

## **Unveiling the Realities: Understanding Sexual Harassment Perception among Secondary School Girls**

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### **Abstract**

The title of the study is "Unveiling the Realities: Understanding Sexual Harassment Perception among Secondary School Girls" in ward number 16 of Kathmandu Metropolitan City. For data collection, the schools were selected purposely inside Kathmandu i.e. Tarun Secondary School, Nepal Rastriya Secondary School and Yubak Secondary School of class 8 to 10 class. The schools were chosen from conventional purposive sampling method and the respondents were selected using census method. 320 female students were chosen from three secondary schools of KTM Ward No 16. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 16 to 18 which shows that they were in late adolescence. They were 100 out of the total 320 respondents. The psychological harassment was higher as compared to sexual harassment and economic harassment. Likewise, physical harassment also was found higher than sexual, economic and other types of harassment in the study area. The table indicates that response for physical harassment was 102, psychological harassment was 113, sexual harassment was 75, and economical and others was 25 and 5 respectively. Among them, 100 respondents had a loss of attention to studies and 95 respondents always felt stress. Likewise, 40 respondents said they had headaches and felt uneasy, 35 were feeling alone and 50 respondents said they had lost confidence. The sexual harassment activities were faced by 105 girls students by phone calls and social media whereas 95 respondents were showed vulgar things and frequently irritated, 35 respondents were tempted and proposed to sex, 50 respondents were attempted bad touch in sensitive organ and body parts, and lastly 35 respondents said vulgar words and whistling were used on them.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, adolescent girls, school environment.

### **Introduction**

Sexual harassment is a major problem in school going adolescent students. Actually, the term "sexual harassment" describes unwelcome proposals, sexual teasing, jokes, questions, remarks, pressure for dating, persuading letters, unwelcome love, undesirable sexual looks,

gestures, coy requests, pornographic materials related to sex (Espelate, 2018). Sexuality is a psychophysical energy. Sigmund Freud termed the sex as a natural phenomenon. It cannot be stopped by social rule and cannot be prohibited. If society attempts to prohibit sex it may bring terrible consequences in sexuality. So it should be regulated rather than prohibited in society (Maharjan, 2015). Sexual harassment is a ubiquitous and subtle manifestation of gender-based violence that extends beyond geographic, cultural, and social barriers to affect all segments of society. Given the damaging impacts that sexual harassment has on people, organizations, and communities, it is critical to comprehend the nuances of this issue in order to create safer and more equal environments. This manuscript explores the many facets of sexual harassment, including its underlying origins outward by bringing attention to this urgent problem and opening the door for real change and individual empowerment.

Approximately 80% students in U.S. Secondary Schools report they have experienced sexual harassment, but it also occurs frequently in elementary schools (American Association of University Women, 2001). This type of behavior has become so commonplace that many accept it as something everyone puts up with. Even if it is common, sexual harassment is unacceptable, causing personal pain and embarrassment and creating a negative learning environment. Recent years have been an upsurge in public awareness of sexual harassment due to lobbying activities and increased awareness. However, while receiving more attention, the issue is still widespread and severely underreported because of institutional obstacles, stigma, and fear of reprisals. This unwillingness to come forward promotes a culture of silence that shields abusers from accountability and feeds the cycle of abuse. Furthermore, the impact of sexual harassment is compounded by its interconnectedness with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, and LGBTQ+ identification, posing particular difficulties for marginalized people. Sexual harassment occurs mostly in adolescent period because it is the period of curiosity. The younger ones see the relationship or activities of elders; they want to gain experiences so the curiosity towards sex is high in human beings. Nowadays different kinds of television channels, newspaper, internet etc. also play a great role to increase sex curiosity within young adolescents. Most other activities easily affect people so they want to know or feel it. In the context of our society, education, economic conditions and others are the enforcing factor for sex curiosity. Some of the textbooks are being taught but they don't provide enough sex education and

somehow little are listed or written but teachers don't want to teach or discuss it as freely as they can. So the level of curiosity goes higher and higher (Gyawali, 2020).

