1994) posited that phenomenological approach allows the investigator to stay grounded in their study, notably remaining alert to the experiences of the research participants. Thus, the phenomenological approach enabled me to explore working women in Liberia's public sector lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment. This method of inquiry became a useful tool for this study because Liberian women loved to share their experiences about issues affecting them. As such, I provided them the platform to achieve that goal. Whereas in-depth interviewing gave me the opportunity to

conduct an interview with a sample of the population to give meaning to their experiences regarding the problem.

Participation Selection Logic

I utilized a sample frame of working women in Liberia's public sector employment setting to identify cases of quid pro sexual harassment. The sampling strategy and sample size employed were purposeful sampling that used an in-depth interview of 13 working women recruited from public sector employment. Purposeful sampling, which is an intersectional approach, focuses on obtaining information-rich cases (Moustakas, 1994). Through purposeful sampling, I brought together working women with in-depth familiarity about the issue, and those available and willing to participate. I also sought individual working women who could effectively communicate their experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment (O'Sullivan et al., 2017).

My inclusion criteria for the interviewees was working women 18 years of age and older in Liberia's public sector employment setting who had been employed for at least 1 year and who have been victims of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Interviewees were those who gave their consent to be interviewed and audiotaped. Additionally, they were willing to participate in an extensive interview, and a possible follow-up interview, and have the data publish in a dissertation and other publications. Interviewees were not, in any form or shape, perpetrators of the phenomenon of interest. The inclusion standards were based on my assumption that the longer an individual has been employed, the more diverse their experiences would be regarding the phenomenon. I assumed also those Liberian women being employed for at least 1 year in the public sector in Liberia was

enough for them to describe their experiences. The choice of inclusion, in other words, centered on my study's purpose to ensure the target group are individuals with in-depth knowledge and experience of the event of interest.

Instrumentation

To ensure content validity and credibility, researchers collect multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, fieldnotes and audio recording (O'Sullivan et al., 2017). The researcher reviews the data collected to make sense of it. This process helps the researcher to group the data into categories from which themes emerges that are reflective of the data. In this vein, I used in-depth semi-structured interviews, fieldnotes, and audio recorder to collect data (O'Sullivan et al., 2017; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In-depth interviewing technique supported women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. Through this interview technique, I conducted rigorous individual interviews with a sample of the working population to uncover their lived experiences.

In-depth interviews were conducted from December 11, 2021, to January 19, 2022. Further, I used an audio player, upon the participants' approval, to record the interviews and took field notes to document my reflections, ideas, and thoughts regarding any possible links among the interview data and the participants for comparative analysis. Data collected, were stored on a thumb drive, and kept in a password protected lockbox. All data and interview transcripts will be preserved for 5 years upon which they will be destroyed by shredding manual transcripts and any journal notations and encrypting and deleting any electronically archived content.

Moreover, I employed a strategy referred to as ‘member checking’ to ensure data triangulation. With this technique, the research participants checked their interview transcripts to ensure that their opinions on the topic mirror what they previously stated (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Member checking supported participants’ accurate accounts of the phenomenon and, as well, ensures transcript accuracy. Participants’ insights provided clarity for thematic meanings and improved the accuracy of theoretical interpretations.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection Procedures

Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from Walden’s Institutional Review Board. My potential study participants were recruited by reaching out to a grassroots women’s organization in Monrovia, Liberia for information on women working in Liberia’s public sector (see Appendix A). My recruiting organization served as a voice in coordinating the affairs of other women’s organizations in Liberia by providing the platform where these organizations can raise their voice about issues impacting women in the country as a means of achieving a sustainable future for all. I emailed my recruitment flyers to my partner organization to post on their bulletin boards, website, and on their social media accounts, such as Facebook and WhatsApp (see Appendix B). Interested individuals got in contact with me through email. Study participation and jointly agreed upon interview schedules were established by phone and via email (see Appendix C). Since the initial recruitment process provided fewer participants than needed to meet my expected sample size, I used the snowball sampling technique to recruit more participants. My initial study participants were asked to refer other potential individuals

with similar characteristics to take part until I achieved the minimum number of participants needed.

After reviewing the informed consent form, participants indicated their willingness to participate in the study by replying via an email with the words “I consent”. Permission was sought also to audio record the interviews, which were included in the informed consent form. Audio recording interviews allow researchers to conduct the interviews free from distraction (Creswell, 2009). Thus, I audio recorded the interview in its entirety, allowing me to stay grounded in the interview by keeping my focus on the participants as they share their experiences regarding quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia’s public sector working environment. Some of the participants were a bit skeptical about being audio recorded fearing the recording could be used against them. I reassured them that their identity would be kept confidential within the limits of the law and will not at any time during the interview process ask for their names or associate their responses to their contact information.

I also informed them that I will not use their personal information for any purposes outside of this research project and will not include their names or anything else that could identify them in the study reports. This was also part of the informed consent under the privacy section. Those that were skeptical agreed to be audio recorded. I also conducted a follow-up interview to allow the participants to check the authenticity of their interview transcript. In addition to the follow-up interview, I sought the help of my committee chair to serve as a debriefer to monitor each interview and prepare field notes, which were compare with mine to ensure the credibility of my research objectivity.

At the start of the Zoom interview, I restated the study's purpose, provide housekeeping rules such as the interview procedures, duration of the interview, and the rationale for audio recording the interview. I went over the informed consent form to ensure the research participants understood the procedures. Once that was done, interviewees were informed of their rights, such as the freedom to withdraw from the study for any reason. They were given the chance before the start of the interview to ask any question or concern they might have during the interview process. None of the participants had any questions. I also asked the participants if they consent to participate in the study interview. Upon receiving an affirmation of consent, I began the audio-recorded interviews. At the conclusion of the interview, I stopped the audio recording and thanked each interview participant. I also invited the participant to review their transcript for accuracy, in which an email address was required to send the transcript in advance. I scheduled a follow up Zoom meeting to review transcript accuracy and to discuss interpretation accuracy.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used for the initial individual interviews to capture the essence of the phenomenon (see Appendix D). The interviews were conducted using Zoom in a private room depending on the participant's choice to encourage them to provide an in-depth account of their experiences regarding quid pro quo sexual harassment. Given that these interviews were conducted in Liberia and myself in the United States, the participant were encouraged to find a location with sufficient strong Wi-Fi to connect using the Zoom Video over Internet Protocol. To help with bandwidth, I instructed the participant to turn off their video option and I did the same, leaving

voice only, which can be recorded without video for transcript generation. Individual follow-up interviews via Zoom were used also to fill gaps that existed in the data collected. These gaps were the results of areas that were ambiguous in meaning, such as study participants not completing a narrative when answering a particular question. These member checking interviews allowed me to review with the participants their transcript content accuracy and to discuss feedback. Participant interviews, member checking activities, and my transcribed field notes served as my main data collection techniques. I constructed the interview questions to be open-ended. However, the interviews were guided by the research question: What are the lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment among working women in Liberia's public sector?

To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for each participant and only I knew the actual participant identity. The interview lasted for approximately an hour. Once the interviews were concluded, and before data analysis, verbatim transcription of the interviews were conducted. The audio-recordings were transcribed verbatim using NVivo 12 software. NVivo is a qualitative data management software that provide researchers with the opportunity to thoroughly analyze the interview data (Dalkin et al., 2021). For example, I used NVivo 12 to store, sort, and code the interview data. The data coding produced nodes that illustrate patterns and helped to develop associated themes. With NVivo 12, I compared the data to form categories and these categories were sorted to develop themes. Additionally, I analyzed the interview data without losing the essence of each participant's response that could be crucial in bringing meaning to the event of interest as described by the participants.

More to this, each interview was transcribed immediately after the interview session. Upon the completion of the interview transcript, I listened to the interviews on the audio players several times to ensure the interviews were accurately and thoroughly transcribed.

Data Analysis Plan

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological research was to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. The hermeneutic phenomenology, as a method of analysis, helps researchers overcome their preconceived modes of understanding human phenomena (Holroyd, 2007). They become aware of how this pre-structured conceptualization of things limits their knowledge of their life worlds. In other words, it helps researchers set aside their fore-conception to get to the ethos of a phenomenon. In doing so, they utilized what Heidegger coined as the hermeneutic circle.

The hermeneutic circle guides researchers in understanding a phenomenon. It is a process of constant revision of pre-structured thoughts when analyzing interviews data (Peoples, 2021; Stenner et al., 2016). This incessant revision helps researchers gain insight regarding the explored phenomenon in a whole different way. The hermeneutic circle link researchers' pre-structured modes of understanding things to the distinctive meaning of individual text. Through this procedure, they can get a grasp of the entire interview transcript as a whole. By examining the whole, they can have a vivid picture of segments of the whole.

