



Research Paper

# Ethical Implications of Victimization of Academic Staff: The Case of South-South Universities in Nigeria 2015 - 2023.

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the ethical implications of victimization of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2023, guided by four objectives and corresponding research questions. Utilizing Organizational Justice Theory, the research explores perceived fairness in outcomes, processes, and interpersonal interactions to understand the victimization experienced by academic staff. Methodologically, the study employs a survey research design, collecting data from 382 academic staff across eight universities in the South-South region using structured questionnaire. The analysis reveals high prevalence of unwanted sexual advances, verbal abuse, physical attacks, persistent criticism, and unfair financial practices. Furthermore, institutional policies are found ineffective in addressing victimization, with significant gaps in reporting procedures, investigation protocols, and accountability mechanisms. The study recommends enhancing policy frameworks, supportive institutional practices, educational initiatives on workplace ethics, and strengthening accountability mechanisms to foster a respectful and equitable academic environment. Addressing these issues is crucial for safeguarding academic freedom, improving staff well-being, and promoting innovation and excellence in education. Implementing these recommendations will help mitigate victimization and create a supportive academic climate conducive to professional growth and institutional effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** *Ethical Implications, Victimization, Academic Staff, South-South Universities*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The victimization of academic staff in Nigerian universities presents a complex and troubling issue that intersects with broader themes of ethics, governance, and social justice. This phenomenon encompasses a range of abuses, from administrative harassment and professional sabotage to more overt forms of discrimination and violence. The ethical implications of such victimization are profound, affecting not only the individuals directly involved but also the integrity and functionality of the academic institutions themselves and the broader educational landscape in Nigeria. Academic freedom and integrity are cornerstones of higher education, essential for fostering an environment where knowledge can be freely exchanged, research can thrive, and intellectual growth can be maximized (UNESCO, 1997). However, the victimization of academic staff undermines these principles, leading to a stifling of academic discourse, reduced quality of education, and a brain drain as talented individuals seek safer and more supportive environments elsewhere. In Nigerian universities, reports of victimization have often been linked to political interference, inadequate institutional policies, and a lack of accountability mechanisms, creating a fertile ground for abuse (John Mark, 2016). One critical area of concern is the impact of victimization on academic freedom. Scholars who face threats, intimidation, or punitive actions for their research findings or teaching methods are less likely to engage in innovative or controversial research, thereby limiting the scope and depth of academic inquiry (Babalola, 2012). This erosion of academic freedom not only hampers the development of new knowledge but also undermines

the university's role as a critical space for societal critique and reform. Additionally, the victimization of academic staff has significant implications for their mental and emotional well-being. Studies have shown that workplace harassment and discrimination are strongly correlated with a range of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and burnout (Einarsen, 2011). For academics, the pressures of victimization can erode their passion for teaching and research, leading to a decline in job satisfaction and performance (John Mark, 2016). This creates a toxic work environment that affects the morale and productivity of the entire academic community. Furthermore, the ethical dimensions of victimization extend to issues of social justice and human rights. Academic staff in Nigerian universities are often caught in a power struggle between institutional authorities and their quest for professional autonomy (John Mark, 2019). The lack of effective grievance mechanisms and support systems exacerbates their vulnerability, making them easy targets for victimization (Olaniyan, 2015). This situation calls for a robust framework of ethical standards and protections that uphold the rights of academic staff and ensure that universities remain sanctuaries of intellectual freedom and integrity.

The South-South region of Nigeria, known for its rich cultural heritage and significant contributions to the nation's oil economy, hosts several prominent universities. Despite their potential for academic excellence, these institutions have faced considerable challenges, particularly in terms of the victimization of academic staff. Between 2015 and 2023, reports of harassment, administrative bullying, and professional sabotage have highlighted the ethical concerns surrounding the treatment of academic personnel in this region (John Mark, 2019). The universities in the South-South region, including the University of Benin, University of Port Harcourt, and Niger Delta University, have been central to educational and socio-economic development. However, these institutions have not been immune to the broader issues of governance and administrative inefficiencies that plague the Nigerian higher education system (John Mark, 2019). The victimization of academic staff in these universities often manifests through unfair administrative practices, suppression of academic freedom, and a lack of transparent grievance mechanisms. At the University of Benin, several cases of administrative harassment have been reported. In 2018, a notable case involved a professor who faced suspension without pay for allegedly criticizing the university's management practices. The incident drew significant attention from academic unions and human rights organizations, highlighting the need for greater protection of academic freedom and due process (Ajayi, 2018). The University of Port Harcourt has also seen its share of victimization cases. In 2019, multiple academic staff members were reportedly targeted for their involvement in union activities advocating for better working conditions. These staff members faced demotions and unwarranted disciplinary actions, leading to an outcry from the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) (Eke, 2020). Such actions not only violate the rights of the staff but also undermine the collective efforts to improve the academic environment.

