

Knowledge and Perception on Sexual Harassment of Currently Working Women in Kathmandu Valley

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Abstract

Sexual harassment is a common and widespread phenomenon that has physical, emotional, and social consequences for individuals. The aim of this paper is to explore the knowledge and perception of sexual harassment among the working women in Kathmandu Valley. The systematic random sampling technique was used and selected 388 people working in the educational and non-educational sectors of the Kathmandu Valley. The result revealed that highest percentage of respondents have heard about the term "sexual harassment." low percent (83%) respondents had heard about SH in Bhaktapur compared to Kathmandu and Lalitpur (97%) and (86%), respectively. The majority of respondents (60%) stated that sexual harassment occurs in the workplace, as a result of misread signals from women. However, the majority of respondents (35%) stated that public transportation is the most risky place for sexual harassment followed by dark/ remote places (34%). Almost two-thirds of respondents (ranging from 62% to 65%) in all districts had heard about sexual harassment-related laws, acts, and policies, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Similarly, respondents aged 35 and older had less knowledge than those in the younger age group, and this was significantly related to their age. The majority of respondents (93%) who worked in reception had the most knowledge of harassment-related laws and policies, followed by managerial supervisors (86%) whereas unskilled labor had lowest knowledge (47%) regarding these laws/policies.

Key Words: Sexual harassment, educational sector, non-educational sector and policy.

Background

Sexual harassment is widespread, common and insidious phenomena that affect the physical, emotional and social consequences on people as well as undermine equality at work (Hirachan, et al, 2016, WCMS). Women have experienced sexual harassment at some point of cases in their lifetime and it violates the fundamental rights and dignity. Sexual harassment occurs in different forms such as; verbal sexual harassment, physical aggressive sexual harassment, cyber sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexual assaults. According to socio-ecological model, sexual harassment occurs in different level factor such as individual, relationship, organizational and societal level (MoH, 2018). Stanko (1988) stated that sexual harassment is: "...unwanted sexual attention. Its behavioral forms are many and include; visual (leering); verbal (sexual teasing, jokes, comments or questions); unwanted pressure for sexual favors or dates; unwanted touching or pinching; unwanted pressure for

sexual favors, with implied threats of job related consequences for non-co-operation, physical assault; sexual assault and rape. The behavioral manifestation may be a singular event or continuous series of events” (Gautam, et al. 2019).

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States has developed a useful definition of sexual harassment in the following way, “Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when;

1. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment.
2. Submission to or reject of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual. (Bhat, 2017)

In Nepal, to protect the right of every individual to work in a safe environment, Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act, 2015 has passed. It is a gender-neutral act and it is not limited to female workers. It defines the sexual harassment as, “Any of the following unsolicited acts committed by or caused to be committed by, any person in abuse of his/ her position, power or by imposition of any type of coercion, undue influence, or enticement would constitute sexual harassment:

- a. Physical contact and advances.
- b. Showing or displaying of pornographic materials
- c. Expressing sexual motives by way of written, verbal or non-verbal means.
- d. Demand or proposal for sexual favors and
- e. Flirting or harassing with sexual motive.

But if any pictures are displayed in the course of raising awareness of reproductive health, the more display of such pictures should not constitute sexual harassment for the purpose of the act (PLA, 2016).

In 1994, Dziech and Weiner viewed that sexual harassment problem faces of epidemic proportion by higher education. From the literature review it is found that around one third college students faced sexual harassment each year (Hughes & Sandler, 1992). On the other hand, globally the rate of reporting sexual harassment is meager and it remains as a hidden problem in society, college and working place. Generally, sexually harassed women do not want to tell the experience due to embarrassment, shame or fear of repercussions. Similarly, they own-self is lack of understanding on that behavior. For example, they do not know the definition of sexual harassment or they verbalized the definitions that exclude certain behavior (Brooks & Perot, 1991).

A study from selected Lebanese organizations found that 28 percent female were sexually harassed at work and only 5 percent cases were reported and rest of others were silent. The most silent reasons are: fear of not being taken seriously, fear of not being promoted, fear of being fire from job and fear of receiving warning. In addition, this report found that life

style might have play a role in harassment and 90 percent respondents mentioned that physical appearance impacts the behavior of the other towards them (Hejase, 2015).