As researchers analyzed data, they break down the data into segments and then combine the segments into a composite whole to form a new understanding (Peoples, 2021). As they go through this analysis journey, they can see that codes and themes, which makes up the parts, influences the full interview transcript and vice-versa. Researchers continue this process until there is a full grasp of the phenomenon explored. In this hermeneutic understanding, researchers' exegesis of a phenomenon calls for an incessant emendation. Their firmly held beliefs in explaining a phenomenon are often shift when new information becomes available, which makes them see the full picture of the phenomenon of interest.

In utilizing the hermeneutic circle, I made explicit my biases of the phenomenon of interest. Researchers makes explicit their biases during the data analysis stage to get to the essence of the phenomenon as described by the study's participants (Moustakas, 1994). According to Moustakas, getting to the essence of an experience is essential because without doing so, participants' lived experiences cannot be grasped in its entirety. He added that this process helped researchers group each participant's experience of a phenomenon into a composite whole.

General Data Analysis Steps

1. Reading and deleting irrelevant information: Through this step, researchers are encouraged to read the individual interview transcript to gain an understanding of each participant's experience. It also involves deleting filler words.
2. Generating Preliminary Meaning Units: This process requires a thorough examination of each participant's statement to assess whether there exists an element of the

statement that is an essential component for understanding it, and whether that segment of the experience can be categorized. Those statements that satisfies the above conditions are considered the horizons of the experience. Those intersecting, recurring, and ambiguous statements not satisfying the above conditions are either excluded or introduced in a narrative format. The standout horizons become the quintessence elements of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

3. **Generating Final Meaning Units:** During this phase, researchers use their deeper reflection of each participant's experience to break down preliminary meaning units into final meaning units.
4. **Situated Narratives:** In this step researchers present each participant's experience of the phenomenon of interest thematically and in their own words.
5. **General Narratives:** Through this process, researchers study the meaning of units and themes of each research participant to illuminate the participants. In other words, they organized the data from the situated narratives to presents the participants' meanings of their experiences.
6. **General Description:** In this final step, researchers step aside from the participants' usual view of things to present the common themes in all or most of the participants' narratives as it relates to their experiences. The goal is to join these emergent themes into a composite whole.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology Data Analysis Illustrated Steps

From the hermeneutic perspective, I read each interview transcript to gain an insight of each working woman's story of quid pro quo sexual harassment. While reading

the transcripts, I noted important information as I reflected on the data and delete filler words like “ah,” “um,” “well,” and “you know,” which are often used to fill up silence. After reading the interview transcripts, I selected the shortest, and eye-catching interview transcript to develop preliminary meaning units. According to Peoples (2021), a preliminary meaning unit is an assigned chunk of the interview that reveal distinct quality of the phenomenon being explored. During this phase, I reviewed each participant’s horizons to ensure no recurring statements exists. Also, I eliminated repetitive statements and those that do not relate to my research question. Next, I used the preliminary meaning units as a signpost while going through the entire data to develop final meaning units or codes. The final meaning units were informed by my grasp of each working woman’s narrative. For example, I used NVivo 12 software to group words and expressions revealed in the participants’ transcripts. I also used NVivo 12 software to develop themes by putting the code together. I documented the developed codes next to the relevant segments of the text to observe if new codes emerge.

Similarly, I emphasized thematically the meanings each participant assigns to their experience of quid pro quo sexual harassment using their own words from the interview transcript. These themes were utilized to develop general narratives, which in return were used to disclose working women’s meanings of their experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Finally, I created an overall narrative to present the themes that were common in all or most of the working women’s stories. The goal was to join these emergent themes into a composite whole.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The issues of trustworthiness are essential ingredients in establishing confidence in qualitative studies. Trustworthiness is important in establishing qualitative research findings' reliability (Amin et al., 2020). Researchers established study trustworthiness when the strategies employed influences the research outcome and no other issues. Therefore, to ensure trustworthiness in my hermeneutic phenomenological study, I compared the developing codes with the interview data to ensure the meaning of the codes are reflective of the actual data. Next, I created a codebook to write down information such as the location in the interview transcripts where I found the code. A qualitative codebook contains a list of codes that researchers use when coding data (Creswell, 2009). It is a technique a researcher uses when journaling about the codes. The ensuing sections discusses the elements that are important in establishing trustworthiness in qualitative studies.

Credibility

Credibility is an essential component in creating truthfulness. According to Connelly (2016), credibility is the qualitative version of internal validity found in quantitative research. To ensure that my study is credible, I used procedures that aligns with phenomenology studies. In other words, I explored my hermeneutic phenomenology study like other hermeneutic phenomenology studies. I collected data using numerous sources to include semi-structured interviews, journal, fieldnotes, and audio recorder to collect data. I studiously checked the accuracy of my research results and utilize my data sources to develop a rationale for the emergent themes. Additionally, I scheduled a

follow-up member checking procedure with the participants for them to review the interview transcripts as a way of enhancing the accuracy of the interview transcripts. One of the participants was nonresponsive to follow-up communication. Thus, I accepted the transcript as accurate and proceed with thematic analysis. More to this, I clarified my biases and activities to limit them in a prior section.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when there exists fluidity in the researcher's strategy, especially when apply in diverse settings and studies. According to Maxwell (2021), transferability occurs when researchers' findings can be duplicated by other researchers. Transferability, in other words, helps researchers avoid threats to external validity. To ensure that individuals interested in transferring my research findings to other settings can do so, I provided an in-depth narrative of the settings and context in which the study took place (Amin et al., 2020). I also described the research assumptions and provide as many perspectives as possible of my participants' experiences using their own words in the emergent themes to achieve information rich thick descriptions of the findings.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research focuses on the steadiness of the researcher's methodology when other researchers utilize it, notably in different settings (Coleman, 2021). Dependability means that the research approach employed by a researcher should be generalizable. Other researchers should be able to use the design to provide a logical explanation of other individuals' experiences within similar circumstances. In other words, to what extent the data sample is translucent, regarding the researcher's

interpretation of the data collected and presented. To ensure dependability, I consistently used my described methodological procedures for interviews, transcript capture, data analyses, and thematic interpretations. I also maintained my approach, procedures, and criteria used for participant recruitment and used an iterative process when reviewing interview transcripts to isolate errors and to validate the developing codes.

Confirmability

Confirmability is qualitative research version of objectivity found in quantitative projects (Maxwell, 2021). Confirmability exists when the study's findings mirror the participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived modes of understanding. Confirmability exists when the researcher takes an objective approach when collecting and analyzing data. Researchers ensure confirmability when their project's findings could be substantiated by others. For example, the readers' account ought to align with that of the researcher's account. To achieve confirmability, I provided a detail explanation of the methodology employed in analyzing my interview data and I maintained a bias-free attitude during data collection. I also described working women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment using their own words. By presenting the research findings through narratives, readers can form their understandings regarding the phenomenon under study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical approval was obtained from Walden's Institutional Review Board before any data collection. I also submitted a letter of cooperation to my partner organization to obtain information on women working in Liberia's public sector, seeking their support

for participant recruitment. I recruited women from the public sector working community in Liberia who had been employed for at least 1 year. Participants were those victims of quid pro quo sexual harassment who were willing to be interviewed and audiotaped. They were also willing to take part in a possible follow-up interview and agreed to have the data publish. Participants, in other words, were those who met my study's purpose.

During the interviews, I restated the study's purpose, provide housekeeping rules, such as the interview procedures, duration of the interview, and the rationale for audio recording the interview. I also reviewed the informed consent form to ensure the participants understood the study's purpose. In addition, I informed the participants of their rights to withdraw from the study or stop the interview if at any time they feel emotionally burdened by what they are sharing. They may also decline to respond to any posed questions. I encouraged the participants to ask questions or voice concerns they might have during the interview process. The interview lasted for approximately 1 hour. Once the interviews were concluded, and before data analyses, I transcribed the interview transcription verbatim. To capture an in-depth understanding of each participant's response, I replayed the audio recording if a word or phrase was unclear. I also generated Microsoft Word interview transcripts by playing the audio file near my computer microphone. The produced transcripts were checked against the audio recordings for correction purposes and immediately associated with pseudonyms, reflective of Liberian names. I also uploaded the clean version of the transcripts to NVivo v. 12 software for thematic analyses.

Similarly, I stored all the electronic data collected on an encrypted thumb drive and stored in a password protected lockbox for a period of 5 years. After this period, they will be destroyed by shredding manual transcripts and any journal notations and encrypting and deleting any electronically archived content.

