

## HARASSMENT AGAINST FEMALE, SOME FACTS FROM EGYPT

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Sexual harassment is the most prevalent form of violence against women and the most abusive. Women are harassed in their jobs, schools, universities, and even at homes. **Methodology:** A convenience sampling method was used to recruit 900 Egyptian females (between 15 and 60 years old), after giving expressed oral consent, using a prepared questionnaire that included ten questions about knowledge, type, and response to harassment. Participants were divided into two groups: group A of 500 female patients of non-medical background seeking medical advice in Kasr-Alainy hospital and Group B of 400 medical student females. The participants' epidemiological data were collected including age, marital status, residency, education, and status of work. **Results:** the study showed that the verbal type of harassment was the commonest (70%), school or street were the most common places of exposure (84%), the perpetrator was not known to the victim (97%). 75.1% of physical violence claims were in the form of simple wounds. Police service against harassment was known only to (62 %), and only (11%) of victims tried to contact police. **Conclusion:** The safety of women requires a multi-disciplinary preventive strategy, awareness about different types of violence against women is a crucial initial step, improving women's access to resources, and increasing the role of anti-harassment units in police as well as many universities in Egypt.

**Keywords:** harassment, female, Egyptian, violence

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sexual harassment could be identified or defined as a type of gender-based violence committed against women just because of their sex (Latcheva, 2017). Sexual harassment is the most prevalent form of violence against women and the most abusive (Fitzgerald, 2017). Women are harassed in their jobs, schools, universities, and even at homes (Reed, Collinsworth, & Fitzgerald, 2005), where sexual coercion is the most prevalent form ; Zaghoul, khater& Hetta,2017) . Nowadays, sexual harassment has become more complicated, as it can occur both online and face-to-face (Scarduzio, Sheff, & Smith, 2017).

Sexual harassment is considered one of Egypt's major issues that needs to be more deeply investigated on larger numbers of females, different educational categories,

and different ages. The current study aims to explore harassment against the female in Egypt, its rate, types, most common age, places at which harassment occur, most common perpetrator and attitude of both victim and society towards the perpetrator. In addition, the study also tries to assess if there is a difference between highly educated students and others in type of harassment and attitude or response of the female victim.

### **MATERIALS & METHODS**

A convenience sampling method was used to recruit a total of 900 females. A structured questionnaire was prepared by the researchers and included ten questions about knowledge about harassment, if she was exposed to harassment, its type, frequency, site of exposure, the perpetrator, and attitude of both victim and society

towards the perpetrator. The study was conducted on Egyptian females, aged between 15 and 60 years and accepting participating in the study. Oral expressed consent was obtained from the participants. Questionnaires were distributed during the period between January 2019 and April 2019.

The current study was conducted on two female groups:

**Group A (non-medical females)**

It included 500 female patients who sought medical advice at outpatient clinics, Kasr-Alainy hospitals, Cairo University. They were non-medical students, and their ages were from 15 to 60 years.

**Group B (medical student females)**

It included 400 female medical students at Faculty of Medicine Cairo University. Their ages were from 18 to 25 years.

**Statistical analysis:** Data was received and collected in an excel sheet and analyzed using SPSS version 22.

**Table (1):** Demographics data of the participants

	Non-medical group (Group 1) n= 500	Medical group (Group 2) n=400
<b>Age (years)</b>	15-60	18-25
<b>Marital status</b>		
Not Married	100 (20%)	400 (100%)
Married /Divorced	400 (80%)	0 (0%)
<b>Residency</b>		
Urban	200 ( 40%)	300 (75%)
Rural	300 (60%)	100 (25%)
<b>Education</b>		
Illiteracy	400 (80%)	0 (0%)
Intermediate education	100 (20%)	0 (0%)
High education	0	400 (100%)
<b>Status of Work</b>		
Doesn't work	250 (50%)	400 (100%)
Work	250 (50%)	0

Descriptive analysis was done, and correlations were estimated using the chi-square test.

**Ethical approval:** The study was approved by the scientific and ethical committee of Forensic Medicine and Clinical Toxicology Department. Express oral consent was taken from participants.

## **RESULTS**

The study was conducted on nine hundred 900 Egyptian females (medical and non-medical): the participants' demographic data are described in table1. Ninety-four percent 94% knew about the harassment, and six 6 % did not know or hear about it; eighty-one percent 81% exposed to harassment, and nineteen 19 % have not been exposed to any type of harassment (Table 2). For those subjected to harassment, most of them were repeatedly exposed and the most common type of exposure was oral or verbal harassment (Table 2).

**Table (2):** females (total sample) exposed to harassment, its type, place, frequency, the perpetrator and attitude of victim and society.

Question	Answers	Percentage	Number
Knowledge about harassment	YES	95	855
	NO	5%	45
Exposure to harassment	YES	81%	731
	NO	19%	169
Frequency of harassment	Once	85%	622
	More than once	15%	109
Type of harassment	Verbal	70%	514
	Physical	21%	151
	Both	9%	66
Place of exposure	School/street	84%	614
	Workplace	3%	22
	Others	13%	95
Relation to perpetrator	Unknown	97%	708
	Friend	2%	15
	Relative	1%	8
Victim reaction	Just go away	61%	445
	Defense	31%	227
	Ask for help	8%	59
People reaction	Try help	26%	541
	Don't try	74%	190

According to the site of exposure, schools or streets were the most common places of exposure eighty-four percent (84%), while only three 3% were exposed at work and thirteen 13 % were exposed in other places. In most of the cases ninety-seven percent (97%), the perpetrator was not known to the victim, only in two 2 % the perpetrator was a friend, and in 1% was a relative. Both victim and people reactions

were negative in most cases (table 2); sixty-one 61 % of victims (445 subjects) just gone away, and people in seventy-four 74 % of the cases did not try to help.