It is crucial to look at the underlying processes and expressions of sexual harassment in order to fully understand its complexity. The spectrum of harassment is broad and varied, ranging from overt acts like unwanted physical advances and outright propositions to converse ones like microaggressions and gender-based stereotypes. Furthermore, victims' vulnerability is frequently made worse by the power dynamics present in many social and professional relationships, which foster an atmosphere that is conducive to abuse and exploitation. Through an analysis of these interactions, we may create more all-encompassing approaches to support, intervention, and prevention. Sexual harassment has profound repercussions on social standards and working environments in addition to individual experiences. In the workplace, harassment not only reduces output and morale but also feeds inequality by creating hostile work environments and limiting prospects for progress. Furthermore, the psychological effects on survivors-such as despair, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder-may have a lasting negative impact on their quality of life and general well-being. A comprehensive strategy that takes into account systemic as well as individual elements is needed to address these effects.

Understanding how multiple social, cultural, and institutional aspects are interrelated is crucial as we traverse the complexity of sexual harassment. We can better understand the underlying causes of sexual harassment and create more potent preventative and intervention tactics if we place it within larger systems of oppression and power. Furthermore, it is essential to give survivors' perspectives and experiences a central place in order to shape laws and procedures that put their security and dignity first. The issue of sexual harassment is widespread and complex, requiring the attention and intervention of individuals, organizations, and society at large. We can build a more fair and just society where no one is subjected to intimidation or violence by dissecting its intricacies and confronting the systems that support it. Insights, analysis, and approaches for promoting cultures of equality, consent, and respect are the main contributions of this thesis to the current discussion.

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To identify the activities of sexual harassment among adolescent girls of selected schools and classes.
2. To assess the knowledge and attitude towards sexual harassment girls students.

### ***Literature Review***

Agardh et al.'s cross-sectional study from 2022: of the female population, 26.8% of pupils and 24.5% of staff said they had been exposed to SH. The comparable percentages for male staff and students were 7.0% and 11.3%, while for non-binary staff and students, they were 33.3% and 29.4%. Uninvited remarks, inappropriate glances or movements, and "inadvertent" touching or brushing were the three types of harassment that staff and students most frequently experienced. 2.1% of female students and 0.6% of male students reported having attempted or successfully committed rape. About 80% of exposed participants reported seeing male offenders and 15% reported seeing female offenders. The bulk of occurrences reported by staff happened during regular university operations, whereas most events reported by students happened during social activities related to student life. Women reported being in a subservient power position more frequently than males when confronted with offenders who belonged to the same group (staff or students).

638 students participated in a survey by Sweeting et al. (2022) in which two-thirds said they had experienced some form of victimization in the previous three months: 64.7% said it was "visual/verbal" (such as sexual jokes) and 34.3% said it was "contact/personally-invasive" (such as sexual touching; most of these students also said they had experienced visual/verbal types). According to data, there may be a gateway effect, meaning that those who report more frequent visual or verbal behaviors are also more likely to report touch or personally invasive actions. In focus groups, participants voiced doubt about the appropriateness of most acts, and several survey respondents said they were not sure if they had engaged in specific behaviors. Ambiguities based on the behavioral context and enactment, such as the perception of the instigator's aims, the degree of pressure, persistence, and physicality, and the degree of familiarity between the instigator and recipient. Students used normative schemas supported by rights (to equality, respect, and dignity) and "knowingness," which is typically fostered by friendship, in an effort to clarify uncertainties.

In a nationwide study by Phillips et al. (2019) of university students in Canada, 188 students estimated that they had witnessed 807 instances of sexual harassment (SH) during their time in medical school. These acts were committed by classmates, patients, and, to a lesser degree, instructors. 98% of the victims were women, while the perpetrators were nearly always men. What was revealed was a picture of the social, educational, and personal contexts in which

victims, peers, and teachers all grow to accept sexual harassment as the norm. Even though they found harassment to be perplexing, unpleasant, and embarrassing, students frequently attempted to ignore it. They provided schools with ways to increase consciousness, assist pupils, and stop or lessen future injuries.

Friborg et al. (2017) did a cross-sectional multilevel study and found that there was a statistically significant correlation between experiencing workplace sexual harassment from clients or customers and having greater levels of depressive symptoms (2.05; 95% CI: 0.98–3.12) as compared to not experiencing such harassment. The mean level of depressive symptoms was higher in employees harassed by coworkers, managers, or inferiors (2.45; 95% CI: 0.57–4.34) than in employees harassed by clients or customers. None of the investigated psychosocial workplace activities showed statistically significant connections with client or customer harassment (all  $p > 0.05$ ).

