



AWARENESS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment has gained global attention and has been recognized as a critical public health concern with significant negative impacts on victims' physical and mental health. This study aimed to find out the awareness of sexual harassment among secondary school students in Nawalparasi District, Nepal.

The descriptive cross-sectional research design was used to find out the awareness of sexual harassment among secondary-level students in Devchuli Municipality, Nawalparasi. Students studying in grades eight, nine, and ten were identified from two conveniently selected schools out of the 12 private schools in the study area. In total, 150 students took part in the study, and every one of them completed the questionnaire in its entirety. Data entry and analysis were done in Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods like frequency, percentage, mean, and chi-square to ascertain the relationship between the level of awareness of sexual harassment and the selected socio-demographic characteristics.

The findings showed that, among 150 respondents, most (82.0%) had a good level of awareness regarding sexual harassment. According to respondents' suggestions for preventing sexual harassment (SH) can be stopped by enacting strict rules, regulations, and policies against those who engage in the practice (85.3%), running awareness campaigns about the issue (83.3%), and offering training on how to handle sexual harassment (75.3%). There was no statistically significant relationship between the level of awareness of sexual harassment and the selected socio-demographic variables. It can be recommended that schools conduct an ongoing sensitization program or awareness campaign to teach students about sexual harassment periodically.

Keywords: abuse - awareness - secondary school - sexual harassment

INTRODUCTION

Unwanted sexual advances, demands or unreasonable requests for sexual favors, as well as other verbal, non-verbal, or physical acts of a sexual nature like staring, telling crude jokes, and making sexual remarks about a person's clothing, body, or appearance, are all examples of sexual harassment (SH) (Girdhar & Rajput 2019, Thapalia *et al.* 2019). Furthermore, it is recognized that this is a serious public health issue. It is viewed as a breach of social security, equality rights, and human rights, and it is receiving more and more attention on a global scale (Girdhar & Rajput 2019, Zaki *et al.* 2019, Thapalia *et al.* 2019).

In today's world, teenage SH is an issue for both boys and girls, and the consequences of this experience can have a significant impact on their lives as adults (Okoro & Obozokhai 2005). Exposure to sexual abuse increases the victims' risk of depression, violence, substance abuse, and various psychological comorbidities (Girdhar & Rajput 2019, Thapalia *et al.* 2019). A study done in Turkey stated that 13.4% of female school students reported having suffered sexual abuse (Alikasifoglu *et al.* 2006). Similar to this, a survey conducted in Kuwait found that 15.3% of schoolchildren had experienced sexual abuse (Al-Fayez, Ohaeri & Gado 2012).

Adolescence is a time of developing one's identity, engaging in peer exploration, and starting close friendships. As a result, schools are one of the major places where SH happens. Schools are frequently unaware of and uninformed about the problem (Sweetinz *et al.* 2022). Educational institutions offer students, teachers, and administrative personnel a secure setting for effective learning environments. Young women are especially susceptible to harassment and violence directed at them despite the fact that schools strive to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for the teaching and learning process (Mohanani, Gupta & Sagar 2017).

According to a study on the South West of Nigeria, university staff employees who engaged in sexual harassment were dismissed from their jobs 85% of the time and suspended 14.3% of the time. Female students reported experiencing more SH on campus (Omonijo *et al.* 2013).

A study found that those who had a high level of sexual harassment awareness (71.5%) were equipped to handle such situations skillfully and

bravely (Girdhar & Rajput 2019). Therefore, researchers thought that in order to lessen the issue, there needed to be a greater understanding of sexual harassment. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to find out secondary school students' knowledge of sexual harassment in the Nawalparasi District of Nepal.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The descriptive cross-sectional research design was applied to assess awareness of SH among secondary-level students in Devchuli Municipality, Nawalparasi. Students studying in grades eight, nine, and ten were identified from two conveniently selected schools out of the 12 private schools in the study area. All secondary school students at New Nawal English Boarding School and Moonlight English Boarding School were included, as was the entire student body, which had to be present during data collection and willing to participate. Both boys and girls were included. A total of 150 students participated, and all of them filled out the questionnaire completely.

