

Effects of Sexual Harassment on Learning Activities among Teenager Girl

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Abstract

The study aimed to analyze the effects of sexual harassment on the learning experience on the girl students in Nepal. Concurrent mixed-method was used for study among 371 girl students who were studying at community and institutional schools of the Lalitpur district, Nepal. The sample size for the quantitative study has been calculated at a 95% confidence level with a 5 confidence interval. Five focus group discussions (FGD) and three in-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted to collect qualitative data. IBM SPSS 20 was used for quantitative data analysis and a thematic approach was used for qualitative data analysis. Learning motivation, interaction with a teacher, self-learning, and class discussion activities among girl students were found significantly affected by sexual harassment and sexual harassment was found as one of the causal factors behind poor learning activity and achievement on the girl students.

Keywords: *learning experience, sexual harassment, teenager, schoolgirls*

Introduction

Sexual harassment is a common experience throughout the world from highly developed countries to the least developing nations (Anderson, 2011; Hill and Kearl, 2011, Plan, 2008). Among them, adolescent girl students are much more likely to be sexually harassed by different persons in different settings (Lee et al. 1996, Grigentyte and Lesinskiene, 2018, Ormerod, Collinsworth & Perry, 2008). In Nepalese condition also 85 percent of school-going adolescents girls had suffered from some kind of sexual harassment like sexual gazing, sexual gestures, and blaming relation with others Gyawali et al., (2020). Similarly, according to Mishra and Lamichhane (2018), 79 percent of girl students in Kathmandu valley had experienced sexual harassment in public transport. A similar situation has also been reported by Thapalia et al., (2019) and found that around 76% of the girl student in Kathmandu valley (Tokha) had experienced some forms of sexual harassment in their life. Along with those finding a lot of cases still might undercover.

Learning experience refers to any interaction, course, program, or other experiences of motivation, and achievement in which learning takes place, whether it occurs in traditional

academic settings (schools, classrooms) or nontraditional settings (outside-of-school locations, outdoor environments), or whether it includes traditional educational interactions (students learning from teachers and professors) or nontraditional interactions (students learning through games and interactive software applications) (GER,2014).

Adolescents is a crucial stage of development and their school experiences help them to shape their self-efficiency belief with cognitive maturity and are better able to interpreted and integrate multiple sources of information about their competencies and they have much more differentiated views of their abilities (Urdans and Pajares, 2006). Hence, the school, which serves several functions, such as socialization, personality development of students, the transmission of cultural norms and values to a new generation in our society beyond transmitting academic knowledge and skills, should be adolescent-friendly, healthy, and have a conducive environment for students for their overall development. Unfortunately, such an ideal learning environment might not happen in all schools and sexual harassment has been reported at the school level from elementary school to high school (Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yuile & Ziang, 2006; Petersen & Hyde, 2009). Such harassment might bring many obstacles to learning experiences at and outside the school. On the other hands, sexual harassment also had found responsible for creating negative effects on academic, psychological, and behavioral impacts as well as the effects on student's enrolment and educational achievement along with dignity, self-esteem, and social relationship (Bagley, Bolitho & Bertrand, 1997; Jones, Karen, Eliana & Broadbent, 2008; Lee, Croninger, Linn, & Chen, 1996; MSI, 2008; Rowe, 1996). Similarly, Sexual Harassment Practice Groups of Outer and Golden (SHPGOD, 2010) has reported that sexual harassment in educational environments has impacts like increased absenteeism by students to avoid harassment, increased student turnover as students leave to escape harassment; conflict amongst students when harassment is present; decreased productivity and performance. Such types of negative effect have been reported from a different nation and in the US, 22 percent of girls reported trouble in sleeping and 37 percent of girls did not go to school (Hill & Kearn, 2011) and nearly 87 percent of the sexually harassed girl have reported negatively effect on girls' school attendance, their concentration, classroom activity and academic performance (Houle et al. 2011, Anderson 2011). A similar situation also reported in European Asian and African countries too (Plan 2008) were trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, decreased class participation, avoid a study group, having thought about changing school, had changed schools, avoiding the library, change study modules, or course or not going to a professor/ teaching assistant's especially in-office hours along with the deterioration on academic performance of the students were found on the victims(Plan, 2008; Witnowka, 2005).

For every nation, adolescents are the pillar for future development, but according to above research has shown sexual harassment might affect their overall academic performance and their future career. In our context, studies regarding the effects of their sexual harassment on student's learning activities are not studied well. In this regard the objective of the study was to explore the effect of sexual harassment on the learning experience of adolescent girl students in Lalitpur district of Nepal and the result of this study will be useful to create a sound academic environment for all adolescent girl students.

