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Perceptions and Experiences of Sexual Harassment among Educated Female in Kathmandu Nepal

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is widespread and common issue. It is connected with unwelcome behavior within men and women on sex. The objective of this study was to plot perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment among educated female. This study was based on Secondary Education Examination (SEE) completed female aged 16 years and above by using self-administered questionnaire in Kathmandu. Total 250 females were selected and chi-square test was used for testing the association. More than a tenth respondents who were teachers/ lecturers said that SH is extremely problematic at community, workplace and school. Overwhelming majority of women (82%) experienced at least one form of sexual harassment. Study found that respondents' age group was significantly associated ($P < 0.01$) with experienced at least one place of sexual harassment. Similarly, married women experienced higher rate (80%) in at least one place of sexual harassment than unmarried women (75%). Therefore, this study suggests that sexual harassment among educated female in Kathmandu valley is prevalent and online harassment is also emerging. On the other hand, they do not want to expose and perceive it as a sexual harassment. Therefore, effective programs and policies related with sexual harassment needs to be addressed.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, educated women, physical, non-physical, & online.

Introduction

Sexual Harassment (SH) is relatively new concept and it is connected with unwelcome behavior within men and women on sex (Ministry of Health, 2018). However historically, women have recorded much harassment than men. Sexual harassment occurs all parts of our life particularly in public space and it is the abuse of power, disrespect and disregard

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for human dignity (U C San Diego, 2019). Additionally, it takes in different forms like: unnecessary touching, inappropriate medical examinations, suggestive compliments, winking, visual messages of sexual nature, use of vulgar language, display of objects of sexual nature and outright demand for sex (MoH, 2018).

In mid-1979s, the term SH came into floor but this issue became a problematic for researchers in the very beginning (Farely, 1978) because of the difficulty to design the definition boundary. In Nepal, formulated a Muluki Criminal Code Act in 2017 after the formulation of SH at workplace prevention Act, 2015. It addressed the SH issues, in section 224 of this code act mentioned that if a person commits on offence involving sexual harassment, s/he shall be sentenced to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years and slapped a fine of up to Rs. 30,000. Additionally it defined SH as, “If any person gropes anyone other than his/ her spouse or touches or attempts to touch his/ her private part, gets or attempts to get rid of his/ her undergarment or shows any sexual content through audio-visual or print media or speaks about sexual activities, expresses sexual intent through spoken words, signals, writing, sexual proposal, or behaves improperly; it shall be considered an offence involving sexual harassment” (Nepal Criminal Act, 2017).

During the period of 1970s, sexual harassment was labeled as a social problem. Catherine Mackinnon (1979) is an American lawyer and feminist and firstly she addressed the sexual harassment in labor law and categorized it into verbal and physical harassment. She explained that sexual harassment is one of the forms of sex based discrimination. Later, there was a shift from the notion of sexual harassment as a form of discriminations to as the violation of human dignity (Matra, 2011). Sexual harassment occurs in different circumstances, such as in different age, caste, power and authority. We can see the sexual harassment at home and outside the home, for example: working place, school, street and while moving from one place to another place by bus or taxi (Gyawli, 2020).

For professional development of the persons/young people, sexual harassment is being an objectionable form which has created negative effect, lack of mental wellbeing and confidence (Matra, 2011). A study found that sexual harassment occurred 20 percent in undergraduate students whereas and 40 percent sexual harassment occurred in graduate students. Similarly, 60 percent female graduate students were sexually harassed by male professor on 356 samples of graduate women (Michelle, 2000). The 2016 report of the Select Task Force on the study of harassment in the workplace estimated that anywhere between 25 to 85 percent of women experience workplace sexual harassment (National Women’s Law Center, 2018). Similarly, another study in Nepal found that 78 percent

female have been harassed while using public transport and the most vulnerable age group is 20-23 years (Gautam et al., 2019). Therefore, it shows that most of the young, energetic and higher leveled persons are affecting from sexual harassment and consequently, it may affect the whole professional, carrier path.

Objective

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment in Kathmandu valley Nepal.

Methodology

This study had used primary data based on cross sectional study design on self-administered questionnaire based on online system. Study was limited on 16 years and above female who had completed SEE level. Researcher had collected sample data in different phases. In the first phase, researcher circulated their questionnaire to 100 respondents from friends, colleagues, relative and students' circle based on research criteria. In the second phase, researcher further requested to those 100 respondents to circulate the questionnaire to their three known person who resides in Kathmandu Valley and SEE graduate. Study had used purposive sampling method through google forms. After circulating the questionnaire and researcher waited it for a month, by then researcher got 250 respondents in google form. Finally, researcher stopped collecting responses because of the accomplishment of sample size.