Additionally, I used gender-inclusive language, where applicable to avoid giving preferential treatment towards a particular gender at the expense of other sexes (Babbie, 2016). During the virtual meeting with women from my partner organization seeking permission to recruit potential participants, I communicated with them using a biased-free language. For example, rather than generalizing to the group from a male chauvinistic lens (e.g., “How are you guys?”), I addressed them by their names.

Summary

The major themes discussed in Chapter 3 included the research design and rationale, my role as a doctorate student conducting this study, the research methodology, which includes the participation selection logic, instrumentation, recruitment, participation, and collection data procedures and data analysis plan. I discussed also in Chapter 3 the issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures for conducting the study. Chapter 4 focused on my study’s results, while my research conclusions will be highlighted in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

This hermeneutic phenomenological research explored women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. The following research question guided the study: What are the lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment among working women in Liberia's public sector working environment?

I describe in this chapter the settings, participants' demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, study's results, and summarized the main points of the chapter, followed by discussions, recommendations, and conclusion, in Chapter 5.

Setting

I conducted the interviews using Zoom in a private room, chosen by each participant. Twelve participants were interviewed in their homes, and one participant interviewed at a church. Given that these interviews were conducted in Liberia and me in the United States, I encouraged each participant to find a location with strong and stable Wi-Fi to connect using the Zoom Video over Internet Protocol. To help with bandwidth, I instructed each participant to turn off the video option, and I did the same. I conducted interviews from December 11, 2021, to January 19, 2022. Some participants were skeptical about audio recording, fearing the recording could be used against them. They were reassured that their identities were confidential within the limits of the law, and they would not be asked for their names, nor would their responses be associated with their contact details. After further verbal reassurances to the interview methods, all participants

agreed to be audio recorded. I took field notes to document my reflections, ideas, and thoughts regarding possible links between the interview data and the participants for comparative analysis. As part of a follow-up member checking process, I scheduled agreed-up Zoom meetings and email exchanges to allow the participants to check the accuracy and authenticity of their interview transcript. Given that each interview was conducted in a setting of the participant's choosing, it is postulated that no personal or organizational conditions influenced the participants' experience responses that may have affected the study results interpretation.

Demographics

A total of 13 participants met the inclusion criteria of being employed in Liberia's public sector for at least 1 year and who experienced workplace instances of quid pro quo sexual harassment. The participants were working women aged 18 years and older, with work experience ranging from 1 to 10 years, and were from diverse geographic locations. All 13 participants gave consent via email before interview participation. Participants' demographic data are shown in Table 4.1 below for easy reference.

Table 1*Participants' Demographic Data*

Participant	Age	Education	Employment Years
Charlesetta	28	Graduate degree	4.5
Doree	34	Graduate degree	10
Janet	30	Bachelor's degree	3.5
Keb	29	Bachelor's degree	3
Kou	26	Graduate degree	2
Lillian	31	Graduate degree	5
Lorpu	28	Graduate degree	2.5
Miatta	27	Bachelor's degree	3
Musu	24	Graduate degree	5.5
Nohn	26	Graduate degree	3
OldLady	23	Graduate degree	2.5
Pat	23	Graduate student	1.5
Pinky	30	Bachelor's degree	6.5

Data Collection

Recruitment processes began in October 2021 after obtaining Walden University IRB approval [09-08-21-0596668] to conduct my study. I emailed my recruitment flyers to the recruitment organization to post on their bulletin boards, website, and social media accounts, such as Facebook and WhatsApp. On October 26, 2021, the executive director emailed me that they were faced with some issues within the organization impacting their operations. However, the executive director promised to update me once they resolved the issue. On November 16, 2021, follow-up communication from the executive director

was received informing me that they began the distribution of my recruitment materials. Within a few weeks, interested individuals contacted me through email and study participation and conjointly agreed-upon interview scheduled were established by phone and via email.

At the start of the Zoom interview, I provided a brief introduction about myself to build rapport, restated the study's purpose, provided housekeeping rules, and collected data adhering to the procedures and ethical guidelines delineated in Chapter 3. The data collection process involved in-depth semi-structured interviews, field notes, and audio recording using Zoom to capture the phenomenon's essence. The interview questions were open-ended but guided by the research question: What are the lived experiences of *quid pro quo* sexual harassment among working women in Liberia's public sector?

Additionally, I went over the informed consent form to ensure the participants' understood the procedures. Participants were informed of their rights, such as the freedom to withdraw from the study for any reason. They were given a chance before the interview to ask any questions or concerns they might have during the interview process. All participants affirmed their understanding of the procedures and consented to the interview.

Following the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, the interviews were casual in style (People, 2021). Through the hermeneutic circle, I began the interviews with overarching questions as described in the interview guide, with follow-up questions as a means of soliciting in-depth explanation and clarification (Holroyd, 2007). The Zoom interview sessions lasted 40 to 60 minutes and were audio-recorded. After each interview

session, I stopped the audio recording and thanked the participant. I also invited participants to review their transcripts, once produced, for accuracy. Those willing to participate in this member checking step provided their email addresses. Upon distribution of their individual transcripts a follow-up Zoom meeting to review transcript accuracy and discuss interpretation accuracy was scheduled on a day and time convenient for each participant.

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and listened to the audio recording several times to ensure the interviews were accurately and thoroughly transcribed. For example, I paused and replayed the audio recording if a word or phrase was unclear. It helped me capture the essence of each participant's response that could be crucial in bringing meaning to quid pro quo sexual harassment as described by the participants. I played the audio file near my computer microphone to generate Microsoft Word interview transcripts. The generated transcripts were checked against the audio recordings to make corrections of the spoken words and immediately de-identified with pseudonyms. I used pseudonyms that are reflective of names common in Liberia. I also uploaded the clean version of the transcripts to NVivo v. 12 software for thematic analyses.

I took field notes during and after the interview, capturing information that would otherwise be overlooked through audio recording alone. Initial analysis of the evolving data and reflective journaling were also noted to ensure data collection trustworthiness. I did not encounter any unusual circumstances regarding the data collection. Participants were willing to share their experiences relating to the phenomenon of interest and were engaged throughout the interview process.

Data Analysis

As a method of analysis, hermeneutic phenomenology provides a framework for understanding women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector (see Holroyd, 2007; Peoples, 2021). The hermeneutic circle guides researchers in the process of understanding as it links researchers' preconceived modes of interpretation to the unique meaning of an individual text (Stenner et al., 2016). Through the hermeneutic circle, I began the cycling process with each participant's transcript, field notes, and reflective journaling immediately after conducting the interview. I performed the initial grouping and coding of data to enable identification of the point of data saturation, in which more interviews did not result in new themes.

Upon completing all interviews, I read each transcript to gain an insight into each participant's story related to quid pro quo sexual harassment. While reading the transcripts, I documented vital information as I reflected on the data and deleted filler words like "ah," "um," "well," and "you know." In line with Peoples's (2021) recommended approach, I selected the shortest and most eye-catching transcripts to develop preliminary meaning units. A preliminary meaning unit is an allocated portion of the transcript that shows the distinct quality of the phenomenon being explored. Through this process, I evaluated each participant's transcript to eliminate recurring statements and those unrelated to the research question. Similarly, I used the preliminary meaning units to develop final meaning units or codes from the actual data. My grasp informed the final meaning units of each participant's narrative.

I also aligned the final meaning units next to the relevant segments of the text, observing if new codes emerged. I emphasized thematically the meaning each participant assigned to their experience of quid pro quo sexual harassment using their own words from the transcript. I used the developed themes to create general narratives to disclose participants' meanings of the phenomenon. Finally, I joined these themes into a composite whole by developing an overarching narrative of the common themes in all or most of the participants' stories.

Analysis of the data produced three main themes: (a) sex for employment or 'sexploiment,' (b) hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting, and (c) effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Additionally, 10 subthemes emerged specific to main theme 2 and 3: (a) lack of employment, (b) fear of public condemnation, (c) fragile judicial system, (d) culture of silence, (e) impediment of women's career prospects, (f) undermining of women's job credibility, (g) reinforcement of women's dependence on men, (h) discouragement of academic pursuits, (i) encouragement of workplace promiscuity, and (j) impact on women's mental health.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In a qualitative study, evidence of trustworthiness ensures certainty and reliability in the study findings (Amin et al., 2020). Researchers achieved trustworthiness when the strategies utilized shaped the study outcomes. To ensure trustworthiness, I compared the emerging codes with the interview data, ensuring the meaning of the codes reflects the actual data. Similarly, I created a codebook to note areas where I found the developing codes. Doing so helped me to keep abreast of the coding process. The subsequent

sections addressed the crucial elements in establishing evidence of trustworthiness in qualitative studies.