In Nepal different studies found that, sexual harassment is highly prevalent in workplaces. A study among nursing students (aged 10-29 years) found that, 29 percent students experienced sexual harassment in last 6 months and majority of the harassed persons were visitors (50%) followed by hospital staff (20%). Result also found that mostly harassment occurred at night shift (54%) and in ward (88%) (Gaire, et, al. 2018). Similarly, a comparative study on Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Srilanka, 2015 found that 53.84 percent of women employee/ workers faced the problem of sexual harassment in their workplace and only 24 percent women employee workers were aware on sexual harassment at the workplace though in that time, Nepal and India had conducted some awareness program on sexual harassment (Rahman, 2015).

Objective

The objective of this paper is to explore the knowledge and perception of sexual harassment among working women in Kathmandu valley who were employed at government and non-government sectors during the survey period.

Methodology

This study was based on primary data and was limited to the Kathmandu Valley. A total of 388 respondents aged 15 years and older were selected from educational (schools) and non-educational (hotels and industries) institutions during the study period. Regarding the sampling method, the researchers used a systematic random sampling method. For equal representation of the sample data, proportional stratification was applied to each cluster. Methods such as direct interview, focus group discussion, and KII were adopted for data collection. For the statistical analysis, Pearson Chi-Square Tests have been used to test the significance level of the variables.

Results and Discussions

With the participation of women in labor market helped to rise the problem of SH at workplace. Though the data are hardly available (Coyle et al., 2014). In the context of Nepal, the relation between men and women are governed by patriarchal system and women are tolerating these discrimination and exclusion.

This subject related to sexual harassment is previously considered taboo and with the gradual involvement of women in the workplace this issue has emerged. The workplace sexual harassment in two ways; one is gender-based violence and another is right based approach of working women. Not only in Nepal, worldwide it is equally prevalent. For example workplace sexual harassment in the US considered to be a type of employment discrimination and it includes sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature and it is prohibited by federal law. (ILO, 2020).

The majority of the respondents were from Kathmandu district (41%), followed by Lalitpur (33%), and Bhaktapur (26%). Similarly, nearly two fifths of the respondents were aged 25

to 34 years, whereas more than tenth (12%) respondents were aged 45–54 years. The age ranged of respondents were 15 to 54 years where median age was 28 years.

About one-fifth (17%) of the respondents were illiterate. It showed that the overwhelming majority of the respondents were literate, of whom 26 percent had completed bachelor's degrees. Regarding marital status, more than half (56%) of the respondents were currently married, two fifths of the respondents (40%) were never married, and nearly half (49%) were from Janjati communities. Similarly, unskilled labour were nearly two fifth (39%) while almost more than 78 percent of the respondents were full time employed.

Table 1: Background characteristics of the respondents (N=288)

Background Characteristics	Number	Percent
Name of district		
Bhaktapur	100	25.8
Kathmandu	159	41.0
Lalitpur	129	33.2
Age group		
15-24years	136	35.1
25-34 years	146	37.6
35-44 years	58	14.9
45-54 years	48	12.4
<i>Median age of the respondents</i>	<i>28 years</i>	
<i>Age range</i>	<i>(15 years to 54 years)</i>	
Level of education		
Illiterate	65	16.8
Primary	33	8.5
Lower secondary	23	5.9
Secondary	92	23.7
Higher secondary	74	19.1
University level / Bachelor and above	101	26.0
Marital status		
Currently married	216	55.7
Divorced /separated/widow	16	4.1
Unmarried	156	40.2
Caste/ ethnicity		
Brahmin	148	38.1
Chhetri	32	8.2
Dalit	17	4.4
Janjati	191	49.2
Major occupation		
Managerial / supervisor level	36	9.3
Skilled labour	30	7.7
unskilled labour	152	39.2
Entertainment sector	39	10.1
Teacher	117	30.2

Reception	14	3.6
Types of work		
Part- time	85	21.9
Full time	303	78.1
Total	388	100.0

Source: Field Survey,2021

A very high percentage of respondents (91%) had heard the term "sexual harassment," and less than a tenth (9%) of respondents had never heard the term "sexual harassment." In terms of different background characteristics, comparatively, a lower percentage had heard the term "sexual harassment" in Bhaktapur (83%) than in Kathmandu (97%) and Lalitpur (89%) districts. Similarly, on the basis of age distribution, women who heard the word "sexual harassment" were more likely to be between the ages of 25 and 34 than to be between the ages of 45 and 54. From this, it can be seen that with increasing age, there is less information about sexual harassment.