Results

During the study, all of the respondents were asked about the problem of sexual harassment at their community, workplace or schools nearby by using Likert scale. Table 1 stated this problem with various occupational categories by using two-way frequency table. Results of this table showed that all of the respondents who were teacher/ lecturer, more than a tenth (11%) mentioned that sexual harassment is extremely problematic at their community, workplace or schools. Overall, more than a third (36%) respondent opined that sexual harassment is somewhat problematic at their community, workplace or school and most of the women who were farmer or involved in agriculture (67%) were accepted this scale and followed it by students (51%). Besides that, a fifth of the respondents opined that not all the problem of sexual harassment at our community, workplace, schools (Table 1).

Table 1: Cross-tabulation between major occupation of the women and level of problem on sexual harassment at community, workplace and school (N=250)

Major occupations	How problematic is SH at your community, workplace, school (%)					Total (N)
	Not at all	A Little	Somewhat	Very	Extremely	
Teacher/lecturer	35.1	14.0	14.0	26.3	10.5	57
Officer level	12.8	14.9	29.8	42.6	0.0	47
Students	19.0	21.0	50.5	9.5	0.0	105
Farmer/agriculture	0.0	33.3	66.7	0.0	0.0	21
Unemployed/ housewife	15.0	60.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	20
Total	19.6	22.4	35.6	20.0	2.4	250

Source: Online Survey, 2020.

After knowing about respondents’ view, they were solicited about their experiences. Result of this study explicit that overwhelming majority of the respondents experienced inappropriate staring or leering which made them intimidated and around all (98%) had agreed that this statement is sexual harassment. Likewise, all of the 205 women who experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, two fifth women experienced inappropriate physical contact while more than half (51%) of the women experienced instructive questions about their private life. More than one fourth (51%) women felt offended by experiencing sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts. Data prevails that most of the women experienced some form of sexual harassment whether by knowingly or unknowingly about harassment in some point of their lifetime (Table 2).

Table 2: Percent distribution of respondents according to their experienced of SH during her lifetime by different SH related statements (N = 250)

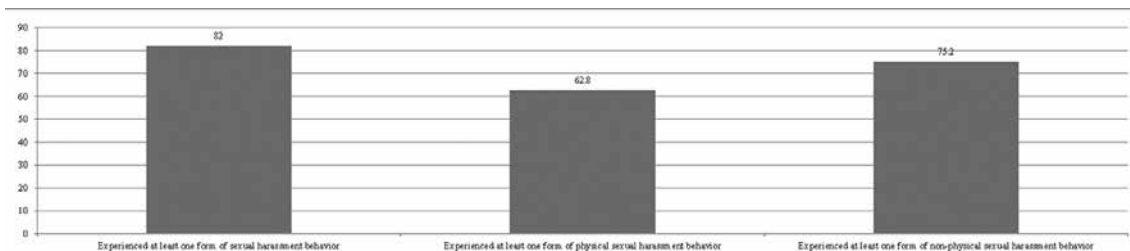
Statements	Percent
Experienced unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering and kissing	67.8
Experienced inappropriate staring or leering that made you feel intimidated	69.3
Experienced sexually suggestive comments or jokes that made you feel offended	33.7
Experienced sexually explicit pictures, posters or gifts that made you feel offended	25.9
Experienced repeated or inappropriate invitations to go out dates	36.6
Experienced instructive questions about your private life	51.2
Experienced sexually explicit emails or messages	27.8

Experienced repeated or inappropriate advances on emails, social networking	29.8
Experienced inappropriate physical contact	40.0
Experienced request or pressure for sex or other sexual acts	11.2
Total Experienced at least one form of sexual harassment during their lifetime (N)	205
Grand Total (N)	250

Source: Online Survey, 2020

In this study respondents were asked about the experience of sexual harassment related behaviors and they responded multiplicity. Therefore, to analyze the data, researcher had calculated at least one form of sexual harassment behavior according to their experience. Accordingly, result found that 82 percent women experienced at least one form of sexual harassment behavior. Similarly, to categorize the sexual harassment behavior into physical and non- physical sexual harassment, researcher has categorized these behaviors into two groups. In physical harassment category includes: unwelcome touching, hugging, cornering or kissing, inappropriate sexual contact and request or pressure for sex. Rest other behaviors were included in non-physical harassment. Analysis of the result found that around 63 percent respondents experienced at least one form of physical sexual harassment while 75 percent respondents experienced at least one form of non-physical sexual harassment (Figure, 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of respondents based on behaviors experienced related with SH (N = 250).