Credibility

Credibility is a qualitative study's version of internal validity found in quantitative studies (Connelly, 2016). I used procedures aligned with hermeneutic phenomenology study to ensure truthfulness and collected data using multiple sources, including semi-structured interviews, journals, field notes, and audio recorder. Additionally, I checked the accuracy of my research findings and utilized my data sources to develop a rationale for the emergent themes. Also, I scheduled a follow-up member checking procedure with the participants to review their transcripts to improve the transcripts' truthfulness. One of the participants was nonresponsive to follow-up communication; hence, I accepted their transcript as accurate and proceeded with thematic analysis. I also made my biases and activities explicit and provided a way in which I limited them in the prior section.

Transferability

Transferability occurs when the researcher's strategy is fluid, especially in diverse settings and studies. Maxwell (2021) postulated that transferability occurs when other researchers can replicate researchers' findings. Transferability, in other words, helps researchers avoid threats to external validity. To ensure research transferability, I provided an in-depth narrative of the settings and context in the study (Amin et al., 2020). I also described the research assumptions and provided as many perspectives as possible of my participants' experiences using their own words in the emergent themes to achieve information-rich, thick descriptions of the findings.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research focuses on the reliability of the researcher's methodology when other researchers utilize it, notably in different settings (Coleman, 2021). Dependability means that the research approach employed by a researcher should be generalizable. Other researchers should use the design to provide a logical explanation of other individuals' experiences within similar circumstances. In other words, to what extent the data sample is translucent regarding the researcher's interpretation of the data collected and presented. I consistently used my described methodological procedures for interviews, transcript capture, data analyses, and thematic interpretations to ensure dependability. I also maintained my approach, procedures, and criteria used for participant recruitment. Moreover, I used an iterative process to isolate errors and validate the developing codes.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a qualitative research version of objectivity found in quantitative projects (Maxwell, 2021). Confirmability exists when the study's findings mirror the participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's preconceived modes of understanding. In other words, confirmability exists when the researcher takes an objective approach when collecting and analyzing data. Researchers ensure confirmability when others could substantiate their study's findings. For example, I ensured my account of the research findings aligned with the participants' accounts. I provided a detailed explanation of the methodology employed in analyzing my interview data and maintained a bias-free attitude during data collection. I also described working

women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment using their own words. By presenting the research findings through narratives, readers can form their understandings regarding the phenomenon under study.

Results

As described above, three major themes emerged: (a) sex for employment or sexploment, (b) hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting, and (c) effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment and 10 subthemes emerged specific to themes 2 and 3.

The following sections describe each of the major themes in addition to these subthemes.

Theme 1: Sex for Employment or Sexploment

Each woman's perception of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment varied. However, they perceived quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment as "*sex for employment or sexploment*." Sex for employment or 'sexploment' is the demand for sexual favors by employers and their associates in exchange for employment-related benefits, hiring, promotions, pay raises, desirable work assignments, or training. OldLady put it this way:

quid pro quo sexual harassment is sex for employment because if you look at it, that's all happening. Your boss trying to offer you a job with the hope of getting in your pants or refusing to give the job because you won't let him get in your pants.

Doree mentioned, "[quid pro quo sexual harassment] is when your boss uses his position to ask you for sex before giving you a pay raise." Kou explained, "it involves being denied a position because you refused to sleep with your boss." Miatta said, "[. . .] quid

pro quo sexual harassment is being excluded from activities at work because you refused to sleep with your boss.” Pinky stated, “sexual harassment is seeing your boss intentionally messed up your performance review, resulting in you not getting a pay raise because you refused to have sex with him.”

Few of the participants' definitions deviate from the usual meaning of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. They described the sexual encounters to be external. Charlesetta said:

... quid pro quo sexual harassment entails being denied job opportunities because you refused to sleep with your boss's family members or friends. I remembered a friend of my boss asked me on dates, in which I rejected. My boss even tried to convince me to go out with his friend. When I declined, my boss started giving me the cold shoulder at work. He left me out of company functions, some job trainings. When I did not give in, he made sure I got fired.

Theme 2: Hesitancy in Quo Pro Quo Sexual Harassment Reporting

Participants acknowledged that quid pro quo sexual harassment is a widespread issue in Liberia's public sector working community but noted most employees were hesitant in reporting their experience. Four subthemes developed regarding employers' decision to keep silent. These subthemes were (a) lack of employment opportunity, (b) fear of public condemnation, (c) fragile judicial system, and (d) the culture of silence.

Subtheme 1: Lack of Employment Opportunity

Participants underscored the lack of job openings as a deterrent for employees in reporting sexual harassment cases. They highlighted the challenges to finding a job and noted the importance of having one. Charlesetta mentioned:

Having a job is a big deal. It brings you so much respect among your family members and your community. People just don't talk to you anyhow and knowing you could lose all that respect if you file a complaint against your employer who might use his power to get you fired is a risk nobody wants to take.

Pinky stated, "When I got employed, I became the source of survival for my family, everybody looked up to me to solve their problems, and I can't afford to let them down for my own interest. I just told a few of my friends and kept it moving as if nothing happened."

Most of the participants described victims' fear of the perpetrators using their public office to apportion the blame on them, which could impact their future job prospects. Miatta explained, "You are afraid to tell people because your boss might turn the entire thing against you, and because of his status, people will take his words over yours." Musu added, "Employers do communicate whether you know it or not. If you make an allegation against one employer, it feels like an allegation against another. They will use their influence [. . .] to stop you from getting another job."

This fear of having to be unemployed in a country where individuals' prestige and value are dependent upon their financial strengths was considered by participants as contributing drivers not to report.

Subtheme 2: Fear of Public Condemnation

Participants revealed that fear of public condemnation made it challenging for victims to come forward with sexual harassment cases. Kou revealed, “it is like a taboo because if you speak up, you will be criticized; you just bury it inside.” Pat said, “whom are you going to tell when the harasser is your boss who controls the organization? This is not America, where institutions have laws that govern their employees, especially female employees, from sexual harassment.” Doree mentioned, “It's hard to speak about your experience because you don't want people looking at you funny or calling you all types of names.” OldLady explained, “telling people you were harassed is like opening Pandora's box of ridicules. People will mock you, and you don't want to live the rest of your life being an object of ridicule.”

Participants expressed the feelings of abandonment by loved ones as a driver while victims do not go public with quid pro quo sexual harassment complaints. They described the feeling of being socially shunned by loved ones as “being worse than the harassment itself.” Keb stated, “Most of us are hesitant to come forward because we are afraid to be perceived negatively. Why open about your experience when your loved ones use it against you to break up with you.” Lorpu put it this way, “being sexually harassed is hard, but being isolated by your own people, especially your significant other, makes the situation much harder because you are all alone, and no matter how strong of a person you are, you get affected by it.”

Subtheme 3: Fragile Judicial System

Participants attributed victims' decision not to come forward with quid pro quo sexual harassment complaints to Liberia's fragile judicial system. Law enforcement officers' decision to question the credibility of sexually harassed victims resulted in them losing faith in the legal system. Nohn stated, "How can you feel confident that the harassers will be brought to justice when police officers indirectly called you a liar." Lillian asserted, "You go to the police station to file a complaint; the officers will be asking unrelated questions as if they are trying to get you to change your mind. They will brush your case aside as if what you are saying is not important."

Participants described the ineffectiveness and corruptness of the judicial system as an incentive to keep silent. There was a consensus among the participants regarding their frustration with the court system, where sexual harassments cases are often prematurely dismissed without proper investigation. Janet said, "You go to file a case thinking [. . .] justice will be served, only to be let down by corrupt police officers. They see you coming and act like they don't know the reason for your visit simply because the harassers bribed them." Pinky mentioned, "There's no point pursuing sexual harassment cases unless you have money to waste. Most of the perpetrators have police officers and judges in their pockets. Taking legal action against them is like taking legal action against yourself. You will not win, so what's the point?"

Subtheme 4: Culture of Silence

Participants described the culture of silence as an underlying factor, leading to victims refusing to share their sexual harassment experiences. They described the societal

muteness and uncaring attitude of the public towards the excruciating cries of the victims as more than enough evidence why reporting is pointless. Pat mentioned, “You can’t be motivated to talk about something when those with whom you are trying to tell aren’t, in fact, listening. They act like they are concerned about your situation, but once you are done talking, they do nothing.” Janet explained, “I don’t see the point telling people, they tell you if you don’t want the job, you should quit.” Keb added, “People make it seem like being sexually harassed is part of the job, which make some of us think maybe we are overreacting.”

