Differences in the Perception of Sexual Harassment by Gender and Ethnicity among Selected Malaysian Undergraduates

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Abstract
Sexual harassment is generally perceived as a social issue predominantly found in the workplace. However, it can also occur at various stages of youth and adolescence. University students who will soon join the workforce are equally vulnerable to sexual harassment. It is hypothesized that lack of understanding and awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment have made the youth easy targets of perpetrators. This study identifies the level of awareness and perceptions of sexual harassment among students in a public university of Malaysia. Being multiethnic and multicultural, Malaysia offers a diverse social demographic context for comparison across ethnic groups such as the Malay, Chinese, and Indian. This study further explores how gender, ethnicity, culture, and personal encounters shape one's perceptions of sexual harassment. We hope this empirical study will shed light for stakeholders in youth development to address this critical yet under-publicized youth issue.

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Keywords
Youth, sexual harassment, gender, ethnicity, Malaysia

Introduction
Sexual harassment has long been recognized as a critical yet underportrayed issue that is commonly faced by workers, especially female employees in the workplace. It is generally defined as the unwelcome attention of a sexual nature, occurring through verbal or physical interaction (Fogarty, 2008). Categorizing harassment, Wolfe and Chiodo (2008) said it can take on a physical form (such as pulling off clothing or rubbing against another person), as well as a verbal form (such as sexual comments, jeers, rumor spreading, or sexual jokes aimed at an individual).

The literature review indicates that equal attention has been paid to sexual harassment involving both females and males in the workplace. Unfortunately, less attention is paid to the fact that sexual harassment is a rising problem among the youth, especially the undergraduates on university campuses. Recent studies have indicated that at least 30 percent of the female undergraduates are victims of sexual harassment, but only 5 percent to 10 percent of these females report the harassment with only the most severe incidences of harassment being brought to light (Birdeau, Somers, & Lenihan, 2005; Halbesleben, 2009).

In Malaysia, Sabitha and Rusimah (2003) found that 80 percent of the 108 university students under study had experienced at least one form of sexual harassment. Similarly, the results of the latest study conducted by Noraida et al. (2011) among undergraduates at a local university in Malaysia also revealed that as high as 75.1 percent of the undergraduates had experienced sexual harassment at least once.

To date, only two public universities in Malaysia, that is, University of Science Malaysia and University of Malaya, have adopted a sexual harassment policy within the university setting, detailing the proper procedures to report sexual harassment incidences by either students or staff. The enforcement of such a university policy reflects the need to