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Problem of sexual harassment experienced by post graduate girl students

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Abstract

This descriptive study attempted to describe the post graduate girl students' experience of sexual harassment, type and nature of harassment, the respondents' feelings and reactions towards sexual harassment and their awareness about the problem. The universes of the study are the post graduate girl students in Tiruchirappalli. A total of 50 respondents were selected from the universe by using convenient sampling technique. The researcher used self-prepared Interview questionnaire to collect the required data from the respondents. From this study it is clear that all the respondents have experienced sexual harassment and that too in almost all the public places. Though the victims of harassment reacts on the harassers, they opined that the general public awareness on sexual harassment and the sources of proper supportive services, its accessibility and availability need to be improved so as to meet the urgency and to help the victims. Though the supportive services already exist, its reach should be improved. The social stigma and the ignorance attached with sexual harassment must addressed properly by the way of proper education on the issue and how to face the problem situation is what the need of the hour. It is good to start addressing this issue from school level itself will be of greater use.

Keywords: Sexual harassment, post graduate girl students, place of harassment, harassers, impact of harassment, awareness on sexual harassment and supportive services

Introduction

Sexual harassment is otherwise called unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. The legal definition of sexual harassment varies by jurisdiction. Sexual harassment is subject to a directive in the European Union. Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behavior as:

- a) Physical contact and advances;
- b) A demand or request for sexual favors;
- c) Sexually colored remarks;
- d) Showing pornography;
- e) Any other unwelcome physical verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Where any of these acts is committed in circumstances where the victim has a reasonable apprehension that in relation to the victim's employment or work whether she is drawing salary, or honorarium or voluntary, whether in government, public or private enterprise such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem.

Sexual harassment may occur in a variety of circumstances—in workplaces as varied as factories, school, academia, Hollywood and the music business. Often, but not always, the perpetrator is in a position of power or authority over the victim (due to differences in age, or social, political, educational or employment relationships) or expecting to receive such power or authority in form of promotion. Forms of harassment relationships include:

- The perpetrator can be anyone, such as a client, a co-worker, a parent or legal guardian, relative, a teacher or professor, a student, a friend, or a stranger.
- The victim does not have to be the person directly harassed but can be a witness of such behavior who finds the behavior offensive and is affected by it.
- The place of harassment occurrence may vary from school, university, workplace and other.

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- There may or may not be other witnesses or attendances.
- The perpetrator may be completely unaware that his or her behavior is offensive or constitutes sexual harassment or may be completely unaware that his or her actions could be unlawful.
- The incident can take place in situations in which the harassed person may not be aware of or understand what is happening.
- The incident may be one time occurrence but more often it has a type of repetitiveness.
- Adverse effects on the target are common in the form of stress and social withdrawal, sleep and eating difficulties, overall health impairment etc.
- The victim and perpetrator can be any gender.
- The perpetrator does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- The incident can result from a situation in which the perpetrator thinks they are making themselves clear, but is not understood the way they intended. The misunderstanding can either be reasonable or unreasonable. An example of unreasonable is when a woman holds a certain stereotypical view of a man such that she did not understand the man's explicit message to stop.

With the advent of the Internet, social interactions, including sexual harassment, increasingly occur online, for example in video games.

According to the 2014 PEW research statistics on online harassment, 25% of women and 13% of men between the ages of 18 and 24 have experienced sexual harassment while online.

Dzeich *et al.* has divided harassers into two broad classes:

- Public harassers are flagrant in their seductive or sexist attitudes towards colleagues, subordinates, students, etc.
- Private harassers carefully cultivate a restrained and respectable image on the surface, but when alone with their target, their demeanor changes.

Langelan describes four different classes of harassers.

- Predatory harasser who gets sexual thrills from humiliating others. This harasser may become involved in sexual extortion, and may frequently harass just to see how targets respond. Those who don't resist may even become targets for rape.
- Dominance harasser: the most common type, who engages in harassing behavior as an ego boost.
- Strategic or territorial harassers who seek to maintain privilege in jobs or physical locations, for example a woman's harassment of male employees in a predominantly female occupation.
- Street harasser: Another type of sexual harassment performed in public places by strangers. Street harassment includes verbal and nonverbal behavior, remarks that are frequently sexual in nature and comment on physical appearance or a person's presence in public.
- Effects of sexual harassment can vary depending on the individuality of the recipient and the severity and duration of the harassment. Often, sexual harassment incidents fall into the category of the "merely annoying." In other situations harassment may lead to

temporary or prolonged stress and/or depression depending on the recipient's psychological abilities to cope and the type of harassment, and the social support or lack thereof for the recipient. Psychologists and social workers report that severe/chronic sexual harassment can have the same psychological effects as rape or sexual assault. Victims who do not submit to harassment may also experience various forms of retaliation, including isolation and bullying.