Theme 3: Effects of Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment

The participants revealed that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment harms women. Six subthemes emerged when they discussed the effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment on women. They are as follows: (a) impediment of women’s career prospects, (b) undermining women’s job credibility, (c) reinforcement of women’s dependence on men, (d) discouragement of academic pursuit, (e) encouragement of workplace promiscuity, and (f) impact on women’s mental health.

Subtheme 1: Impediment of Women’s Career Prospects

The participants indicated that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment affects women’s future career prospects. They revealed that many women lose their jobs because of their unwillingness to succumb to their bosses and sometimes associates of their boss’s sexual advances. Musu explained, “after I was voted as the best employee for three consecutive months, I got fired for not doing my job right. It was because I refused to go on dates with one of the bosses from the other department who claimed he wanted

to celebrate my success.” The participants also noted that these quid pro quo sexual arrangements create an uncondusive working environment, resulting in women being unable to carry out their work obligations effectively. For instance, Janet said, “I felt incompetent at work because I couldn’t concentrate. I looked over my shoulder, expecting to be harassed by my boss.” Lillian mentioned, “when you go to work, all you can think of is, is he coming again to promise you a pay raise or promotion in return for sex.”

Participants indicated that quid pro quo sexual harassment results in women being excluded from work activities, notably those designed to help them succeed. Nohn said, “when my boss saw I was turning down his sexual interest, he took my name from the list of those selected to travel for special training. I’m not one to cry easily, but this hurt. I needed this opportunity to excel in my field. Without the training, I was stuck.” Charlesetta mentioned, “What bothers me is that your boss will intentionally exclude you from training that he knows will help you on the job. But he will accuse you of being incompetent when performing a task, you did not get trained to do.”

Few of the participants revealed that quid pro quo sexual arrangements result in women not achieving their goal of having a productive career. OldLady said, “they blame young women for passing around, when in reality those that supposed to hire us, are asking us to have sex with them before giving us a job. How people expect you to have a career when you are not giving a chance to develop one?” Pinky elaborated, “you worry a lot even when you start your career because you think maybe all this might come to an end if some boss comes in who has a sexual interest in you. It's hard to not think of it.”

Charlesetta added, “I feel like a woman career success rest on us agreeing to sleep with the employers. If we refused, we could forget about a career regardless of our qualifications.” Some of the participants highlights the lack of a “stable job,” “absenteeism,” and “favoritism,” resulting from quid pro quo sexual harassment, narrows women’s chances to enhance their professional development.

Subtheme 2: Undermining of Women's Job Credibility

The participants mentioned that quid pro quo sexual harassment affects their employment. Miatta noted, “When you get a job, people just assume you slept with the boss for the position . . . [Hence,] they looked at you funny.” Kou said, “People don't take you serious. They think you are not qualified for the job.” OldLady said, “to tell you how sad the situation is, even if the job is an entry-level position, people still think there's no way you got the job without sleeping with the boss.” Pinky explained, “When I was hired as an administrative assistant, one of my co-workers asked me to connect him with the boss. He felt I did not get the AA job on merit.” Doree mentioned, “when I got promoted, some of my male co-workers thought I had an affair with my boss despite my qualifications.” Charlesetta explained, “it bothers me to know that because I am a woman, my education and experiences doesn't count for much. If I get a job, it's not because I'm qualified, but rather because I slept with someone in position of power.” Lillian added, “Only us women endure such hypocrisy. When a man gets a job or a promotion, nobody assumed anything out of the ordinary”

Other participants used words like “slut” “woman's card,” “the boss toys,” “don't belong,” to discuss the effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment on women's credibility in the workplace.

Subtheme 3: Reinforcement of Women's Dependence on Men

Participants indicated that in a male chauvinistic society, like Liberia, women being denied equal job opportunities reinforces their dependence on men. They noted that the lack of employment or inadequate jobs with mediocrity benefits resulting from quid pro quo sexual arrangements harms women's socioeconomic foundation. As a result, most women become compelled to “go after men with money” for their financial survival. They perceived these men as a stream from which success cometh. As such, they succumb to the demands of these men if they are to “taste the fruits” of these riches. Kou explained, “sometimes, you don't really like the guy, but what can you do, he's the one providing for you and your family. You just do what he tells you.” Doree added, “I want to do things alone sometimes, but because the guy is the breadwinner, he thinks you don't have that right. If you go against him, he threatens to stop supporting you.” Nohn stated, “I think women who wants to work should be giving the opportunity, because having a man provide for you, make he wants to treat you like a child.”

Few of the participants noted that it is emotionally draining to be under the financial shadow of men. Keb mentioned, “Whenever you and your man argued, he takes away all the stuff he bought you and puts you outside no matter the time of the day if you stay together. It is stressful to be seen as unequal.”

Subtheme 4: Discouragement of Academic Pursuits

Participants divulged that being coerced to offer their bodies as collateral in exchange for employment-related benefits reduced their enthusiasm for education. Lorpu put it this way, “If your boss going to ask you to sleep with him before offering you a job, then what's the point of you making the sacrifice getting an education? It just makes you hate school.” Participants indicated that these quid pro quo sexual arrangements make it challenging to convince younger women about the importance of education, notably when many of her exemplars with universities degrees are still struggling to find a job. Janet stated, “I know many young girls who rather spend hours beautifying themselves than investing time in their education. They tell you what's the point of suffering yourself to study, when it's your body the boss wants.” Nohn mentioned, “My little sisters tell me why go to school when they are seeing others like them without a proper college degree having good jobs and living flashy lifestyles because they are sleeping with employers.”

Subtheme 5: Encouragement of Workplace Promiscuity

Participants revealed that quid pro quo sexual harassment encourages workplace promiscuity. Lillian said, “Men think just because nobody holds them responsible for their behavior, they can have any woman they want. Miatta mentioned, “you find a boss having more than three girlfriends on the job. Everyone knows about it but find it cool.” Pat explained, “Some employees think it's normal. So, every guy approaching every female co-worker. You get assigned with a male co-worker to do a project; he leaves the project to start hitting on you.” Keb added, “Nowadays, it's hard to have a male co-worker as a friend at work.” Few of the participants noted that those that refused to

participate in this promiscuous behavior are considered the outsiders or not a team player, resulting in employment consequences.

Subtheme 6: Impact on Women's Health

Participants indicated that victims develop health problems, such as depression, anxiety, anger, and withdrawal symptoms. Janet said, "When you think about the situation, it makes you sad that you try to avoid people. You become traumatized." Kou mentioned, "I get angry easily on even the smallest of things, and it frustrates me. I think every guy that approach me want something." Few of the participants reported that victims developed a negative self-image of themselves. Pat said, "I used to be this positive person, but after my experience, I just lost that part of me. I felt I was not good enough and doubted myself a lot." Lillian said, "you become unpredictable; one minute you are happy and sad the next. It's not something you do on purpose. It just happened, which scares me." Nohn added, "To tell you the truth, when you get in contact with me, I was like what this guy wants from me too. This is how bad it is. You think everybody is out to get you. You build this wall around you because you have constant flashbacks about what happen to you."

Few of the participants revealed they lost weight because of loss of appetite. OldLady stated, "I used to be a little chubby, but started losing weight after my experience. All the food tasted the same in my mouth." Musu mentioned, "I hated eating because when I see the food, it made me think of him and for me I quick to lose weight if I don't eat."

Summary

I presented in Chapter 4 participant demographics, and characteristics crucial to the study, collected data from thirteen participants, with whom I conducted interviews using Zoom. I used the hermeneutic circle to analyze the data, and the research question resulted in the findings reported. The results produced three main themes: (1) sex for employment or sexploment, (2) hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting, and (3) the effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Ten subthemes emerged under themes 2 and 3. Chapter 5 restates the study's purpose and nature and highlights the rationale for the selected research methodology. Additionally, a narrative of how the findings contribute to the body of knowledge will be presented by comparing results with peer-reviewed literature. I will also describe the study limitations related to trustworthiness that arose and provide recommendations for future research grounded in the study's strengths and limitations aligned with the other peer reviewed literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This hermeneutic phenomenological study fills an existing information gap in the literature by exploring women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. Thirteen working women in Liberia's public sector participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews using Zoom to capture the phenomenon's essence. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analyzed thematically.

In this chapter, I described a summary of the findings presented a narrative of how the findings contribute to the body of information by comparing results with peer-reviewed literature, analyzing, and interpreting the findings in the context of the theoretical framework. I also describe the study limitations related to trustworthiness that arose and provide recommendations for future research grounded in the study's strengths and limitations and aligned with other peer-reviewed literature, the potential implications for positive social change, and a concluding statement.