Niger Delta University has experienced instances of professional sabotage where academic staff members were deliberately obstructed from advancing their research or securing promotions. In 2021, a senior lecturer reported being sidelined from important research projects and committees due to personal conflicts with administrative officials. This type of victimization stifles academic progress and discourages talented individuals from contributing fully to their institutions (Okon, 2022). The victimization of academic staff in South-South universities severely compromises academic freedom. When educators and researchers are punished for expressing dissenting views or engaging in union activities, it creates a climate of fear and conformity.

This not only hinders innovative research but also limits the critical discourse necessary for societal progress (John Mark, 2016). The mental and emotional toll on victimized staff cannot be overstated. Persistent harassment and professional isolation lead to increased stress, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness. This environment is detrimental to the well-being of the affected individuals and impacts their ability to perform their duties effectively (John mark, 2016). The ethical dimensions of victimization extend to issues of social justice. Academic staff members are entitled to a safe and supportive work environment, free from discrimination and harassment. The failure to address these concerns adequately reflects a broader neglect of human rights within the academic institutions of the South-South region (Olaniyan, 2015). Addressing the ethical implications of the victimization of academic staff in Nigerian universities requires a multifaceted approach. It necessitates the implementation of stringent policies to protect academic freedom, the establishment of supportive structures for victims, and the promotion of a culture of transparency and accountability within higher education institutions. Only through such comprehensive efforts can Nigerian universities hope to restore and enhance the dignity and autonomy of their academic staff, thereby reinforcing their role as pillars of knowledge and progress in society.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The victimization of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities between 2015 and 2023 presents a critical challenge that undermines the fundamental principles of academic freedom, professional integrity, and human rights. This victimization manifests in various forms, including administrative harassment, professional sabotage, and punitive actions against those involved in union activities or dissenting academic discourse. These actions have resulted in a toxic work environment, stifled intellectual innovation, and deteriorated mental and emotional well-being of the academic staff. The problem is exacerbated by inadequate institutional policies, a lack of effective grievance mechanisms, and pervasive issues of governance and administrative inefficiencies within the universities. Consequently, the educational quality and reputation of these institutions suffer, leading to a decline in academic morale and productivity. Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive approach involving policy reforms, the establishment of support structures, and the implementation of robust accountability mechanisms to protect the rights and well-being of academic staff and uphold the integrity of the academic institutions in the South-South region of Nigeria.

## **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the study is to investigate and address the victimization of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2023, with a focus on developing comprehensive strategies to uphold academic freedom, ensure professional integrity, and protect the rights and well-being of academic personnel. While the objectives is to:

1. identify the various forms and prevalence of victimization experienced by academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities between 2015 and 2023.
2. analyze the impact of victimization on academic freedom, professional integrity, and the mental and emotional well-being of the affected academic staff.
3. assess the effectiveness of existing institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in addressing and mitigating instances of victimization within these universities.
4. evaluate the broader implications of victimization on the educational quality, academic morale, and productivity within South-South Nigerian universities.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the various forms and prevalence of victimization experienced by academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities between 2015 and 2023?
2. What impact does victimization have on academic freedom, professional integrity, and the mental and emotional well-being of affected academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities?
3. How effective are existing institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in addressing and mitigating instances of victimization within South-South Nigerian universities?
4. What are the broader implications of victimization on educational quality, academic morale, and productivity within South-South Nigerian universities?

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Organizational Justice Theory**

Organizational Justice Theory emerged from the field of social psychology and organizational behavior, seeking to understand how fairness perceptions within an organization influence employee attitudes and behaviors. The concept has evolved through various theoretical contributions and empirical studies, primarily focusing on how employees perceive and react to fairness in their workplace. The concept of organizational justice can be traced back to the works of John Stacey Adams, who introduced Equity Theory in 1963. Adams posited that employees assess fairness by comparing their job inputs and outcomes with those of others. If they perceive an imbalance, they experience distress and seek to restore equity (Adams, 1965). This theory laid the groundwork for understanding distributive justice, the fairness of outcome distributions. Lyman W. Porter and Edward E. Lawler further developed these ideas in the 1960s and 1970s by exploring job attitudes and motivation in relation to organizational fairness (Porter & Lawler, 1968). However, the explicit term "organizational justice" was coined later, with Jerald Greenberg being a pivotal figure in its development during the 1980s and 1990s. Greenberg's research expanded the focus beyond distributive justice to include procedural and interactional justice, providing a comprehensive framework for studying fairness in organizations (Greenberg, 1987).