According to a study by Gyawali et al. (2022) involving 371 female students, the most frequent impact that sexual harassment has on female students' learning performance is linked to a motivating learning experience, and 64% of the girls reported that sexual harassment lowers their motivation for self-learning activities. The inability to focus on the study (63%), as well as the demotivation of 23% of the girls to sit in class because they were afraid of being harassed sexually, was the other repercussions. Following the motivational effect, it was discovered that sexual harassment had an impact on interaction activities. Of these, 61 percent of the girls reported that their fear of being sexually harassed during the teacher-student learning process had reduced their interactional and discussion activities, and 25 percent of them said the same about their peer group discussions. The impacts of sexual harassment on female students' learning outcomes and school-related behaviors are also reported to be impacted. Now Nepal is declared the law of muluki criminal code 2074; Sec. 24 deals sexual misconduct and sexual harassment. Custody up to 3 years and fine to Rs 30,000/- if any of the sexual harassment acts mentioned in section 224 of muluki criminal code 2074 (Adhikari, 2021).

The issue of sexual harassment has garnered significant attention in recent years as awareness about its detrimental effects on individuals and society at large has grown (Buchanan et al, 2019). The problem of sexual harassment is deeply rooted in our society. As there is a problem, it has consequences too. The consequence of this problem may be depression, suicide, addiction to drugs and withdrawal from education. In school, teasing, ragging and lying are

common. Ragging sometimes is the reason for the death of students. Day by day harassment is creating big problems in society as our society is walking towards moderation. More problems related to harassment are found prevalent (Fernald, 2015).

Approximately 76% of the participants in Thapalia et al.'s 2020 survey, which had 441 female secondary school students, reported having encountered sexual harassment at some point in their lives. There was a strong correlation found between parental occupation and religion and sexual harassment. The majority of individuals who reported experiencing sexual harassment said that the harassers were strangers, and that at the time of the incidents, they either disregarded it or took no action. Public spaces, schools, and highways were the most frequent locations where participants experienced sexual harassment.

### **Methodology**

This study is carried out on the basis of descriptive as well as analytical research design. The data was collected by using questionnaires from the sexually harassed students of secondary school of Kathmandu Districts. The sample sizes were taken using census method: 320 female students were taken as the part of the study. Three high schools were selected by conventional purposive sampling method.

### **Findings**

The results of our study, which looked at how secondary school girls perceived sexual harassment, are presented in this article. We discovered important insights into how young girls perceive and experience sexual harassment in the school setting through extensive surveys and interviews. These results provide insight into the frequency, type, and effects of sexual harassment on females in secondary schools' academic performance and general well-being.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Respondents according to their age

Age	No.	Percent (%)
12-15	65	20.31
16-18	105	32.81
18-19	100	31.25
Above 20 years	50	15.66
Total	320	100

The table shows that the majority of respondents were between the ages of 16 to 18, it shows that they were in their late adolescence. In the age of 16 to 18, it also shows a higher rate. Likewise, from 18 to 19 were 100 out of 320 respondents. Respondents above 20 years were only 50.

**Table 2.** Caste wise description of Respondents

Caste of Respondents	No. of Respondent	Percent (%)
Brahman and Chhetri	65	57.81
Janajati	55	17.19
Madhesi	25	7.813
Dalit	35	10.94
Others	30	6.25
Total	320	100

The above table shows the frequency of respondents according to caste which shows 185 respondents represented from Brahman and Chhetri community. Similarly 55 respondents were from Janajati family, 25 respondents were Madhesi, 35 Dalit and 30 respondents were from other castes.

**Table 3:** *Causes of Sexual Harassment*

Causes of Sexual Harassment	No. of Respondent	Percent (%)
Biological factors	79	24.69
Male Dominated Society	110	34.38
Due to Adolescent Period	70	21.88
Lack of Awareness	40	12.5
Socio-cultural factors	21	6.56
Total	320	100

The above table shows that the causes of sexual harassment was due to male dominated society was 110, biological causes was 79, the periods of adolescence was 70, lack of sexual awareness was 40 and socio-cultural factor was influence 21 respectively.