Summary of Findings

As delineated in Chapter 4, interviews produced three major themes: (1) sex for employment or sexploment, (2) hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting, and (3) effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment. Ten subthemes developed under themes 2 and 3. The emergent themes embodied women's quid pro quo sexual harassment experiences in Liberia's public sector working environment. Theme 1 revealed the meaning participants associate with quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's workplaces. As described by the participants, quid pro quo sexual harassment in

employment is sex for employment or 'sexploment.' Sex for employment or 'sexploment' is the demand for sexual favors by employers and their associates in exchange for employment-related benefits, hiring, promotions, pay raises, desirable work assignments, or training. Theme 2 illuminates participants' reasons for not reporting sexual harassment cases. Four subthemes underscored participants' sexual harassment reporting reluctance: (a) lack of employment opportunity, (b) fear of public condemnation, (c) fragile judicial system, and (d) the culture of silence. Theme 3 elucidates participants' descriptions of quid pro quo sexual harassment effects on women. Six subthemes illuminated these effects: (a) impediment of women's career prospects, (b) undermining women's job credibility, (c) reinforcement of women's dependence on men, (d) discouragement of academic pursuit, (e) encouragement of workplace promiscuity, and (f) impact on women's mental health. The study's findings highlight that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment harms women who live in developing nations, like Liberia.

Interpretation of the Findings

This section presents a discussion on key findings concerning how these results confirm, disconfirm, and extend information related to the sexual harassment literature. I present the interpretation of the results below.

Theme 1: Sex for Employment or Sexploment

The study results found a consensus among participants regarding the meaning of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. All 13 participants perceived quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment as sex for employment or 'sexploment.' Sex for

employment or sexploiment is the demand for sexual favors by employers and their associates in exchange for employment-related benefits, hiring, promotions, pay raises, and desirable work assignments and training. They explained that quid pro quo sexual harassment is nothing less than the gatekeepers of employment-related benefits exploiting their position to solicit sexual activities from unemployed women or working women interested in climbing up the organization ladder.

Participants' insights regarding quid pro quo sexual harassment are consistent with findings by prevailing researchers (Anita et al., 2020; Aycock et al., 2019; Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017) in that quid pro quo sexual harassment involves employers abusing their power to solicit sexual favors in exchange for jobs. Khumalo et al. (2015) specifically described that these sexual activities may be in the forms of unwelcoming sexual advances, touching, and the constant request for dates.

While the existing sexual harassment literature views employers as the primary-perpetrators of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment (Aljerian et al., 2017; Halouani et al., 2019; Khumalo et al., 2015), the study findings offer novel insights about the phenomenon. A few participants reported that employers' associates mastermind quid pro quo sexual arrangements. They explained that these individuals often exploit their connection with employers to request sexual activities from women in exchange for jobs. Participants noted that women's refusal to accept these individuals' de trop sexual advances leads to an upsurge in women's unemployment in Liberia. This result illuminates that women's failure to comply with these de trop sexual advances means they will complain and risk the job prospects of others.

Theme 2: Hesitancy in Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment Reporting

Despite consensus among the participants concerning quid pro quo sexual harassment pervasiveness in Liberia, they reported that many employees, notably female employees, are afraid to speak about their experience. Hesitancy in quid pro quo sexual harassment reporting manifests itself in several impediments. A few of the participants noted that they ceased reporting sexual harassment complaints because of the fear they might lose their jobs, which could impact their capability to support their families. Participants illuminated how the struggle to find reliable jobs, and the socioeconomic prestige of having one in Liberia hinders sexually harassed women from sharing. The results confirm findings by existing researchers (Feldblum & Lipnic, 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2017) that sexually harassed employees refrained from speaking about their sexual harassment experience as they fear employers may use that to target them in the workplace.

Consistent with the prevailing literature, a few participants mentioned that public condemnation, where sexually harassed women are often abused, ridiculed, and blamed for the harassment, unequivocally weakens their motivation to come forward with sexual harassment incidents (Aljerian et al., 2017; Namaganda et al., 2021). For example, Namaganda et al. (2021) found that sexually harassed women may refrain from sharing their experiences because they fear that their complaints would be met with skepticism, leading to blame and public ridicule. Participants also disclosed that they remained silent because sexual harassment leads to ostracization and premature breakups as sexually harassed women are perceived negatively in Liberia. The participants' responses fit the

findings by existing researchers (Namaganda et al., 2021) that sexually harassed women refrained from reporting because of the post-reporting negative consequences, including being shunned by loved ones and possibly damaging their future marital plan.

In association with the barriers above, participants linked their reasons for not reporting sexual harassment to the legal practices that were corrupt and apathetic to sexually harassed women's excruciating pain. The fragile judicial system is evident in the court's inaction and bias in addressing sexual harassment complaints and police officers' decision to scrutinize and downplay the credibility of the victim's story. Participants noted that these manifestations are ample reasons they keep silent because they do not feel confident that the harassers will be brought to justice. These facts substantiate the findings of Divon and Bøås (2017), indicating that the fragile judicial system in Liberia makes addressing sexual harassment a challenge. Divon and Bøås postulated that the corrupt nature of the legal system makes it easy for harassers to offer a bribe to avoid being brought to justice, making sexually harassed women's fight for justice unlikely. Pinky echoed these sentiments, “. . . Most of the perpetrators have police officers and judges in their pockets. Taking legal action against them is like taking legal action against yourself. You will not win, so what's the point?”

The study participants reported that they abstained from sharing their experience openly because of a culture that normalized sexual harassment, resulting in public backlash directed towards sexually harassed women. They revealed that sexual coercion is seen as the *sine qua non* for women's effective engagement at work and what it means to be a team player. These views confirm the findings of other researchers

(Armitage, 2022; Namaganda et al., 2021) that illuminated that societal indifference regarding sexual harassment impedes sexually harassed women's interest in reporting sexual harassment complaints.

Theme 3: Effects of Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment

When asked to describe the effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment, all the participants illuminated that it harms women. Participants noted that these quid pro quo sexual arrangements affect women's active participation at work. Sexually harassed women are likely to withdraw from the organization's functions because they may find their working environment unexciting and as a strategy to avoid the harassers. Their withdrawal impedes their ability to adequately implement their work responsibility because they may struggle to keep up to date with the ongoing organization's changes that could take place in their absence. Participants further explained that women's inability to perform their job obligations often leads to them being demoted, fired, or made to attend training classes to enhance their performance, which can be degrading and a 'slap in the face.' These unfair practices, resulting from quid pro quo sexual arrangements, intrudes on women's sustained employability.

The results are consistent with findings by previous researchers (McLaughlin et al., 2017; Mulugeta et al., 2022) that women's work absence affects their job performance and standing in the competitive job market because they lack the skills needed. A few participants reported that quid pro quo sexual harassment thwarted working women's career interest. They noted that the perpetrators do not directly fire their targets. Instead, they exclude them from work activities, such as job training that

could help them grow professionally. Participants' reports and the existing sexual harassment literature suggest that women's unwillingness to succumb to employers' and their associates' sexual advances impedes their future career prospects.

Several other participants reported that it reinforces women's dependence on men. When women prematurely quit a job due to sexual harassment, they often end up being unemployed or working in low-paying jobs, contributing to the socio-economic gap between women and men, notably in emerging democracies, like Liberia. Participants noted that this financial unevenness makes it challenging for women to support themselves and their families, cultivating intimate relationships with men they perceived to have money to support themselves and their families. The findings echo previous researchers' findings (Khumalo et al., 2015; McLaughlin et al., 2017) that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment contributes to male chauvinism, resulting in women's marginalization in the homes.

Participants' lived experiences expand findings by other researchers that quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment undermines women's job credibility (see Eagly & Carli, 2007). Participants explained that when women fracture the glass ceiling and get a job, especially one that puts them in power, orthodox male chauvinistic views about their capabilities continue to undermine their credibility. This distrust manifests itself in the public biased against women. Participants noted that many believe the only logical explanation for a woman getting a job or a promotion is because she *slept with the boss* or someone with connections to the boss. Women are often seen as unworthy of the position regardless of their qualifications. As the participants echoed, this public distrust

leads to individuals not taking women seriously because they do not have faith in them. Hence, making their input in decision-making within an organization inconsequential.

The study's results offer novel insights about quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment. As the study's participants described, quid pro quo sexual harassment as a condition for employment weakens many young women's interest in education. These quid pro quo sexual arrangements make the value once attached to education less valuable. Participants revealed that many young women no longer see education as a "head-start to success" but rather a means to "drown in college debts," triggering public humiliation. Many people assumed the only logical explanation behind recent graduates' unemployment is that they are either *cursed* or "cannot defend their degrees." Nohn echoed these sentiments:

When I got my Masters, I was unemployed for almost two and a half years. During this period, I felt I was going to die, almost everybody had something to say about me being jobless. People told me I needed prayers because it wasn't 'normal' for me to graduate with honor, yet I can't get a job. Others felt I wasn't qualified for the degree; they said, 'I paid money to get my degree,' [leading to more ridicules].