The majority of women with university or bachelor's degrees or higher had high (98%) knowledge of sexual harassment, whereas uneducated women had low (69%) knowledge. Similarly, unmarried women were found to have the highest level of knowledge (97%) compared to the others. On the basis of caste, it was found that Chhetri and Janajati had the most knowledge (94% and 93%) of sexual harassment. It was found that women working in the fields of entertainment and reception were completely aware of sexual harassment. Based on the types of work, High levels of knowledge were found in both part-time and full-time working women.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents who heard the term sexual harassment according to selected background characteristics (N=388)

Background characteristics	Respondents who heard the term sexual harassment		Total (N)
	Number	Per cent	
District			
Bhaktapur	83	83.0	100
Kathmandu	154	96.9	159
Lalitpur	115	89.1	129
Age group			
15-24 years	127	93.4	136
25-34 years	143	97.9	146
35-44 years	48	82.8	58
45- 54 years	34	70.8	48
Level of education			
Illiterate	45	69.2	65
Primary	30	90.9	33
Lower secondary	18	78.3	23
Secondary	89	96.7	92
Higher secondary	71	95.9	74

University level / Bachelor and above	99	98.0	101
Marital status			
Currently married	187	86.6	216
Divorced/ separated/ widow	14	87.5	16
Unmarried	151	96.8	156
Caste/ethnicity			
Brahmin	132	89.2	148
Chhetri	30	93.8	32
Dalit	12	70.6	17
Janjati	178	93.2	191
Occupation			
Managerial / supervisor level	33	91.7	36
Skilled labour	29	96.7	30
unskilled labour	129	84.9	152
Entertainment sector	39	100.0	39
Teacher	108	92.3	117
Reception	14	100.0	14
Types of work			
Part-time	77	90.6	85
Regular	275	90.8	303
Total	352	90.7	388

Source: Field Survey, 2021

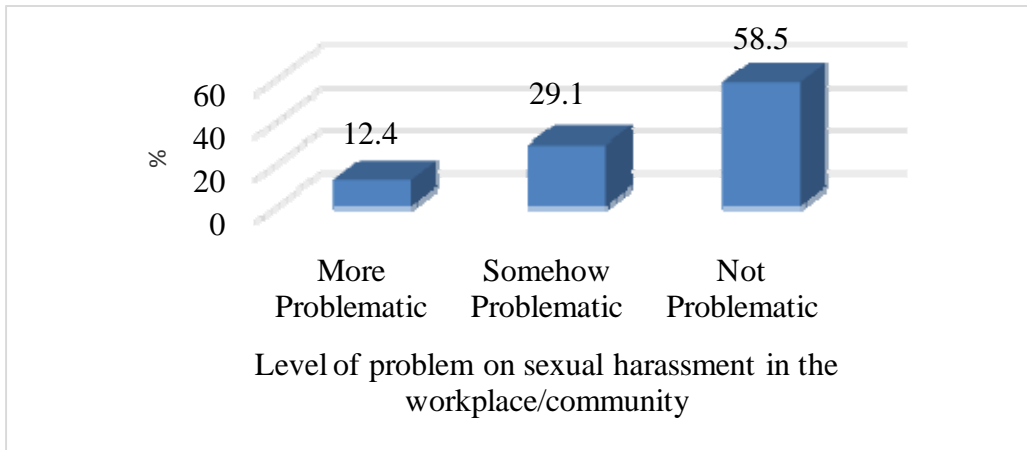
Those respondents who did not hear the term sexual harassment, also asked about the activities/behaviors (teasing, blinking, forced to do sexual activities, forced to go out on dates (or any activities which are connected with sexual orientation, and proposed despite their willingness) by asking is it sexual harassment or not. In these statements, more than two third respondents said that it is sexual harassment. It shows that most of the respondents were aware of sexual harassment to related activities despite the knowledge of the term sexual harassment.

Hence, researchers were asked about the status of sexual harassment in the community or workplace to all respondents, irrespective of their familiarity on the term sexual harassment. Results found that more than half the respondents (59%) did not mention sexual harassment in a problematic category within their community and working environment. More than one fourth (29%) respondents stated that sexual harassment is somehow problematic in community and working areas. Only a smaller number of respondents (12%) stated sexual harassment as a more problematic issue in any place (Figure 1). Literature found that Nigeria students defined sexual harassment as ranging from innuendos, insinuations to unwanted pressures that could be verbal or physical such as rape(Abe, 2012).