- As an overall social and economic effect every year sexual harassment deprives women from active social and economic participation, and costs hundreds of millions of dollars in lost educational and professional opportunities for mostly girls and women. However, the quantity of men implied in these conflicts is significant.

Sexual harassment, by definition, is unwanted and not to be tolerated. However, there often are a number of effective ways for offended and injured people to overcome the resulting psychological effects, remain in or return to society, regain healthy feelings within personal relationships when they were affected by the outside relationship trauma, regain social approval, and recover the ability to concentrate and be productive in educational, work, etc. environments. This may include stress management and therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, friends and family support, etc.

Materials and methods

Objectives of the study

- To study the experience and impact of sexual harassment among post graduate girl students.
- To know the protective services and awareness on sexual harassment among them.

Research design

Descriptive research design has been adopted for this research. It attempted to describe the respondents' experience of sexual harassment, type and nature of harassment, the respondents' feelings and reactions towards sexual harassment, the awareness level among them about the problem.

Universe

The universes of the study are the post graduate girl students in Tiruchirappalli. They were both 1st year and 2nd year students who constituted the universe of this study.

Sampling

A total of 50 respondents were selected from the universe by using convenient sampling technique.

Tools of data collection

The researcher used self-prepared Interview questionnaire developed by researcher constituting 52 questions covering the aspects like.

- Socio-demographic condition.
- Experience of sexual harassment, harassers and place of harassment.
- Type, nature of harassment and the impact of sexual harassment.
- Source of support and the level of awareness about sexual harassment.

Findings and discussion

Findings related to socio-demographic condition of the respondents

The findings of the study shows that more than half (60%) of the respondents are from rural areas and the remaining (40%) respondents are from urban areas. Regarding the educational qualification of the respondents it was revealed that exactly half of the respondents are from 1st year and the remaining students are from 2nd year Master of Social Work. Distribution of the respondents by their family type showed that nearly 3/5th (70%) of the respondents is from nuclear family, and the remaining 30% of the respondents are from joint family. The nature of family of the respondents shows that a little less than 3/4th (74%) of the respondents are from male headed families and 26% of the respondents are from female headed families.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents by their experience of sexual harassment.

S.No	Experience of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Yes	50	100%
2.	No	0	0
	Total	50	100%
S.no	Frequency of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Only one time	19	38%
2.	Rarely	26	52%
3.	frequently	5	10%
	Total	50	100%

It is revealed from the above table that all the respondents had the experience of sexual harassment. It was also shown that the frequency of experience of sexual harassment and it is inferred that 38% of the respondents had only one time, 52% of the respondents rarely experienced sexual harassment and only 10% of the respondents frequently harassed sexually especially at public places.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by the harassers and the place of harassment.

S. No	Harassers	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Known person	13	26%
2.	Unknown person	37	74%
	Total	50	100%
S. No	Place of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Road	4	8%
2.	Bus Stand	21	42%
3.	Market	1	2%
4.	Park	1	2%
5.	Hotel	11	22%
6.	Theatre	3	6%
7.	Temple	9	18%
	Total	50	100%

The above table shows the distribution of the respondents by the harassers and it was revealed that nearly 3/4th of the respondents(74%) were harassed by unknown persons and the remaining 26% of the respondents were harassed y known person especially their relatives. Regarding the place of harassment it was inferred from the data that almost all the respondents experienced sexual harassment at all public places. Among the place of harassment, bus stop tops the list

where more possibility of sexual harassment. Next comes the hotels starting from small coffee shops to decent hotels and then the temples hold the third position of sexual harassment frequently occurring place is very unfortunate.