The questionnaires related to socio-demographic information and the structured awareness questionnaire on sexual harassment were developed based on a literature review. The socio-demographic information had 10 items, including age, sex, grade, ethnicity, education status of parents, employment status of parents, experience of SH, the reporting system, and action taken after harassing. Similarly, a structured awareness questionnaire on SH included issues like meaning, types, effects, and suggestions for prevention of SH. The tools were divided into two parts: Part I and Part II. Part I relates to socio-demographic information. Part II included 15 scorable items related to SH awareness. Each item in Part II had a score of "1" if correctly answered and "0" if incorrectly answered, as well as 1 mark for multiple response questions. All questions were developed in the English language. By summing the scores, a total score was obtained and interpreted as good awareness: more than 70%, average: 31–69%, and poor awareness: less than 30% (Gurung, Priyadarshini & Margaret 2016).

The content validity of the questionnaires was maintained through a thorough review of the available literature and discussion with peers, advisors, subject experts, and research management cell members. Questions were then updated in response to their suggestions. Ten percent of the entire sample size was used for pre-testing, and any necessary

adjustments were made. Before collecting data, the first approval was obtained from the Birgunj Nursing Campus's Research Management Cell. The concerned school officials provided their written consent in order to carry out the study. One day prior to the data collection, a consent form was distributed to each student along with details about the study's purpose in order to gain their guardian's written consent.

The next day, data collection was done with verbal permission from each student. The objectives were properly explained to the students. Giving the students the option to refuse or stop their studies at any time protected their dignity. Each question contained a serial number to ensure anonymity, and confidentiality was upheld by promising the students that the data they provided would only be utilized for academic research. Each student was given a questionnaire and given 20–30 minutes to complete it. Data were collected from September 16 to September 28, 2018. After the data was completed, it was carefully checked for its completeness and accuracy. The obtained data were edited, coded, and organized before entry into the computer software system. The computer program Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 was used for data entry and analysis. The obtained data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods like frequency, percentage, mean, and chi-square to ascertain the relationship between the level of awareness of sexual harassment and the selected socio-demographic characteristics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Socio-demographic Information

Among 150 respondents, more than half (56.7%) were aged 15-17 years, and 43.3% were aged 12-14 years. Concerning sex, 60.7% of the respondents were male and 39.3% were female. Regarding grade, 41.3% of the respondents were from grade 8, 32.0% from grade 9, and 26.7% from grade 10. Regarding ethnicity, 58% of the respondents were Brahmin/Chhetri. In terms of their parents' educational status, 43.3% of respondents' fathers and nearly half (47.3%) of respondents' mothers had completed secondary school. Similarly, 40.7% of respondents' fathers had their own businesses, and 39.3% of their mothers were stay at home (Table 1).

Table 1: Respondents' socio-demographic information

n=150

Characteristics	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
12 – 14	65	43.3
15 – 17	85	56.7
Sex		
Male	91	60.7
Female	59	39.3
Grade		
Grade 8	62	41.3
Grade 9	48	32.0
Grade 10	40	26.7
Ethnicity		
Dalit	13	8.7
Janajati	50	33.3
Brahmin/Chhetri	87	58.0
Father's Education Level		
No education	3	2.0
Primary	27	18.0
Secondary	65	43.3
SLC and above	55	36.7
Mother's Education Level		
No education	5	3.3
Primary	27	21.3
Secondary	71	47.3
SLC and above	42	28.0
Father's Occupation Status		
Own business	61	40.7
Abroad	52	34.7
Agriculture	19	12.6
Service worker	18	12.0
Mother's Occupation Status		
Homemaker	59	39.3
Agriculture	39	26.0
Own business	38	25.3
Service worker	14	9.3

Experience of sexual harassment

When asked about their experience with sexual harassment, almost all (98.7%) said they had never experienced it, and only a small percentage (1.3%) said they had. However, after being the victim of sexual harassment, 50% of respondents reported the incident. Among the reported cases, 50% reported to the police station and 50% shouted at the perpetrator (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents' Experience of Sexual Harassment

n=150

Variables	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Having been experience of SH		
Yes	2	1.3
No	148	98.7
If yes, report the SH events (n=2)		
Yes	1	50.0
No	1	50.0
Action taken after SH (n=2)		
Report to the police station	1	50.0
Shout to perpetrator	1	50.0

Awareness of sexual harassment

Concerning the meaning of SH, 50.7% of respondents answered about unwelcome sexual behavior from both male and female sources. Likewise, most (95.3%) of respondents said physical harassment, verbal harassment (80.6%), and non-verbal harassment (80.0%) are types of sexual harassment.