Perception of sexual harassment differ from country to country for example study found that perceptions about what constituted SH behavior in Turkey and the US, there were differences as well. While sexist hostility, sexual hostility, physical sexual offense, and sexual bribery and coercion were regarded as SH in both Turkey and the US, behavior

labeled “insinuation of interest” was considered to constitute SH only in Turkey. This “insinuation of interest” behavior included unwanted personal attention, such as constantly requesting a date from a woman, inquiring or commenting on a woman’s spouse or family, using affectionate terms such as “honey” and “my dear,” leaving notes showing interest, inquiring about a woman’s personal life, and making compliments about a woman’s physical appearance(Toker, 2016)..

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of respondents who shared the status of sexual harassment in their community/workplace (N=388)



Majority of the respondents (60%) mentioned that sexual harassment occurs in community/workplace because most of the men misread signals from women like the symbol of innocent girls, over fashion and dress-up. Similarly, nearly half of the respondents stated that men are superior and they feel superiority and wants to harass a woman (45%) because of the aggressive nature, using alcohol and drugs of men help to occur sexual harassment (44%). Two fifth (40%) percent of the respondents believed that lack of company, organization’s rule and policy regarding sexual harassment also support to occur this situation. Similarly, more than a tenth (11%) respondents viewed that cultural differences, patriarchal norms and poverty leads to occur sexual harassment. Likewise, misuse of social media and gender imbalanced were also as a cause to occur sexual harassment (Table 3).

A study conducted in Jambia found that sexual harassment generally occurs when the harasser holds a position of real or perceived authority over the other individual. Harassment can occur anywhere on campus environment at universities(Menon et al., 2014). Similarly another study found that appreciation of dress and figure of harassment is the second common type with 23 percent to 60 percent and lowest in Luxmburg(Aman, Asif, Qazi, & Aziz, 2016).

Another qualitative study found that in Pakistan culture is considered a shame to openly discuss especially for unmarried girls and if something like this happens people will not say anything to the man but they will blame the girl to be the main culprit behind such issue(Ali & Kramar, 2015).

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their knowledge on the causes of sexual harassment (N=388)

Main causes of sexual harassment	Number	Per cent
Men are superior/feel superiority	173	44.8
Moral values	90	23.3
Divorced	76	19.7
Men misread signals from women/ innocent girls/ over fashion/ dress up	230	59.6
Cultural differences/ patriarchal norms/ poverty	44	11.4
Aggressiveness/ use of alcohol/drug	171	44.3
Lack of company policy/ lack of knowledge of sexual harassment acts	156	40.4
Gender imbalanced/ high number of male members	7	1.8
Misuse of social media	10	2.6
Total	388	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Note: Total percentage may exceed 100 due to multiple responses.

Regarding the highest risky place to occur sexual harassment, majority of the respondents mentioned that public transport/ train is the most risky place (35%) and followed by dark/ remote places (34%). Some of the respondents (15%) said that office/ workplace is the most risky place to occur sexual harassment. Less number of respondents (1.3%) focused that workplace especially for night duty is the most risk area for sexual harassment (Table 4).

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to their responses on most risky place to occur sexual harassment (N=388)

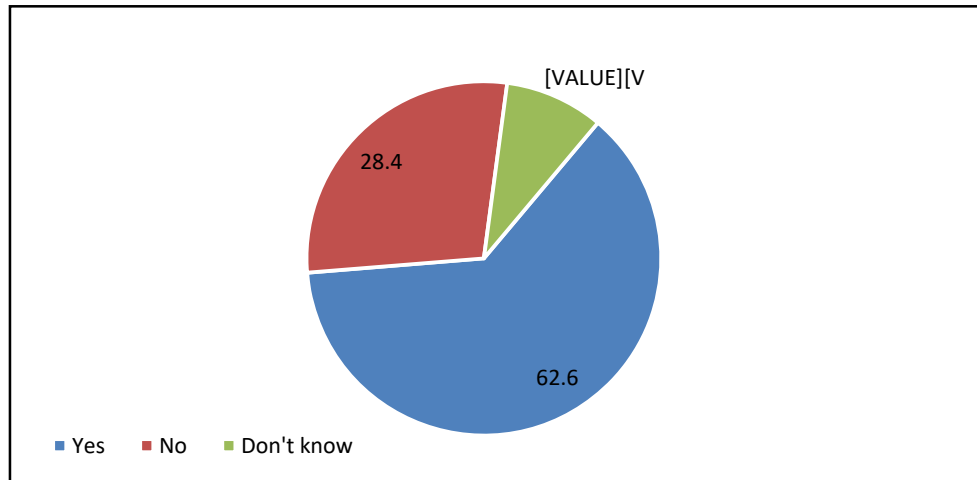
Most risky place to occur sexual harassment	Number	Percent
Dark remote place	131	33.8
Home	10	2.6
Office/ workplace	58	14.9
Public places/ mela/jatra	29	7.5
Public transport/ train	133	34.3
Transportation hubs	22	5.7
Workplace especially for night duty	5	1.3
<i>Total</i>	<i>388</i>	<i>100.0</i>

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Regarding the awareness about workplace sexual harassment-related policies/ acts in Nepal, the results found that 63 percent respondents had heard on workplace sexual harassment related policies/ acts. Whereas, nearly, tenth percent of respondents (9%) were unknown about any workplace sexual harassment related acts and policies.