Source: Online Survey, 2020

Table 3 shows that 94 percent 30 to 39 years aged women had experienced at least one place of sexual harassment while more than half (59%) in earlier aged (16-19 years) women experienced at least one place of sexual harassment. This study found that respondents' age group is significantly associated ($P < 0.01$) with experience at least one place of sexual harassment. Similarly, married women experienced higher rate (80%) in at least one place of sexual harassment than unmarried women (75%), however p-value indicates that the

difference is not significant. Study found that, all respondents who were non-Hindu had experienced at least one place of sexual harassment and also it is significantly associated. Study displayed that high level of education did not help to decrease the level of sexual harassment. Percentage of women who experienced sexual harassment were high among the bachelor completed group (82%) than SEE (42%) and +2 completed (74%). In addition, education and harassment were also significantly associated. Study found that respondents who were currently employed had high rate (81%) of sexual harassment than currently unemployed (72%).

Table 3: Factors associated with experienced at least one place of SH by different background characteristics of women (N = 250).

Background characteristics	Experience at least one place of sexual harassment (%)	Number	P-value
Age group *			0.009
16-19 years	58.8	17	
20-29 years	73.8	164	
30-39 years	93.8	48	
40+ years	76.2	21	
Marital status			0.342
Married	79.8	104	
Unmarried	74.7	146	
Religion*			0.014
Hindu	75.0	232	
Non-hindu	100	18	
Caste/ethnicity			0.157
Brahimin/chhetri	74.6	173	
Janjati	79.1	67	
Dalit	100	10	
Level of education*			0.014
SEE completed	41.7	12	
+2 completed	73.8	80	
Bachelors completed	82.1	106	
Masters' completed	78.8	52	

Major occupation			0.201
Teaching (school/college)	80.7	57	
Accountant/researcher	85.1	47	
Students	71.4	105	
Farmer/shopkeeper	66.7	21	
Unemployed	85.0	20	
Currently employed			0.106
Yes	80.9	131	
No	72.3	119	
Total	76.8	192	

Source: Online Survey, 2020.

* Significantly associated $p \leq 0.01$

Discussion

Sexual harassment is very difficult to design the definition boundary. Different literatures found that sexual relationship at workplace is not always harassing and harmful, some of the people view that flirting, joking could be enjoyable and it makes feel less ascetic (Washington State University, 2019). Similarly, in this study found that 5 percent respondent did not categories the flirting, joking into sexual harassment though it is not limited with working women.

Results of this study found that with comparison of physical sexual harassment, non-physical sexual harassment is higher (63% vs 75%). Most of the literatures found that physical sexual harassment is higher than non-physical but results of this study showed it different. This study is based on only educated women who were completed SEE level, so that perpetrator may sexually harassed by using non-physical way than physical.

A survey which was conducted by Association of American Colleges found that 70-90 percent of female college students experienced sexual harassment (Elizabeth & Michelle, 1992). In our study, those respondents who were students at the time of survey found that 71 percent experienced at least one form of sexual harassment. Similar to developing countries, developed countries also affected by sexual harassment. In 1983 Harvard study found that 34 percent (more than one third) of under graduate women had experienced at least gesturing or verbal sexual harassment during their time at Harvard (Elizabeth & Michelle, 1992).

In the present context, the issue of online abuse is emerging; online abuse is any type of abuse that happens on the internet. Different literatures showed that social media, online text and emails don't seem to invite new abuse; they just provide abusers with a new tool. A study found that only 4 percent experienced digital abuse and harassment (Zweig and Dank, 2013). Despite that in this study, nearly a third (30%) experienced online harassment through email and social networking. Literature says, technology based harassment includes the large number of witness and it may create high chance to occur emotional impact. In addition, literature also found that here is more likely to involve multiple perpetrator, short duration, more likely to involve stranger in technology based harassment (Kimberly et al., 2016).

Conclusion

This study suggests that sexual harassment among educated female in Kathmandu valley is prevalent and problematic. Public transport is a major risky place to occur sexual harassment. Study also shows that most of the harassment among female occurs at an early adolescent age. In the present context technology based harassment is in growing trend. Age and level of education are statistically associated. On the other hand, this research covers small sample size and overall scenario of educated women in Kathmandu valley but it did not cover the whole Nepal. Additionally, this study does not cover specific issue such as workplace harassment, severe and less severe types of harassment, so further research should focus on these mentioned issue. Finally, this study does not cover policy based research, so it is necessary to study further.

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