Table 3: Distribution of the respondents by type and nature of sexual harassment

S.no	Type of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Verbal abuse	18	36%
2.	Physical harassment	10	20%
3.	Vulgar visual harassment	14	28%
4.	Anonymous calls	8	16%
	Total	50	100%
S.no	Nature of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Individual	37	74%
2.	Group	13	26%
	Total	50	100%

The above table shows the type and nature of sexual harassment and regarding the type of sexual harassment, it was revealed that 36% of the respondents underwent verbal abuse, 28% of the respondents experienced vulgar visual harassment 20% of the respondents had physical harassment like touching, rubbing and pinching etc., and 16% of the respondents had anonymous calls. The respondents also experienced all types of harassment in general.

While analyzing the nature of sexual harassment it was found that a little less than 3/4th of the respondents 74% experienced sexual harassment by individuals and the remaining respondents were harassed by groups.

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents by their feelings and reaction towards sexual harassment

S. No	Feeling towards sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Laugh at them	2	4%
2.	Anger	32	64%
3.	Inferior/ashamed	2	4%
4.	Insecured	9	18%
5.	Don't take it seriously	3	6%
6.	Enjoyed	2	4%
	Total	50	100%
S. No	Reaction	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Verbal reaction	15	30%
2.	Physical reaction	9	18%
3.	Ignoring	15	30%
4.	Seeking help from others	7	14%
	Total	50	100%

It is clear from the above table that 64% of the respondents got angry while they were harassed, 18% of the respondents felt insecured, 6% of the respondents did not take the harassment seriously, 4% of the respondents laugh and go, the same percent of them felt inferior and ashamed and rarely 4% enjoyed sexual harassment.

It is revealed from the above table that 30% of the respondents retaliated through verbally and 30% of them did not give importance to them. 18% of the respondents retaliated physically and 14% of them seek help from others.

Findings on the source of support during sexual harassment

The analysis of the source of support and help for the victims during sexual harassment revealed that nearly ½ of the respondents (44%) sought help from others when they were harassed and 56% of the respondents did not seek help from others when they had sexual harassment.

And it is also inferred from the analysis that 40% of the respondents opined that they themselves faced the situation, 20% of the respondents expressed that the public came voluntarily and helped them. 16% of the respondents got support and protection from police

Furthermore analysis on the respondents' experience of helping others when the others are undergoing sexual harassment it is inferred from more than half of the respondents 60% did not help others when others are sexually harassed in front of them. 40% of the respondents helped others when others are harassed in the presence of the respondents.

Table 5: Distribution of the respondents by their causes of sexual harassment

S. No	Causes of sexual harassment	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Dress code	6	12%
2.	Poor cultural values	9	18%
3.	Lack of awareness	3	6%
4.	Girls attitude	4	8%
5.	Boys attitude	9	18%
6.	Mass media	1	2%
7.	Lack of Laws & order practices	5	10%
8.	Internet/mobile phone	13	26%
	Total	50	100%

It is revealed from the above table that 26% of the respondents opined that internet and mobile phone culture was the reason for sexual harassment. 18% of the respondents expressed that negative attitude of boys and poor cultural values are the causes of sexual harassment. 12% of them opined that Dress code. 10% of them state that lack of law and order issues are the causes of sexual harassment. And the remaining respondents were of the opinion that lack of awareness girls attitude and mass media are the causes of sexual harassment.

Findings on the respondents' opinion about the awareness on sexual harassment

It is understood from the analysis that a vast majority of the respondents (86%) were of the opinion that the awareness on sexual harassment among the respondents are insufficient and the remaining respondents felt that the present awareness on sexual harassment is sufficient. Regarding the respondents' opinion on the discussions on sexual harassment, it is revealed that almost all the respondents were of the opinion that discussions on sexual harassment need improvement. The analysis also revealed that more than half of the respondents (64%) shared their problems related to sexual harassment with their friends. 28% shared it with their mother and the remaining respondents shared it with their female siblings.

Conclusion

From the above study it is clear that all the respondents have experienced sexual harassment and that too in almost all the

public places. Though the victims of harassment reacts on the harassers, they opined that the general public awareness on sexual harassment and the sources of proper supportive services, its accessibility and availability need to be improved so as to meet the urgency and to help the victims. Though the supportive services already exist, its reach should be improved. The social stigma and the ignorance attached with sexual harassment must addressed properly by the way of proper education on the issue and how to face the problem situation is what the need of the hour. It is good to start addressing this issue from school level itself will be of greater use.

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