Methodology

The concurrent mix method (Cresswell, 2014) was used for the study. Total 371 teenage girl students (13-19 years old) from the four community and four institutional schools were selected purposively at the Lalitpur district of Nepal. Structures and semi-structured questionnaires were used for quantitative data collection and focus group discussion (FGD), key informant interview (KII), an in-depth interview (IDI) tools were used for qualitative study. IBM SPSS 20 was used for quantitative data analysis. For the qualitative data, the thematic analysis approach (Vaismoradi et al., 2016) was used for qualitative in the process of initialization, construction, rectification, and finalization. For the measurement of the learning activities, four factors were considered which were motivational effect, interactional effect, effect on learning achievement, and effect on school living environment. The result was triangulated between Quantitative and Qualitative results.

Result and Discussion

Perceived effects on learning experiences on Adolescent Girl Students

In this study, learning experience reflects larger pedagogical and technological shifts that have occurred in the design and delivery of education to students, and it most likely represents an attempt to update conceptions of how, when, and where learning does and can take place (GER, 2014). Here, for the measurement of the learning experiences, the four factors have been considered which are motivational effect, interactional effect, effect on learning achievement, and effect on school living environment. From the study, the most common effect on the learning performance of girl students due to sexual harassment was found related to a motivational learning experience and 64 percent of girls said that sexual harassment reduces their motivation for self-learning activities. The other effects were the difficulty to concentrate on the study (63%), and 23 percent of girls were found demotivated to sit in their classroom due to fear of sexual harassment (Table 1). After the motivational effect, the interaction activities are found affected by sexual harassment and among interactional activities, 61 percent of the girl said their interactional and discussion activities during learning process with the teacher is reduced due to fear of sexual harassment on them while 25% girls expressed that their peer group discussion activities are reduced due to fear of sexual harassment (Table 1). The effects on learning achievement and school living behaviors are also found affected by sexual harassment on girl students.

Table 1. *Perceived effects of learning activities on sexually harassed girl students*

Types of effect		Percentage (%)
Motivational effect	No interest in the class	23
	Difficult to concentrate on study	63
	Self-learning process	64
Interactional effect	Peer group discussion	25
	Learning activities with the teacher	61
	Interaction with teacher	27
Effects on learning achievement	Lower mark in the exam	29
	Decreasing overall percentage	24
Effects on school living	No interest to come to school	22
	Interest to change school	15

(Multiple responses cases 801)

Along with the quantitative results, in focus group discussion also, participants shared that they were feeling negative learning experiences due to sexual harassment. According to the participants, the sexual harassment from their peers and male students in school made them disturbed and they also lost their attentions to the classroom learning process. Along with the other retarded learning experiences, girls were told that they used to leave the classes of a particular teacher who harassed them sexually. During focus group discussion, they expressed that they had no interest in classroom activities and could not concentrate on that class which used to teach by the teacher who was involved in sexual harassment.

There are some statements of participants which were captured during the focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. Some of the verbatims are as follows:

I feel disturbed and irritated because of boys' vulgar talks and behaviors when we are studying in a classroom. We cannot concentrate on learning (FGD 3, Lalitpur, Institutional, R.N.2, Dalit).

We want to leave the class of that teacher who harasses us. Because of his harassing behaviors, we cannot properly concentrate on study and we feel fear too. (FGD 4, Lalitpur, Community, Brahmin).

Other participant said that the sexual harassment from teachers and male peers, create difficult to concentrate on learning activities and it is responsible to retard their motivational drive during the active learning process.

I have no interest to go to school because of teachers' and friends' harassing behaviors. The boys not only in school but also follow us on the way to and fro school. In that situation, our parents also blame us and asked whether he is my boyfriend or not (FGD 5, Institutional. Lalitpur)

During the discussion, the participants expressed that sexual harassment activities that happen to them from teachers and peers in the classroom make to leave class and school. Similarly, such sexual harassment was found responsible for retarding their active participation in the classes. Not only in the classroom but the sexual harassment during extra curriculum activities also found affecting negatively on the girl's teaching-learning activities.

I feel fear and my body starts trembling when I see that teacher who harassed me. Because of such fear and irritation, I cannot understand his class (IDI 2, Lalitpur, Community, Janjati).

I do not want to participate in extra-curricular activities in school and also do not like to discuss with boys about learning because of their harassing behaviors (IDI 1, Lalitpur, Institutional, R.N. 1, Janjati).

From the above verbatim, it is found that sexual harassment has created several unfavorable situations for girl students' especially in motivational effect, interactional effect, effects on the learning achievement and school living situation. These all factors might hinder the overall learning performance and achievement of adolescent girl students.