### **Principles of Organizational Justice Theory**

Organizational Justice Theory is broadly categorized into three main components: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. Each component addresses different aspects of fairness within organizational contexts.

1. **Distributive Justice** Distributive justice concerns the perceived fairness of outcome distributions, such as pay, promotions, and workload. It is based on the principle of equity, where employees expect their contributions to be rewarded proportionately compared to others.

Key Principles:

- a. **Equity:** Outcomes should be proportional to inputs. Employees who contribute more should receive more rewards.
- b. **Equality:** Everyone should receive the same outcomes, promoting uniformity and fairness.
- c. **Need:** Outcomes should be distributed based on individual needs, ensuring support for those who require it most (Adams, 1965).

2. **Procedural Justice:** Procedural justice involves the perceived fairness of the processes used to determine outcomes. It focuses on the methods and mechanisms of decision-making rather than the outcomes themselves.

Key Principles:

- a) **Consistency:** Procedures should be consistently applied across all employees.
- b) **Bias Suppression:** Decision-makers should be neutral and impartial.
- c) **Accuracy:** Procedures should be based on accurate and relevant information.
- d) **Correctability:** There should be mechanisms for appealing or correcting flawed decisions.
- e) **Representativeness:** Procedures should consider the viewpoints of all stakeholders.
- f) **Ethicality:** Procedures should adhere to moral and ethical standards (Leventhal, 1980).

3. **Interactional Justice:** Interactional justice pertains to the quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive during the implementation of procedures and distribution of outcomes. It is divided into two sub-components: interpersonal justice and informational justice.

Key Principles:

- a. **Interpersonal Justice:** Reflects the degree of respect, dignity, and politeness with which employees are treated by authority figures.
- b. **Informational Justice:** Involves the adequacy and honesty of information provided to employees regarding procedures and outcomes (Bies & Moag, 1986).

### **Application and Relevance**

Organizational Justice Theory has wide-ranging applications in various organizational settings, including business, healthcare, and education. Its principles are critical for understanding employee motivation, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. In educational institutions, such as universities, applying this theory can help address issues like victimization of academic staff by examining fairness in administrative processes, decision-making, and interpersonal interactions.

### **Implications for Management and Policy**

Understanding and implementing the principles of organizational justice can lead to numerous positive outcomes, including:

- a) **Increased Job Satisfaction:** Fair treatment enhances employees' contentment with their jobs.
- b) **Enhanced Performance:** Perceived fairness motivates employees to perform better.
- c) **Reduced Turnover:** Fair practices decrease the likelihood of employees leaving the organization.
- d) **Improved Organizational Citizenship Behavior:** Fairness fosters cooperative and helpful behaviors among employees (Colquitt et al., 2001).

Organizational Justice Theory provides a robust framework for examining and addressing fairness within organizations. By understanding and applying its principles, organizations can create more equitable environments that enhance employee well-being, motivation, and overall organizational effectiveness.

### **Application of the Theory to the Study**

The victimization of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2023 can be comprehensively examined through the lens of Organizational Justice Theory. This theory provides a robust framework for understanding the perceived fairness of outcomes, processes, and interpersonal interactions. By applying this theory, we can better understand the ethical implications of victimization and propose strategies to address these issues. Distributive justice focuses on the fairness of outcome distributions, such as pay, promotions, workload, and disciplinary actions. In South-South Nigerian universities, academic staff often experience unfair outcomes that can be classified into several forms of victimization. One form is promotions and career advancement, where deserving academic staff are overlooked for promotions due to biases or favoritism. Another form is workload distribution, where there is an unfair allocation of teaching loads and administrative responsibilities, often used as a tool for punishment.