**Table 4:** *Respondents views on sexual harassment*

Types of Violence	No. of Respondent	Percent (%)
Physical Harassment	102	31.87
Psychological Harassment	113	35.31
Sexual Harassment	75	23.44
Economical Harassment	25	7.8125
Others	5	1.57
Total	320	100

The above table shows that the psychological harassment was higher as compare to sexual harassment and economic harassment. Likewise Physical harassment also found higher than sexual, economic and other types of harassment in the study area. The table indicates that physical harassment was 102, Psychological harassment was 113, sexual harassment was 75, economical and others was 25, 5 accordingly.



**Table 5:** Effect of Health due to Sexual Harassment

Effect on Health	Number of Respondents	Percent (%)
Headache and feeling uneasy	40	12.5
Feeling of stress	95	29.69
Being alone	35	10.94
Loss of confidence	50	15.63
Lack of attention on studies	100	31.25
Total	320	100

The above table indicates that 100 respondents lost focus on studies and 95 responded always feeling stress. Likewise, 40 respondents said they had headaches and were feeling uneasy. 35 were feeling alone and 50 respondents said they lost confidence.

**Table 6:** *Activities and Behaviors of Sexual Harassment*

Activities or Behavior	Number of Respondents	Percent(%)
Used of Vulgar word and Whistling	35	10.94
Try to touching in sensitive organ and body parts	50	15.63
Tempting and proposing to sex	35	10.94
Showing vulgar things and frequently irritating	95	29.69
Showing different types of sexually related materials from mobile and social media	105	32.813
Total	320	100

The above table shows that the sexual harassment activities were faced by 105 girls students by phone and social media whereas 95 respondents were showed vulgar things and frequently irritated, 35 respondents were tempted and proposed to sex, 50 respondents were tried to touch in sensitive organ and body parts, lastly 35 respondents were used of vulgar word and whistling.

## Conclusion

Sexual harassment was a major problem of our context. To minimize these issues the school administration should give regular information for personal awareness for sex, education and some of the students have not proper attitudes toward, so psychological counseling should be conducted to them. According to the finding of the study majority of the respondents feel that sexual harassment was common in school.

It is crucial to take a holistic strategy to treating sexual harassment of girls in secondary school, taking into account all of the aspects of this widespread problem. The victims of sexual harassment may experience severe and long-lasting consequences that affect their general well-being, mental health, and academic performance. As a result, it's critical to establish a secure and encouraging atmosphere where kids feel free to voice their concerns and where offenders are held responsible for their actions. Education is a key component in combating sexual harassment in secondary schools. Age-appropriate curriculum that teaches children about respect for others, boundaries, and consent should be implemented in schools. We can assist stop sexual harassment before it starts by educating young people about healthy relationships and the value of respect for others. To guarantee that every student receives the knowledge and assistance they require, these educational activities must be continuous and incorporated into the curriculum.

Campaigns for awareness are essential in the fight against sexual harassment in addition to education. In order to increase awareness of the problem and motivate students to come forward if they see or experience harassment, schools might host seminars, assemblies, and other events. These efforts can also aim to dispel negative beliefs and preconceptions that support an environment that tolerates harassment and discrimination. Schools can make the classroom a safer and more welcoming place for all children by promoting an environment of empathy and responsibility. Enforcing strict policies is another essential part of combating sexual harassment in high schools. Schools need to implement strong, well-defined policies that spell out inappropriate conduct and the penalties for offenders. Parents, teachers, and students should all be informed about these policies so that everyone is aware of their rights and obligations. Schools should also have policies in place for reporting harassment instances and helping the victims. To make sure that justice is done, it is crucial to treat allegations of harassment seriously and to look into them as soon as possible in an unbiased manner.

Addressing sexual harassment of females in secondary school also requires the establishment of a supportive environment. Confidential resources and victim support services, including advocacy and counseling, should be offered by schools. It is imperative that victims understand they are not alone and that assistance is at their disposal. Schools should also endeavor to promote a peer-supporting environment where students watch out for one another and step in to stop harassment of others. By fostering close relationships within the school community, we can establish a network of support that aids in the detection and resolution of harassment incidents. Furthermore, for effective sexual harassment prevention, communities, lawmakers, and schools must collaborate. This entails working together on preventative initiatives, exchanging information, and promoting legislation that puts kids' safety and wellbeing first. Together, we can bring about structural change that contributes to the elimination of sexual harassment in secondary schools and builds a society that is more just and equal for all.

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