Similarly, the grade point average of the sexually harassed girls has been analyzed the result shows that the percentage of sexually non harassed girls is toward a higher Grade point average (GPA) that is B and above. Figure 1). During the chi-square test results were found statistically significant, $\chi^2= 14.53^*$, $df=7$ $p < 0.05$ % level. So it shows that sexual harassment and the GPA depend on each other.

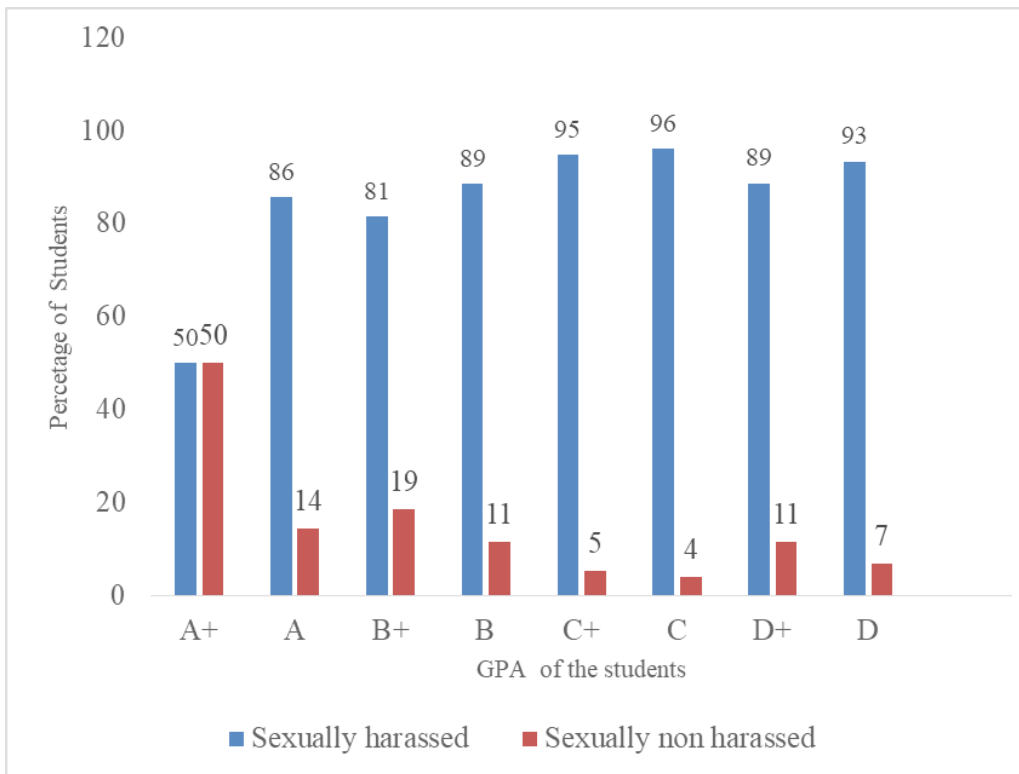


Figure 1. Grade point average of sexually harassed girl

$\chi^2= 14.53^*$, $df=7$ $p =0.042$

Perceived effect in learning activities on girl students due to sexual harassment by teachers.

Both the school activities and the learning activities which together affect learning capacity and overall learning performance on the girl students are found negatively affected by the sexual harassment from the teachers/school staff at various levels.

Table 2. *Consequence in learning activities on girl students due to sexual harassment by teachers*

Level of effects	Percentages of girls with negative effects* (Value in the parenthesis represents the number of respondents)	
	Effects on learning activities	Effects on school activities
Never	20(34)	22(40)
Sometimes	34(59)	44(79)
Often	23(39)	16(28)
Very often	23(41)	18(31)

* The percentage of the girl with negative effects on learning experiences = (Percentage of girl student under Sometime + Often + Very Often Level of effects)

From the study, 80 percent, and 78 percent of total participants reported that learning activities and school activities were affected respectively due to sexual harassment by teachers at “sometimes to very often” level (frequency) (Table 2).

In qualitative data, (focus group discussion) participants shared that they were feeling disturbed and they were feeling difficulty concentrating on their learning because of sexual harassment from the teachers. They told me that, they could not understand the lectures so they wanted to leave those classes due to the fear of that teacher who was involved in sexual harassment. There are some examples where the participants shared about their experience as follows:

When we see that teacher who harasses us, our body starts trembling. In that situation, how can we understand his lecture? We cannot concentrate and understand the lesson properly. We feel discomfort in class due to the behaviors of that harassing teacher. (FGD 2, Lalitpur, Community school, Dalit and Janjati).