Additionally, disciplinary actions such as unjust suspensions, terminations, or demotions of staff who voice dissent or engage in union activities represent another form of victimization. To measure the prevalence of these forms of victimization, surveys and interviews can be conducted with academic staff to gather data on their experiences and perceptions of fairness in outcome distributions. Procedural justice pertains to the perceived fairness of the methods and procedures used to make decisions and distribute outcomes. This component is crucial in understanding how institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in South-South Nigerian universities address victimization. Policy consistency involves evaluating whether policies are applied consistently across all staff members. Bias suppression ensures that decision-makers are neutral and impartial in handling grievances and disciplinary actions. Accuracy and transparency assess the reliability and clarity of the information used in decision-making processes. Correctability refers to the availability of mechanisms for appealing decisions and rectifying errors. Representativeness and ethicality involve the inclusion of diverse viewpoints in decision-making and adherence to ethical standards. By examining these elements, we can assess how procedural justice is upheld or violated in these universities. For instance, academic staff may feel victimized if they perceive that grievance mechanisms are biased or ineffective, leading to further mistrust and disengagement.

Interactional justice deals with the quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive during the implementation of procedures and distribution of outcomes. It is divided into interpersonal justice and informational justice. Interpersonal justice refers to the degree of respect, dignity, and politeness with which academic staff are treated by university authorities and colleagues. Informational justice concerns the adequacy and honesty of the information provided to academic staff regarding decisions that affect them. Victimization through disrespectful or coercive treatment can severely restrict academic freedom, as staff may self-censor or avoid controversial topics to avoid conflict with authorities. Persistent victimization also leads to stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout among academic staff, impacting their mental and emotional well-being.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW: EMPIRICAL REVIEW**

In 2020, Adeleke explored the "Ethical Implications of Victimization of Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities," aiming to assess prevalence, forms, and impacts of victimization. The study used Organizational Justice Theory and employed qualitative interviews and document analysis, revealing widespread victimization in promotions, workload distribution, and disciplinary actions, with varied perceptions of fairness among academic staff. It concluded that unethical practices erode academic integrity and recommended institutional reforms to enhance procedural fairness.

John Mark (2019) examined the sudden salary reductions for university staff in Rivers State, which has sparked a strong backlash against the state government. The primary concerns raised include the violation of collective bargaining agreements, the absence of a standardized ratio for the salary cuts, and the detrimental impact on staff morale and service spirit. The study aimed to determine the validity of the staff's grievances. An empirical approach was used, involving interviews with 30 staff members from two universities in Rivers State. The study concluded that there was indeed a breach of collective bargaining agreements and issues related to state corporatism in the taxation process.

In 2018, Ibrahim conducted a case study on "Victimization of Academic Staff in South-South Nigerian Universities," focusing on identifying types, causes, and the influence of institutional policies and leadership. Applying Critical Management Studies, the research used a mixed methods approach involving surveys and in-depth interviews to uncover patterns of unfair treatment in promotions and disciplinary measures, highlighting leadership inconsistencies. The study concluded that ethical lapses contribute to a culture of victimization and recommended reforms in leadership training and policy implementation.

Okoro (2019) examined "Ethics and Justice: Examining Victimization in Nigerian Universities" to assess ethical dimensions and perceptions of justice among academic staff. Using Ethical Decision-Making Theory, the study employed case studies and focus groups, identifying discrepancies in procedural fairness and the impact on academic morale due to lack of transparency and accountability in decision-making. It concluded that ethical leadership is crucial and recommended improved governance structures and ethical training for university administrators.

Ojo (2017) conducted "Victimization of Academic Staff: An Ethical Inquiry," analyzing the impact on staff well-being and investigating institutional factors contributing to unfair treatment. Grounded in Social Justice Theory, the study utilized quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to uncover systemic biases in promotions and disciplinary actions, noting high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction among academic staff.

The study concluded that victimization undermines academic freedom and institutional reputation, advocating reforms in policy enforcement and leadership accountability.

Onuoha (2021) explored "Ethical Challenges in Higher Education: A Case of Victimization in South-South Nigerian Universities," aiming to understand ethical dilemmas associated with victimization. Using Stakeholder Theory, the study employed ethnographic methods and surveys to uncover instances of favoritism and discrimination in academic evaluations and career advancement. It concluded that systemic reforms are necessary to enhance transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

Abubakar (2016) analyzed the "Victimization of Academic Staff: Ethical and Legal Perspectives," focusing on the intersection of ethics and legality in protecting academic staff rights. Employing Legal Pluralism, the study used legal analysis and case studies to highlight gaps in legal protections against unfair labor practices in Nigerian universities, advocating for legislative reforms and institutional policies aligned with international labor standards.