The participants further explained that their demotivation in pursuing an education stemmed from seeing other young women without degrees nor work experience employed because they succumbed to the employers' sexual advances. They noted that this type of behavior has resulted in many young women being more concerned with enriching their physical appearance than developing their human

intellect. The participants also highlighted the financial struggles to many families brought on by education costs. Most described that many parents sell on the streets and in the marketplaces and often risk their lives by traveling on dangerous roads to fund their children's education with the hope that when they graduate, they will, in return, help to improve the family's lifestyle. As a result, many parents sacrifice the future of some of their kids to be able to support one or two of their children's education endeavors, notably those they perceived to be doing well in school. The participants noted that many parents hope the child or children sent to school would be able to support their siblings, forced to drop out of school, but only to see this hope shattered because individuals in positions of authority refused to hire young women on merits. Such unfair practices suggest that *beauty and the willingness to offer one's body as collateral* in exchange for a job is the modern version of what society meant when they say, "sometimes who you know is better than what you know" to determine an individual career success.

A few participants revealed that workplace quid pro quo sexual harassment augments sexual promiscuity among employees. They indicated that the prestige of employees, notably males, is no longer based on their practical contributions to an organization's growth but rather on how many "sexual partners" they have at work. They clarified that this shift in what it means to be an epitome of reputable employee results in many male employees incessantly pressuring female co-workers for dates to polish their dating list as a means of boosting their workplace morale. The participants explained further that workplace sexual promiscuity manifested in hindrances preventing sexually harassed women from reporting. They noted that the lack of and the ineffectiveness of

law to prevent gender discrimination means that male co-workers can sexually harass their female counterparts and “walk-sky-free” or be “celebrated as lover boys.” They highlighted that those supposed to create a safe working environment for their employees are themselves the touch bearer of these morally inexcusable undertakings. As a result, employees who are apathetic to these workplace sexual dealings may work in isolation, as described by the participants.

Participants also reported that they experienced health problems because of the harassment. One in three participants reported they experience mental health problems, including anger, anxiety, depression, insomnia, nausea, low self-esteem, self-blaming, and withdrawal symptoms. The participants’ lived experiences expand findings by existing researchers (Cassino & Besen, 2019; Friborg et al., 2017) that victims of sexual harassment experienced psychological distress, such as depression. A few participants explained that they suffered from other health conditions, including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), which is consistent with other researchers’ findings (Khumalo et al., 2015). In addition, while Van Tu et al. (2020) found linkages between sexual harassment and obesity, this study’s results disconfirm this view. A few participants reported losing weight because they were stressed about the harassment that food began the least of their concern, resulting in loss of appetite. Some participants illuminated that food reminded them of the harassers because their experience occurred after going on dates at fancy restaurants.

Applying the Theoretical Framework to the Findings

I used Feinberg's (1984) harm principle to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working environment. Feinberg listed five requirements in which an individual's conduct can be considered a harm to another. According to Feinberg:

A harms B when 1) A acts 2) in a manner which is defective or faulty in respect to the risks it creates to B, that is, with the intention of producing the consequences for B that follow, or similarly adverse ones, or with negligence or recklessness in respect to those consequences; and 3) A's acting in that manner is morally indefensible, that is, neither excusable nor justifiable; and 4) A's action is the cause of a setback to B's interests, which is also 5) a violation of B's right. (pp. 105-106)

In the context of the harm principle, employers and their associates can be regarded as A, individuals engaging in quid pro sexual arrangements. The participants illuminated employers and their associates exploit their position to solicit sexual favors from them in exchange for jobs, satisfying Feinberg's (1984) first requirement. Participants reported that employers and their associates engaged in unfair workplace practices, including intentionally excluding them from the organization's function, exposing them to numerous challenges that impact their job performance. These unfair practices became a risk as it intrudes on their sustained employability.

The participants' responses satisfy the second requirement of Feinberg's (1984) harm principle because employers and their associates knowingly and through disregard

produced consequences that harm women. The third requirement needed in justifying that A harms B is for A's conduct to be morally indefensible. Participants divulged that they were asked incessantly by employers and sometimes their associates to offer their bodies as collateral in exchange for employment-related benefits. Employers' and their associates' actions are morally inexcusable because they interfere with participants' liberty.

Feinberg's (1984) fourth requirement, in which A's action harm B, is for A's conduct to set back B's interest. Participants reported that they experienced numerous social problems, including psychological trauma. They noted that these social problems hindered their ability to achieve their future goals. The fifth requirement to consider A's action harmful to B is for such conduct to violate B's right. Participants reported that employers and their associates deprive them of equal opportunity to develop their careers, which violates the participants' rights.

To this end, then, when applying Feinberg's (1984) harm principle to the findings, participants illuminated that quid pro quo sexual harassment negatively impacts their capability to realize their more ultimate life goals. These life goals may be in pursuit of a profession, which becomes attainable by the joint fulfillment of welfare interests. Feinberg postulated that welfare interests are step-by-step goals whose shared self-actualization helps individuals accomplish a more prominent goal. For instance, giving women the chance to obtain a job, sustain the job, and develop on the job can be considered a welfare interest, whose joint achievement may lead to them accomplishing a bigger goal, like having a career. Therefore, when these step-by-step goals become

thwarted, they are undoubtedly harmed. Whatever that may be, their more prominent goal undoubtedly becomes defeated, too, a concern raised by the participants. They reported that what they hoped to achieve in life became defeated by quid quo sexual arrangements in Liberia's public sector working environment.

Limitations of the Study

My study was not inclusive of Liberia's working women population because all the participants were Liberian women 18 years of age and older who have been employed for at least 1 year and victims of quid quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector. Hence, my research is limited in terms of answering questions about working women who did not meet the inclusion criteria. It is conceivable that working women outside the study scope would respond differently to the posed research question.

Similarly, few of the participants acknowledged that their quid pro quo sexual harassment accounts happened almost four years ago. Thus, it is possible that they may have understated or overstated their experiences. Using the current research question to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment shortly after it happened would be an area to explore. Additionally, one-third of the participants were skeptical about being audio recorded, fearing I could use the recording against them, especially me having no connection with them personally and professionally. Besides, with myself being a male researcher asking about their sexual harassment experiences, participants feared that I would share these interviews with my male friends. However, after I restated the study's purpose and reassured them that their identities were

confidential, including furthered verbal guarantees related to the interview methods, all participants agreed to be interviewed and audio recorded.

Recommendations

My study's findings provide some novel insights regarding the effects of quid pro quo sexual harassment on Liberian women, thus giving voice to members of this marginalized population. All 13 participants highlighted numerous responses they perceived to impede their disclosure of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working community. These responses are some of the barriers that encumber victims from reporting sexual harassment cases, as highlighted in the existed literature (Khumalo et al., 2015; Namaganda et al., 2021). However, studies have not highlighted women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's working community. It would be beneficial to have these women's voices illuminated in research of this sort to enrich the study's findings. The newly collected data could lead to public policy initiatives, especially those designed to improve the lives of Liberian women.

Similarly, the failure, misinterpretation, and misappropriation of the law as illuminated by the participants' responses highlight a need to reevaluate Liberia's judicial system, ensuring that legal practitioners are legal practitioners and not the opposite. There is an exigent need for deep soul-searching when it comes to whom Liberians entrust to occupy the nation's political institutions. This studious reflection could lead to an improvement in policy changes and the legal practices within Liberia. For instance, it could help to make the legal system more accessible and affordable for all victims of

sexual harassment. Further, there is a need to provide ongoing education to law enforcement officials in bringing awareness to sexual harassment. By educating those responsible for ensuring the safety of the citizens, they could approach victims' stories with care, enthusiasm, and empathy. For example, if a potential victim comes forward with sexual harassment report, rather than brushing off the case as unimportant, they could handle the case, accordingly, ensuring they direct the victim's report to the right channel for adequate support.

My study's findings illuminate that the culture of silence, normalizing sexual harassment leads to sexually harassed women being blamed for the harassment. The participants revealed that this societal blame robs them of their mental health. It stimulated self-blame, challenges in aligning their experiences to the larger narratives, anxiety in sharing their sexual harassment experience, and prevented them from seeking treatment. As such, there is a need for policies changes and education programs that address this concern. For example, the government could enact policy changes to select a month in the calendar year, focusing on sexual harassment awareness. During this month, the public could receive education regarding sexual harassment. It could be a time to reinforce support to sexual harassment victims by creating a safe space to share their stories without fearing public condemnation. The government can implement these changes through numerous programs, including advertisements on TVs, Radio, social media, and campuses.