Due to the sexual harassment from the specific subject teacher, we could not concentrate in his class. It makes us secure lower marks in that subject in the examinations we have to face the scolds by our parents too. (FGD 1, Lalitpur, Institutional, Janjati).

From the above-mentioned results from quantitative and qualitative data, it is found that sexual harassment from teachers is responsible to create negative consequences on girl students in their learning as well as other school activities. Due to such retarding effects of sexual harassment on girl students’ learning activities, and school activities by the sexual harassment from teachers’/ school staff the overall education activities of adolescent girl students might be reduced.

Perceived effects on learning on girl students due to the sexual harassment by peers and friends.

Table 3. Different level of learning effects on girl students due to sexual harassment by peers (boys)

Level of effect	Percentages of girls with negative effects (Value in the parenthesis represents the number of respondents)	
	Effects on learning activities	Effects on school activities
Never	11(28)	31(77)
Sometimes	37(93)	39(96)
Often	18(44)	14(34)
Very often	34(86)	16(40)

* The percentage of the girl with negative effects on learning experiences = (Percentage of girl student under Sometime +Often + Very Often Level of effects)

The effects on learning activities and school activities were found among 89 percent, and 69 percent of total participants respectively. Among the different levels of effects, the learning activities are affected most in the “sometimes” level (37%) which is followed by the “very often” level (34%) (Table 3).

In qualitative data also (focus group discussion) participants shared that they felt disturbed, irritated, and also have a problem in concentration on their study due to the sexual harassment from their peers and their friends. Similarly, they also felt fear and lost their interest in group learning activities with their peers or male. Some examples are shared by the participants in the focus group discussion.

Boys conduct misbehaviors with us in class. Because of that reason, there is not a proper learning environment. We can read properly only in the absence of such some naughty boys who are involved in sexual harassment (FGD 2, Lalitpur, institutional, Brahmin).

Boys in the classroom talk vulgar words loudly so that we girls felt ashamed and disturbed. It affects our study because it makes it hard to concentrate on the class. As a result, we do not want to discuss the lesson too (FGD 3, Lalitpur, Public, Janjati).

The results showed that the learning activities and school activities of girl students have been affected by the sexually harassing behaviors of their peers and male friends and the effects on school activities were found to a larger extent.

Discussion

From the quantitative and qualitative results, the negative effects of sexual harassment on the learning performance of girl students were found where more than half of the respondents told that they had felt negative effects on their education due to sexual harassment by different persons. Similarly, in qualitative inquiry also, most of the participants shared that they had felt deteriorated and negative effects on learning activities were expressed by the girl students.

It is also found that they were feeling disturbed in their study and losing their attention in the classroom due to the sexual harassment from peers and male friends. On the other hand, the sexual harassment by teachers like touching and pinching, made the participants leave classes of such sexual harassment perpetrators. They were also feeling difficult to understand the lesson due to the sexual harassment by such teachers.

Not only in our context but sexual harassment has also been reported as one of the causes of poor learning performances of the students particularly girl students internationally. Ommar and Wall (1994), Okoke (2011), and Witnowka (2005) have reported trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, decreased class participation, avoid a study group, think about changing schools, change schools, avoid the library, change major subjects, not gone to a professors'/ teaching assistants' office hours due to the sexual harassment and deteriorated academic performance of the students have been pointed out. Female students have been found more vulnerable to sexual harassment and they tend to experience it during their college days which will hitherto affect their academic performance. According to MSI (2008), 16 percent of the female students who were sexually harassed, found it hard to study or pay attention in class and 9 percent of the female students dropped out of a course or skipped a class. Fogarty (2012) showed that about 80 percent of the females experienced sexual harassment while in school and 40 percent of such victims became absent from school or skipped classes. A majority of victims attempt to ignore or avoid offensive behavior, and so they may cut classes, or even quit school (Paludi, 1997; Stein, 2002). Hence, from this study and the other similar international works, sexual harassment is one of the factors behind the poor learning activities in Nepal.

Conclusion

Sexual harassment has been found as a one of the factor effecting on the learning experience on the girl student. From the study, a negative association between sexual harassment and the learning experiences of girl students has been found. Such sexual harassment on the girl students was found responsible to reduce their learning motivation such as reduced concentration on study and self learning motivation. Similarly interactive behaviour of the victim with teachers and their peers also found reduced due to fear of sexual harassment. The above mentioned effects found as retarding factors on lower GPA and overall academic achievement of adolescent girls student. Therefore, to create a healthy learning environment to girls, sexual harassment free environment should be maintained at all academic institutes and all the stalk holder need to be aware about it.

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