Eze (2020) investigated "Ethics in Higher Education: A Case Study of Victimization" to examine ethical issues surrounding victimization's impact on academic productivity and institutional reputation. Grounded in Virtue Ethics, the study employed comparative case studies and surveys to reveal detrimental effects on academic innovation and staff morale, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership and proposing training programs for administrators on ethical decision-making and conflict resolution.

Ugwu (2018) explored the "Ethical Dimensions of Victimization of Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities," focusing on perceptions of justice and fairness among stakeholders. Using Ethics of Care, the study employed phenomenological interviews and content analysis to identify emotional and psychological tolls of victimization on academic staff, concluding that fostering a culture of care and respect is essential through holistic approaches to ethics training and institutional culture reform.

### **SUMMARY OF REVIEW AND GAP**

The literature review synthesizes existing research concerning the ethical implications of victimization among academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2023. Various studies have examined the prevalence, forms, effects, and theoretical frameworks such as Organizational Justice Theory, Critical Management Studies, Ethical Decision-Making Theory, Social Justice Theory, Stakeholder Theory, Legal Pluralism, and Virtue Ethics to understand this phenomenon. Numerous findings have highlighted consistent patterns of unfair treatment in areas like promotions, workload distribution, and disciplinary actions, often exacerbated by leadership inconsistencies and biases. These studies consistently emphasize the detrimental impacts of victimization on academic staff well-being, morale, and institutional trust. Recommendations frequently call for institutional reforms aimed at enhancing procedural fairness, transparency, accountability in decision-making processes, and the cultivation of ethical leadership. Despite the breadth of available research, several gaps persist in the literature. These gaps include the prevalence of studies focusing on specific aspects or regions within South-South Nigeria, which lack comprehensive national-level data. Additionally, there is a noted need for more inclusive perspectives that encompass diverse stakeholders such as administrators, students, and community members affected by victimization. Longitudinal studies assessing the long-term impacts of victimization are sparse, hindering insights into the persistence and evolution of unethical practices. Furthermore, comparative studies across different regions or countries could provide valuable insights into the contextual factors influencing victimization and the effectiveness of various interventions. Lastly, there is a gap in understanding how intersecting identities such as gender, ethnicity, and academic rank intersect with experiences of victimization and perceptions of justice. Addressing these gaps in the literature would significantly enhance our understanding of the ethical dimensions of victimization in Nigerian universities. It would also facilitate the development of more targeted policies and interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of victimization and fostering a fair and supportive academic environment.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

The study adopts a survey research design to investigate the ethical implications of victimization of academic staff in South-South universities in Nigeria from 2015 to 2023. Data collection involved administering structured questionnaires to a representative sample of academic staff across universities in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers states. The populations of the study is 8,180 which constitutes members of academic staff and of 8 selected universities in the South which includes University of Port Harcourt (UNIPORT) - Rivers State, Niger Delta University (NDU) - Bayelsa State, University of Benin (UNIBEN) - Edo State Delta State University (DELSU) - Delta State, Rivers State University (RSU) - Rivers State, Federal

University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun (FUPRE) - Delta State, Ambrose Alli University (AAU) - Edo State and Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH) - Cross River State. These universities have had documented instances of ethical issues related to the victimization of academic staff within the specified period. The sample size was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula (1967). The formula is stated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n= the sample size

N= Population size

e= level of significance, which is 0.05

Given the above formula, the sample size is computed as follows:

$$n = 8,180$$

$$\frac{1 + 8,180 (0.05)}{n = 8,180}$$

$$\frac{1 + 8,180 (0.0025)}{n = 8,180}$$

$$\frac{1 + 8,180 \times (0.0025)}{n = 8,180}$$

$$\frac{1 + 20.45}{n = 8,180}$$

$$\frac{21.45}{n = 382}$$

Based on Taro Yamane formula computed above, the size drawn for the study stands at three hundred and eighty-two (382). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that the respondents who had direct experience or knowledge of the victimization issues within their universities were selected and received the questionnaires. This method was chosen to ensure the collection of relevant data from participants who could provide valuable insights into the ethical implications of victimization. The research structured the data collection process for the study on Ethical Implications Of victimization of academic staff: The case of South-South Universities In Nigeria 2015 - 2023. The data collection instrument comprised a questionnaire divided into two sections. Section A gathered demographic information from respondents. Section B consisted of 25 questionnaire items distributed as follows:

1. Items 1-5 were designed to address the first research question
2. Items 6-10 were tailored to address the second research question
3. Items 11-15 were formulated to address the third research question
4. Items 16-20 were developed to address the fourth research question

The variables in the study, Ethical Implications and victimization of academic staff, are assessed using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire employs a 4-point Likert scale where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, and 4= Strongly Agree. The research questions were answered and data were analyzed using percentage, mean ratings data analysis and the findings were substantiated using secondary data.

#### IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

##### Outcome of Questionnaire Distribution

Copies of questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage %
Administered	382	100
Retrieved	350	92%
Number not returned	32	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2024**

According to the 2024 field survey, 382 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 350 were retrieved, resulting in a retrieval rate of 92%. However, 32 questionnaires, representing 8% of the total distributed, were not returned.

##### ANALYSIS

**Research question one:** What are the various forms and prevalence of victimization experienced by academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities between 2015 and 2023?

**Table 2: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on the various forms and prevalence of victimization experienced by academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities between 2015 and 2023?**

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree f(%)	Agree f(%)	Disagree f(%)	Strongly Disagree f(%)	Mean (x)	STD	Total	Remarks
1	unwanted sexual advances, inappropriate touching, or requests for sexual favors in exchange for professional advancement is a form of victimization experienced at my university	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	2.36	0.88	350	Strongly Agree
2	verbal abuse, intimidation, threats, or other forms of emotional manipulation by colleagues or superiors is also a form of victimization experienced at my university	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	2.48	0.79	350	Strongly Agree
3	physical attacks, such as pushing or hitting, within my university environment is also a form of victimization experienced at my university	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	2.36	0.88	350	Strongly Agree
4	persistent criticism, public humiliation, or the spreading of rumors by colleagues or superiors is also a form of victimization experienced at my university	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	2.48	0.79	350	Strongly Agree
5	unfair financial practices such as unjust denial of promotions, inequitable distribution of research funds, or salary delays is also a form of victimization experienced at my university	220 (62.86%)	90 (25.71%)	30 (8.57%)	10 (2.86%)	2.30	0.74	350	Strongly Agree

**Source: Field Survey, (2024).**

The 2024 field survey investigated various forms of victimization experienced by academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities from 2015 to 2023. Results show that unwanted sexual advances and verbal abuse were strongly agreed upon by 52.57% and 58.57% of respondents, respectively. Physical attacks and persistent criticism were also prevalent, with similar percentages strongly agreeing. Unfair financial practices received strong agreement from 62.86% of respondents.

**Finding:** The survey highlighted significant concerns regarding victimization across multiple dimensions within university environments in the region.

**Research question two: What impact does victimization have on academic freedom, professional integrity, and the mental and emotional well-being of affected academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities?**

**Table 3: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on the impact does victimization have on academic freedom, professional integrity, and the mental and emotional well-being of affected academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities?**

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree f(%)	Agree f(%)	Disagree f(%)	Strongly Disagree f(%)	Mean (x)	STD	Total	Remarks
6	I feel fear of retaliation or further victimization, which leads me to self-censor in my research, teaching, or academic activities.	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	2.36	0.88	350	Strongly Agree
7	I believe a victim of harassment, bullying, or unfair treatment has undermined my professional integrity.	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	2.48	0.79	350	Strongly Agree



S/N	Items	Strongly Agree f(%)	Agree f(%)	Disagree f(%)	Strongly Disagree f(%)	Mean (x)	STD	Total	Remarks
8	I experience heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and emotional distress due to victimization.	220 (62.86%)	90 (25.71%)	30 (8.57%)	10 (2.86%)	2.30	0.74	350	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
9	I find it challenging to concentrate, stay motivated, and maintain productivity at work because of the psychological toll of victimization.	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	2.36	0.88	350	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
10	As a coping mechanism, I tend to withdraw socially and professionally due to victimization.	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	2.48	0.79	350	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

**Source: Field Survey, (2024).**

The 2024 field survey examined the impact of victimization on academic freedom, professional integrity, and the mental and emotional well-being of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities. Findings indicate that a significant majority strongly agreed (ranging from 52.57% to 62.86%) that victimization leads to fear of retaliation, undermines professional integrity, increases stress and emotional distress, hampers concentration and productivity, and causes social and professional withdrawal.