Concerning the definition of "physical harassment," nearly two-thirds (69.3%) of respondents said it was unwanted touching, patting, kissing, pinching, or pulling clothes on purpose (50.6%), and one-third (25.3%) said they didn't know. Regarding the cause of physical harassment, around two-thirds (77.3%) of the respondents answered being alone, and 55.3% said overcrowding. When asked to define verbal harassment, the majority (67.3%) of respondents said making direct or indirect phone comments on body parts and clothing. Regarding the cause of verbal harassment, two-thirds (66.7%) of the respondents answered sitting alone, wearing tight clothes, or wearing open clothes. Concerning non-verbal harassment, above half (54.7%) of the respondents answered staring at sexual parts or showing their own private parts, and 10% said shouting at others. With respect to causes of non-verbal harassment, above half (54.7%) of the respondents said wearing tight clothes, open clothes, or being alone (Table 3).

Table 3: Respondents' awareness of sexual harassment

n=150

Variables	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Meaning		
It is an unwelcome sexual behavior from both male and female*	76	50.7
Violence against man by women or group of women, where they do uninvited sexual advances	14	9.3
Violence against women by men or group of men, where they do uninvited sexual advances	35	23.3
It is a behavior that cause recipient to be embarrassed, uncomfortable and cause distress	25	16.7
Types of SH**		
Physical harassment	143	95.3
Verbal harassment	121	80.6
Non-Verbal harassment	120	80.0
Meaning of Physical Harassment**		
Unwanted touching, patting, kissing or pinching	104	69.3
Pulling clothes intentionally	76	50.6
I don't know	38	25.3
Cause of Physical Harassment**		
Being alone	116	77.3
Over crowding	83	55.3
I don't know	22	14.6
Meaning of Verbal Harassment		
Giving verbal comments on body and dresses directly or indirectly through phone*	101	67.3
Smiling and laughing on others	13	8.7
I don't know	36	24.0
Cause of Verbal Harassment		
Sitting alone, wearing tight clothes, open clothes*	100	66.7
Talking to a friend	14	9.3
I don't know	36	24.0
Non-Verbal Harassment		
Staring at sexual parts / showing own private parts*	82	54.7
Shouting at others	15	10.0
Smiling at others	16	10.7
I don't know	37	24.7
Causes of Non-Verbal Harassment		
Wearing tight clothes, open clothes, being alone*	81	54.0
Talking to a friend	17	11.3
Doing your own work	11	7.3
I don't know	41	27.3

Multiple Response ** Correct answer *

Time and situation of sexual harassment

Most of the respondents (83.9%) indicated that nighttime is more likely to result in sexual harassment, and nearly 90.0% said that walking alone is a situation that could result in harassment (Table 4).

Table 4: Time and situation of sexual harassment

n=150

Variables	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Time of SH**		
At night	125	83.9
At evening	50	33.6
At day morning	14	9.3
At day time	8	5.3
Situation of Harassment**		
When walking alone	134	89.3
Provocative dressing	74	49.3
Overcrowding	70	46.6
Travelling in public vehicles	54	36.0
School	52	34.6
Dim light of vehicles	32	21.3
Time of disaster	23	15.3

*Multiple Response***

Sexual harassment effects

Concerning the sexual harassment effects, the majority (70.7%) of the respondents answered loss of concentration as the short term effect of SH. In terms of the long-term effects of sexual harassment, 59.3% of respondents said they were depressed, and 34.0% said they had considered suicide. When asked about the economic consequences of sexual harassment, nearly half (44.0%) of respondents said a decrease in earnings and job loss. Concerning the social effects of SH, 63.3% of the respondents said social stigma, disturbances in family relations, and disturbed working relationships (Table 5).