Similarly, the study's results offer novel insights about quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberian employment settings. Participants illuminated that quid pro quo

sexual arrangement weakens many young women's educational interests. From this view, policymakers and other gender advocate groups could consider participants' responses by ensuring that any plans to support young women's sustainable future target this concern. For example, they could address the unfair employment-related practices targeting women equal job opportunities. Failure to do so means any advocacy and policy initiatives to encourage young women to take their education seriously would be a waste of time, energy, and resources continuing the belief that education and its related expenses are a waste if the educated are not able to practically use the same.

To this end, future studies could utilize the current research question to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment outside the study's scope and into other marginalized societies or emerging countries, especially across the wider African continent. Additionally, future research could explore the study's results from a quantitative lens in which legal records, police cases, and other data could be generated for statistical analyses.

Implications

Based on the reviewed literature, my research is the first to explore women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia's public sector working community. I created a platform for Liberian women to add their voices to the overall sexual harassment narratives. By allowing Liberian women to share their experiences, I provided much-needed empirical data that policymakers could leverage to improve the ever-present push for gender equality in Liberia. For instance, by viewing quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment as sex for employment or 'sexploment,' it could

resolve the ambiguity surrounding the phenomenon, thereby, distinguishing it from other forms of gender-based violence in Liberia. With this unambiguous interpretation, the legal system could make quid pro quo sexual harassment punishable, regardless of employers' and their associates' defenses. Hence, creating a roadmap that supports and enhances victims' ability to share their experiences.

The study's findings could lead to a positive social change by creating awareness on barriers that encumber women from reporting sexual harassment complaints and how these barriers become impediments to their future career prospects. Likewise, local advocacy groups could use my empirical data and theoretical conclusions to encourage social change. They could pressure public officials to enact laws that encourage the adoption of a "zero-tolerance" policy for quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment and other forms of gender-based violence a priority to improve the health of Liberian women.

Additionally, participants indicated that they refrained from reporting sexual harassment complaints because of fear they might lose their jobs. Their responses could encourage the government to enact adequate provisions within its labor law, ensuring that sexually harassed women are not retaliated against for breaking their silence. Doing so could encourage more women to speak out regarding their experiences.

Correspondingly, my study has further supported the efficacy of using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to capture the discrete essence of a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology inquiry makes explicit the circumstances that serve as clues to understanding lived experiences (Holroyd, 2007).

Through this method of inquiry, researchers become aware that understanding lived experiences is a way of being in the world (Van Manen, 2014). This way of being in the world is what Heidegger (1962) refers to as *Dasien*, being there, which urges researchers to approach the phenomenon as it relates to the parts and view each part as they link to the whole, using the hermeneutic circle. Rather than researchers viewing themselves as experts when exploring a phenomenon, they approach the study with openness, giving each interview data equal attention and importance (Holroyd, 2007). For example, using hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to capture the essence of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment described by Liberian women. By employing this method, I became aware that my lifeworld and interest in understanding Liberian women's lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment were inseparable. I used my foresight or preconceived knowledge as a signpost to develop new insight into the phenomenon. My interest in exploring the phenomenon was "not in knowing more, but on knowing differently" (Holroyd, 2007, p. 3). Thus, I sat on the exploration bench with openness, allowing the study's participants to enlighten me. Through this approach, I saw quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment differently, as illuminated by Liberian women.

Conclusion

By exploring Liberian women's lifeworld of quid pro quo sexual harassment in employment, this hermeneutic phenomenological study validates that its impacts are undeniably devastating for women from all lifestyles. Working women in Liberia's public sector struggled to find suitable employment because many employers used quid pro quo sexual arrangements as a condition for employment. Such illicit and unethical

employment practice hinders their chances to forge a professional career. Despite quid pro quo sexual harassment harm on Liberian women, many of them mentioned being afraid to report their sexual harassment experiences, fearing that it could have negative ramifications. They illuminate that job scarcity, the culture of silence, normalizing sexual harassment, and the corrupt judicial system, where bribery determines the verdict of cases, encumbers them from reporting. They also suggest that de trop sexual arrangements made a condition for employment, undermined their job credibility, encouraged workplace promiscuity, and demotivated them to pursue a higher education, which intrudes on their sustained employability. It is my hope and prayer that policymakers, and advocacy groups will find useful information from this study in helping improve the health of Liberian women.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Date:

Name of (Women's Movement Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director)

Address

Dear (Name),

I am Gbelly Arrington Johnson, a Walden University [United States] doctoral student studying Public Policy and Administration with emphasis on Terrorism, Mediation, and Peace. I am conducting my doctoral research on Liberian public sector working women in an effort to explore their lived experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment. It is my hope that by gaining insights on their lived experiences of this phenomenon local advocacy groups can have information sufficient to help support Liberia government lobbying efforts to develop programs that focuses on women, in general, and female jobseekers who are experiencing sexual harassment not only in the workplace, but throughout the nation.

I am kindly seeking your support in identifying working women in Liberia's public sector employment setting who have been employed for at least 1 year and may have been victims of quid pro quo sexual harassment and are willing to be interviewed. Once these individuals are identified, I would like to meet with them to discuss the study. I have attached an informational flyer to be posted on your institution's bulletin board, website, and social media accounts to help with recruitment. My contact details are included.

Study participation is voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. All interview information will be confidential and reported in the aggregate only. A token of appreciation for participation will be provided to each participant.

To this end, I welcome your phone call to address any questions or concerns you may have regarding my dissertation research and your role in pinpointing potential participants. Below you will find my contact information in order to reach me.

Sincerely,

Gbelly Arrington Johnson, Doctoral candidate

Walden University

Phone # [423-XXX-XXXX]

Email gbelly.johnson@xxxxxx.edu

Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

***Have you experienced quid pro quo sexual harassment in
Liberia's public sector?***



If so, be a part of a dissertation study
exploring women's quid pro quo sexual harassment experiences

For your participation you will receive 10 USD

You may be eligible to participate if:

- **18 years and older.**
- **Employed for at least 1 year in Liberia's public sector.**
- **Have been a victim of quid pro quo sexual harassment**
- **Willing to participate in a 60-minute audio-recorded interview using Zoom**

Please contact Gbelly Arrington Johnson via this gbelly.johnson@xxxxxx.edu for more information.

Appendix C: Letter to Participants

Women's Quid Pro Quo Sexual Harassment in Liberia's Public Sector

Date:

Dear (insert name),

I hope this note finds you well. My name is Gbelly Arrington Johnson, a Walden University [United States] doctoral student majoring in Public Policy and Administration.

As part of my doctoral program, I am conducting a research study on working women in Liberia's public sector and I would like to invite you to participate as "interviewee."

The recruitment and participation process will require you to complete an Informed Consent statement, which I will e-mail to you, and meeting with me in a setting convenient to you via a Zoom meeting. My study is focused on your experiences of quid pro quo sexual harassment in the public sector workplace. The entire interview process should take no more than 60 minutes. Your responses to the interview questions will be audio recorded upon your approval, and the information you provided will be kept confidential and only reported as aggregate data. Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience to set up a date and time that works best for you.

You can contact me by e-mail **gbelly.johnson@xxxxxx.edu** if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Gbelly Arrington Johnson

Appendix D: Interview Questions

Semistructured Interview Protocol

Since this a semi-structured interview, I will not ask each specific question below. Nonetheless, I will make sure to cover the topic.

To participant: “The purpose of this interview is to explore your lived experience of quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia’s public sector.”

I will begin the interview with the following question: “What is your perception of quid pro quo sexual harassment? How did you come to view quid pro quo sexual harassment in that manner?”

When appropriate, I will ask the following questions:

1. How would you describe your experience with quid pro quo sexual harassment in Liberia’s public sector working environment?
2. What can you tell me about your experience with quid pro quo sexual harassment?
3. How did the experience affect you?
 - a. What changes, if any, do you associate with the experience?
4. What feelings were generated by the experience?
 - a. How did what you felt affect your public sector employment interest?
5. What incident connected with the experience stood out for you?
 - a. How did the incident affect your view of being a woman in the workplace?
6. How did the experience influence your ability to do your job – can you give me examples?
 - a. How did the experience influence your liberty in the workplace?

7. How did the experience influence your ability to pursue a career?
8. How did the experience affect your sustained employability?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me as it relates to your experience?