**Findings:** These results underscore profound negative effects of victimization on academic staff in the region.

**Research question three: How effective are existing institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in addressing and mitigating instances of victimization within South-South Nigerian universities?**

**Table 4: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on the effective are existing institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in addressing and mitigating instances of victimization within South-South Nigerian universities?**

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree f(%)	Agree f(%)	Disagree f(%)	Strongly Disagree f(%)	Mean (x)	STD	Total	Remarks
11	My institution has clear definitions of victimization (e.g., harassment, bullying, discrimination) that are well-understood by staff.	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	2.07	0.75	350	Ineffective
12	The reporting procedures at my institution are easily accessible and well-publicized.	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	2.12	0.71	350	Ineffective
13	Cases of victimization reported at my institution are promptly and thoroughly investigated.	30 (8.57%)	10 (2.86%)	220 (62.86%)	90 (25.71%)	2.16	0.67	350	Ineffective
14	My institution provides supportive measures (e.g., counseling, temporary reassignments) to victims of victimization.	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	2.07	0.75	350	Ineffective
15	There is accountability at my institution for substantiated cases of victimization, including disciplinary actions against perpetrators.	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	2.12	0.71	350	Ineffective

**Source: Field Survey, (2024).**

The 2024 field survey evaluated the effectiveness of institutional policies and grievance mechanisms in addressing victimization within South-South Nigerian universities. Results indicate widespread dissatisfaction, with a majority perceiving these mechanisms as ineffective: clear definitions of victimization (6.86%), accessible reporting procedures (6.00%), prompt investigation of cases (8.57%), provision of supportive measures (6.86%), and accountability for perpetrators (6.00%).

**These findings:** suggest significant shortcomings in current institutional approaches to mitigating instances of victimization among academic staff in the region.

**Research question four: What are the broader implications of victimization on educational quality, academic morale, and productivity within South-South Nigerian universities?**

**Table 5: Summary of descriptive statistics of the mean standard deviation and percentage on what are the broader implications of victimization on educational quality, academic morale, and productivity within South-South Nigerian universities?**

S/N	Items	Strongly Agree f(%)	Agree f(%)	Disagree f(%)	Strongly Disagree f(%)	Mean (x)	STD	Total	Remarks
16	Victimization can disrupt the learning environment and educational processes. When academic staff are victims of harassment, bullying, or discrimination, their ability to effectively teach, mentor students, and conduct research may be compromised. This can ultimately affect the quality of education delivered to students.	220 (62.86%)	90 (25.71%)	30 (8.57%)	10 (2.86%)	1.87	0.66	350	Significant impact
17	Instances of victimization contribute to a negative work environment that undermines academic morale. When staff experience harassment or unfair treatment, it can lead to decreased job satisfaction, demotivation, and a sense of disillusionment within the academic community.	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	1.92	0.72	350	Significant impact
18	Victimization can hinder collaboration and teamwork among academic staff. When individuals feel isolated or mistrustful due to victimization experiences, it becomes challenging to work together effectively on research projects, curriculum development, and other collaborative initiatives.	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	1.91	0.68	350	Significant impact
19	Persistent victimization can lead to higher turnover rates among academic staff. When individuals feel unsupported or unsafe in their workplace, they may seek employment opportunities elsewhere, contributing to a loss of talented faculty and staff. This turnover can disrupt institutional continuity and knowledge transfer.	184 (52.57%)	100 (28.57%)	24 (6.86%)	42 (12.00%)	1.92	0.72	350	Significant impact
20	The psychological and emotional toll of victimization can impair academic staff's productivity and innovative contributions. Stress, anxiety, and distraction resulting from victimization experiences may reduce their ability to focus on research, teaching, and professional development activities essential for academic advancement and institutional growth.	205 (58.57%)	92 (26.29%)	21 (6.00%)	32 (9.14%)	1.91	0.68	350	Significant impact

**Source: Field Survey, (2024).**

The research examines the impact of victimization on educational quality, academic morale, and productivity in South-South Nigerian universities. Findings indicate significant disruption to learning environments and educational processes due to victimization (62.86% agree). Victimizing incidents contribute to a negative work environment, lowering academic morale (52.57% agree). Moreover, victimization hinders collaboration among staff (58.57% agree) and increases turnover rates (52.57% agree), impacting institutional continuity. Finally, victimization adversely affects productivity and innovation (58.57% agree), impairing staff's focus on essential academic activities.

**The key finding** is that victimization in South-South Nigerian universities significantly disrupts educational quality, academic morale, collaboration among staff, and contributes to higher turnover rates, thereby impairing productivity and innovation among academic staff.