Table 5: Awareness related to effects of sexual harassment

n=150

Variables	Number (N)	Percentage(%)
Short Term Effects of SH**		
Denial	3	2.0
Loss of concentration	106	70.7
Shame	29	19.3
Isolation	12	8.0
Long Term Effects of SH**		
Depression	89	59.3
Suicide	51	34.0
Dropping out school	5	3.3
Anxiety	5	3.3
Economic Effects of SH		
Decrease in earning, loss of job*	66	44.0
Social isolation	66	44.0
No effect	4	2.7
I don't know	14	9.3
Social Effect of SH**		
Disturbances in family relations	122	81.3
Social stigma	117	78.0
Disturbed working relationship	111	74.0

*Multiple Response** Correct answer**

Level of awareness of sexual harassment

Regarding level of awareness of sexual harassment, 82.0% of respondents had a good level of awareness, and 18.0% had a low level (Table 6).

Table 6: Level of awareness of sexual harassment among respondents

n= 150

Level of Awareness	Number (N)	Percentage (%)
Poor	27	18.0
Good	123	82.0

The relationship between level of awareness of sexual harassment and selected socio-demographic variables

Using cross tabulation to demonstrate the relationship between level of awareness of SH and selected socio-demographic variables, respondents aged 15-17 years showed a higher level of awareness about SH (82.3%) than other age groups. Similarly, respondents from the Janajati and

Dalit ethnic groups were 87.3% and from the Brahmin/Chhetri ethnic group were 78.1% aware of sexual harassment. However, there is no statistically significant association between the level of SH awareness and socio-demographic factors (Table 7).

Table 7: Association between level of awareness of sexual harassment and selected socio-demographic variables

n= 150				
Variables	Level of awareness		χ^2 value	P-value
	Poor no. (%)	Good no. (%)		
Age Group				
12 – 14	12 (18.4)	53 (81.0)	0.017	0.898
15 – 17	15 (18.0)	70 (82.3)		
Sex ¥				
Male	23 (25.2)	68 (75.0)	8.295	0.008
Female	4 (7.0)	55 (93.2)		
Ethnicity				
Brahmin/Chhetri	19 (22.0)	68 (78.1)	2.068	0.15
Dalit/ Janjati	8 (13.0)	55 (87.3)		

χ^2 = chi square, and $p = < 0.05$. ¥ = p value obtained from Yates correction

Prevention of sexual harassment

Regarding the prevention of SH, respondents had suggested that it can be prevented through making strict rules, regulations, and policies against the person who is involved in sexual harassment (85.3%), conducting an awareness campaign regarding the prevention of sexual harassment (83.3%), and providing training on skills to use in dealing with sexual harassment (75.3%) (Table 8).

Table 8: Suggestion for the prevention of sexual harassment

n=150		
Suggestion about prevention of SH**	Number (N)	Percentage(%)
Make strict rules, regulations and policies against the person who are involved in sexual harassment.	128	85.3
Conduct awareness campaign regarding prevention from sexual harassment.	125	83.3
Provide training on skills to use in dealing with sexual harassment	113	75.3

*Multiple response***

The findings of the study showed that, among 150 respondents, 56.7% were aged 15–17 years and 43.3% were aged 12–14 years, which is similar to the study by Nlewem and Amodu (2016). Regarding grade, 41.3% of the respondents were from grade 8, 32.0% were from grade 9, and 26.7% were from grade 10, which is similar to the finding reported by Nlewem and Amodu (2016).

The present study showed that very few (1.3%) had experience with SH, which is contradictory to a study done in Kathmandu, Nepal, which showed that majority (76%) of the respondents had experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives (Thapalia *et al.* 2019). Another study conducted in southwest Nigeria discovered that 58% of the participants had SH (Oyedunni, Isaac & Musibau 2013). Among them, 50% report incidents of sexual harassment. Findings that were distinct from other studies done in Nepal revealed that 71.8% of respondents did not report the event (Pandey *et al.* 2022).

Concerning SH being an unwelcome sexual behavior, the present study found that 50.7% of the respondents gave the correct answer, which is similar to the finding (54.1%) reported by Menon *et al.* (2014).