To eliminate sexual harassment and promoting equality, ILO is working with relevant stakeholders for preventing these issues in Nepal and it helped to improve awareness and strengthen capacity of the key stakeholders. More importantly model code of conduct on violence and harassment in the world of work drafted for adoption by government, employers' and workers' organizations, enterprises and other institutions (ILO,2020)

Figure2: Respondents' knowledge on workplace sexual harassment-related policies/acts/ laws in Nepal (N=388)



Based on their knowledge of respondents on sexual harassment related acts, policies and programs, researchers have tried to explore its association with other selected background variables by using chi-square test. District wise variation has not shown and in all districts almost two third respondents (range (62% to 65%) had heard sexual harassment related laws/ acts and policies and it was statistically significant at 0.05 level. Similarly, respondents who were aged 25-34 years had highest knowledge (74%) on sexual harassment related acts/ policies than other age groups. Additionally, it also showed that respondents who were aged 35 years and above had less knowledge than earlier age group and it was significantly associated. Similarly, Level of education, and types of work were also significantly associated with knowledge on workplace sexual harassment related acts and policies. According to caste/ethnicity, Janjati and Brahmin (67% and 64% respectively) had highest knowledge on sexual harassment related acts/ laws/ policies than Dalit and Chhetri (35% and 44% respectively). Despite the significant association, the cell value is less than five so it may be invalid. After the secondary level education knowledge on sexual harassment related laws and policies increased than lower level of education and it was statistically significant. Overwhelming majority of the respondent who were working as a reception had highest knowledge on laws/policies (93%) and it was followed by managerial supervisor level (86%) whereas unskilled labour had lowest knowledge (47%) regarding these laws/ policies. Additionally, those respondents who worked as a full time/regular basis had high knowledge on these laws/ policies (67%) than part time workers (46%).

Table 5: Distribution of respondents who heard sexual harassment related laws/acts/policies (N=388)

Background Characteristics	Respondents who heard sexual harassment-related laws/ acts in Nepal			
	Number	Percent	Total (N)	Chi-square value
District				.040*
Bhaktapur	65	65.0	100	

Kathmandu	98	61.6	159	
Lalitpur	80	62.0	129	
Age group				.000*
15-24 years	88	64.7	136	
25-34 years	108	74.0	146	
35-44 years	25	43.1	58	
45- 54 years	22	45.8	48	
Level of education				.000*
Illiterate	20	30.8	65	
Primary	18	54.5	33	
Lower secondary	6	26.1	23	
Secondary	60	65.2	92	
Higher secondary	56	75.7	74	
Bachelor's and above	83	82.2	101	
Marital status				.000*+
Currently married	123	56.9	216	
Divorced/ widow	8	50.0	16	
Unmarried	112	71.8	156	
Caste/ethnicity				.000*+
Brahmin	95	64.2	148	
Chhetri	14	43.8	32	
Dalit	6	35.3	17	
Janjati	128	67.0	191	
Occupation				.000*+
Managerial / supervisor level	31	86.1	36	
Skilled labour	19	63.3	30	
unskilled labour	71	46.7	152	
Entertainment sector	20	51.3	39	
Teacher	89	76.1	117	
Reception	13	92.9	14	
Types of work				.001*
Part-time	39	45.9	85	
Regular	204	67.3	303	
Total	243	62.6	388	

Source: Field Survey, 2021

*The chi-square statistic is significant at the 0.05 level.

+ More than 20 per cent of cells in this section have expected cell counts of less than 5. Therefore, chi-square results may be invalid.

Conclusion

The knowledge and perception related to sexual harassment as well as knowledge about the act and policies, the sexual harassment is somehow a problem at the workplace. Public transport is one of the major places where sexual harassment occurs. Lack of awareness

among women about workplace harassment related to laws and policies. Unskilled workers have less knowledge about laws and policies compared to other professions. Awareness should be increased for working women about the rights given to women in the Act and Punishment which should be made more effective.

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