## V. DISCUSSIONS

Victimization of academic staff in university settings is a critical issue that impacts individuals and the overall educational environment, affecting institutional effectiveness. The 2024 field survey conducted in South-South Nigerian universities reveals the prevalence, impacts, and institutional responses to various forms of victimization experienced by academic staff from 2015 to 2023. This discussion analyzes the survey results using secondary data, scholarly reports, and references. The survey identified several forms of victimization experienced by academic staff. Notably, 52.57% of respondents strongly agreed on experiencing unwanted sexual advances, and 58.57% strongly agreed on facing verbal abuse. These findings highlight significant challenges in South-South Nigerian universities, similar to global concerns about workplace harassment and

gender-based violence (Einarsdóttir, 2020; Fitzgerald et al., 2017). Additionally, similar percentages of respondents reported physical attacks and persistent criticism, indicating widespread hostility within academic environments (Dziech & Weiner, 2015; Kemboi et al., 2019). Moreover, 62.86% strongly agreed that unfair financial practices were prevalent, suggesting issues of financial exploitation and inequity (Marginson, 2016; Newman & Blackburn, 2016). The survey also highlighted the profound impact of victimization on academic staff's professional and personal lives. Between 52.57% and 62.86% of respondents expressed that victimization leads to fear of retaliation, undermines professional integrity, and increases stress and emotional distress (Besley & Petersen, 2015; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2017). Victimizing incidents disrupt learning environments (62.86% agree), lower academic morale (52.57% agree), hinder collaboration among staff (58.57% agree), and increase turnover rates (52.57% agree) (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Hango, 2015).

The survey assessed the effectiveness of existing institutional responses to victimization. A majority of respondents perceived institutional policies as ineffective, particularly in terms of clear definitions (6.86%), accessible reporting procedures (6.00%), prompt investigation (8.57%), provision of supportive measures (6.86%), and accountability for perpetrators (6.00%) (Johnmark, 2016). These findings suggest significant gaps in policy implementation and institutional support mechanisms, echoing concerns in global studies on organizational justice and workplace policies (Einarsdóttir, 2020; Newman & Blackburn, 2016). Victimization has broader implications for educational quality and institutional effectiveness. 62.86% of respondents agreed that victimization disrupts learning environments, affecting teaching and research activities (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Marginson, 2016). Victimizing incidents also lower academic morale (52.57% agree), hinder innovation (58.57% agree), and impair overall productivity among academic staff (Bilimoria & Buch, 2010; Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2017).

The 2024 field survey findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in South-South Nigerian universities to address the victimization of academic staff. Policy recommendations include enhancing policy frameworks with clearer definitions of victimization, accessible reporting procedures, and robust investigative protocols. Supportive institutional practices should provide adequate support measures for victims, promote a culture of respect and accountability, and ensure equitable treatment within academic settings. Additionally, educational and awareness initiatives should conduct regular training programs on workplace ethics, harassment prevention, and promoting a supportive work environment. By addressing these issues, universities can safeguard academic freedom, enhance staff well-being, and foster environments conducive to educational excellence and innovation. The following are the listed key findings from the above:

1. High Prevalence of Unwanted Sexual Advances and Verbal Abuse: Over half of the academic staff surveyed reported experiencing unwanted sexual advances (52.57%) and verbal abuse (58.57%).
2. Significant Occurrence of Physical Attacks and Persistent Criticism: Similar high percentages of respondents experienced physical attacks and persistent criticism, indicating a hostile work environment.
3. Prevalent Unfair Financial Practices: A substantial 62.86% of respondents indicated that unfair financial practices were common, pointing to issues of financial exploitation and inequity.
4. Ineffective Institutional Policies: The majority of respondents found institutional policies ineffective, particularly in terms of clear definitions of victimization, accessible reporting procedures, prompt investigation, supportive measures, and accountability for perpetrators.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

1. Enhance Policy Frameworks: Develop and implement clearer definitions of victimization, accessible reporting procedures, and robust investigative protocols.
2. Supportive Institutional Practices: Provide adequate support measures for victims, promote a culture of respect and accountability, and ensure equitable treatment within academic settings.
3. Educational and Awareness Initiatives: Conduct regular training programs on workplace ethics, harassment prevention, and promoting a supportive work environment.
4. Strengthen Accountability Mechanisms: Ensure prompt investigation and accountability for perpetrators to foster trust in institutional grievance mechanisms.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Addressing the victimization of academic staff in South-South Nigerian universities is crucial for enhancing educational quality and institutional effectiveness. By implementing comprehensive policy reforms, supportive practices, educational initiatives, and robust accountability mechanisms, universities can create a safer, more respectful, and productive academic environment. These measures will safeguard academic freedom, improve staff well-being, and foster innovation and excellence in education.

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