Physical harassment (95.3%), verbal harassment (80.6%), and non-verbal harassment (80.0%) are the three main types of SH. In contrast to these results, a study conducted in Nepal revealed that verbal harassment at work (66%), followed by verbal (39%) and physical (24%), was the most prevalent type of SH; (Thapalia *et al.* 2019). This result was in contrast to a study conducted in Malaysia by Suhaila and Rampal (2012), which revealed that verbal, visual, physical, and non-verbal SH were the most prevalent types. The most frequent form of SH was physical harassment (unwanted touching), which was followed by verbal harassment (verbal directives on clothing and appearance given directly or indirectly over the phone) (67.3%) and non-verbal harassment (staring at private areas or exposing them) (66.7%). In contrast to a study conducted in Kathmandu, verbal SH (passing crude jokes, making crude remarks, or mocking crudely) was the most prevalent sort of SH (35%) followed by physical harassment (30%). Sending offensive messages on a cell phone and making missed calls in the late evening or night were new instances of harassment that were discovered (23%) (Sapkota & Bhusal 2015). Unwanted sexual jokes, stories, questions, or words (59.0%), touching on the body (46.2%), displaying sexual behavior with the eyes, hand, or face (23.9%), making

kissing sounds, receiving unwanted mail or phone calls (20.5% each), receiving sexual link web addresses, messages, pictures, or comments via social media (12.8%), and showing the body sexually (7.7%) were all contrary to the current study's findings (Pandey *et al.* 2022).

Regarding the time and situation of SH, most (83.9%) of the respondents said nighttime is more susceptible to SH, 33.6% said evening time, 9.4% said daytime, and 5.4% said morning time, which is similar to a study in Nepal that showed 38.5% of the respondents were harassed in the evening. Badejoko *et al.* (2014) found the opposite, with 66.2% of SH occurring during the day (between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.), and 33.8% occurring at night (between 7:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m.). The peak hour for SH was 8:00 p.m. Nearly 90.0% of respondents claimed that walking alone constitutes harassment when asked about situations of harassment. The results contradicted those of the Pandey *et al.* (2022) study, which indicated that the majority (66.7%) of respondents experienced harassment when working alone.

Regarding the effect of SH, 59.3% of respondents reported depression, suicide (34.0%), shame (19.0%), and 3.3% drop out of school, which contradicts the findings of Gyawali (2020), who found that depression (81%), fear (86%), and irritation (77%), respectively, are caused by SH.

Regarding awareness of sexual harassment, 82.0% of respondents reported having a good level of awareness, while 18% reported having a poor level of awareness. In contrast to the results of the current study it was found that 82.4% of respondents had an average understanding of SH, 13.2% had strong knowledge, and 4.4% had poor knowledge (Gurung, Priyadarshini & Margaret 2016).

When cross tabulation was used to measure the relationship between level of awareness of SH and selected socio-demographic variables, students in the 15-17 age group had a higher level of awareness of SH than those in the 12-14 age group. This result contrasts with one from Saudi Arabia, where researchers discovered that students' ages significantly influenced their source of knowledge about sexual harassment (Zaki *et al.* 2019).

In terms of recommendations for preventing SH, respondents indicated that enforcing severe rules, regulations, and policies against those who engage in sexual harassment (85.3%), running awareness campaigns for the issue (83.3%), and offering training on how to handle sexual harassment (75.3%) were effective. Similar to this finding, a study conducted in

Kathmandu, Nepal, found that an awareness campaign (70%), strong rules and regulations (64.7%) and a policy against SH are all required for the prevention of SH (Pandey *et al.* 2022). This finding is reinforced by a study conducted in Korea, which determined that education is essential for the prevention of SH (88.3%) and suggested that an education program be put in place to do so (Lee Song & Kim 2011). A study of knowledge on sexual abuses recommends that guidelines be developed for the prevention of sexual abuse, and preventive programs should focus on raising public awareness of what constitutes sexual abuse and its effects on society and human rights (Dzimadzi & Klopper 2007).

CONCLUSIONS

A good awareness of SH was present among the respondents. A few number of people have any experience with SH. Half of those polled reported sexual harassment incidents to a police station. Furthermore, the study also found no statistically significant association between the level of awareness of SH and these selected socio-demographic factors. In addition, educating people about sexual harassment and offering them training on how to deal with it have helped prevent SH in society. Based on the study's findings, it can be recommended that schools conduct an ongoing sensitization program or awareness campaign to teach students about sexual harassment periodically.

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