Regarding police service against harassment, it was known only to sixty-six 66 % of victims and only twenty-five 25 % of victims who trust that police will help; however, only eleven 11% of victims who tried to contact police (table 3).

**Table (3):** females (total sample) experienced about police service and its value using chi-square test

	Hearing about police service against harassment	Trust in police	Tried calling police
Number	479	181	80
percentage	66%	25%	11%
Number	252	550	651
percentage	34%	75%	89%

In the current study, the first group was included: non-medical females (group A), and the second group was the medical student group (group B). The study revealed that there was significant difference

between these two groups in knowledge about harassment with 100% knowledge in the medical group; also, there was a significant difference in exposure towards the non-medical group (table4).

**Table (4):** difference between two female groups about harassment and police service using chi-square test

		Group A		Group B		c	P. value
		%	N	%	N		
Knowledge about harassment	YES	91	455	100	400	35.172	p < .01*
	NO	9	45	0	0		
Exposure to harassment	YES	75	375	89	356	28.558	p < .01*
	NO	25	125	11	44		
Frequency of harassment	Once	88	330	82	292	5.1431	p < .05*
	More than once	12	45	18	64		
Type of harassment	verbal	64	240	77	274	16.146	p < .018*
	physical	26	98	15	53		
	Both	10	37	8	29		
Victim reaction	Just Go away	59	221	67	239	6.9	p < .05*
	Defense	36	135	27	96		
	Ask for help	5	19	6	21		
Knowledge about police serve against harassment	YES	65	244	66	235	0.072	P= 0.78
	NO	35	131	34	121		
Trust in police	YES	30	113	19	68	11.93	p < .01*
	NO	70	262	81	288		
Tried calling police	YES	10	37	13	46	1.693	P= 0.193
	NO	90	338	87	310		

\* p value < 0.05 is significant

Concerning victim reaction, the medical student group showed a more negative reaction than the other group. For police service against harassment, there was no significant difference between two groups except that females in the non-medical group have more trust in police (table4).

According to the type of harassment, verbal harassment was the most common in

both groups; however, the verbal type was more frequent in the medical group than other group and the physical type was more frequent in the non-medical group than the medical group. Regarding exposure to physical harassment, 75.1% of physical abuse claims were simple wounds, and 24.9% were serious injuries in the form of violent abortion and burns (Table 5).

**Table (5):** Chi square test for physical injuries inflicted in cases of harassment

Types of physical injuries		N= 217
<b>Simple injuries</b>		N= 163 (75.1%)
	Abrasions	82 (50.3%))
	Bruised	81 (49.7%)
<b>Severe injuries</b>		N= 54 (24.9%)
	Violent abortion	30 (55.5%)
	Burns	24 (44.4%)
	Dry burns	12 (50%)
	Scalds	11 (45.8%)
	Electric	1 (4.1%)

## DISCUSSION

Sexual harassment, or *taharush jinsi* in Arabic, is a comparatively recent concept applied to daily Egyptian as late as the 1990s as nongovernmental organizations started to pay attention to how pervasive gender-based violence had been. The prominent expression of (*mu'aksa*) has conflated sexual harassment with flirtation in public spaces. That concept has led to the popular acceptance of sexual harassment, and many people do not consider it a serious crime or a violation (**Hammad, 2017**).

The problem of sexual harassment in Egypt has become a rising societal challenge with no successful assessment or solutions to it. Physical sexual harassment differs from verbal sexual harassment, in some cases it may end dramatically into rape or murder. It is becoming a worrying trend in our local community, expanding across all standards and to every level and section of the society. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights (ECWR) describes it as "A Social cancer" (**Ebaid, 2013**).

Sexual harassment against girls and women in public places in Egypt is widespread and well-known. United Nations declared that the sexual harassment percentage in Egypt was about 99%, based on their study on 2332 women from 7 governorates (**Cairo, Dakahleya, Ismailia, Alexandria, Gharbia, Qena and Assiut**) (**Abdelmonem & Galan, 2017; El Deeb, 2010**). Although this percentage seems to be huge, a previous study in 2008 in Greater Cairo, including 1010 women, showed that 83% of Egyptian women and girls and about 98 % of foreign women reported being sexually harassed (**Abdelmonem & Galan, 2017**). Harass Map team in 2014 conducted a study on 300 women in Greater Cairo and found that 95 % of women reported experiencing sexual harassment (**Fahmy, Abdelmonem, Hamdy, Badr, & Hassan, 2014**).

Concerning the type of harassment, our study showed that the verbal type was the commonest type (70%), followed by physical abuse (21%), and combined abuse,

both verbal and physical, was present in about 9%. These results came in accordance with (**Naif et al., 2013**), who shows that verbal harassment was the most commonly reported (68%), followed by physical harassment (11.1 %).

Regarding the type of physical harassment, our work showed that 75.1% of physical abuse was in the form of simple wounds, and 24.9% of wounds were in the form of violent abortion and burns. These results came in accordance with (**Sobh et al., 2020**), who showed that half of the physical violence claims were simple wounds, and the other half were serious injuries in the form of traumatic abortion, infirmities, Stab, and firearm injuries. Our results also came in accordance with (**El-Gendy, El-kholy & Metwally, 2016**) who showed that contusions of the face and neck, inflicted by hands and feet were the most common injuries. Also (**Swailem & Elagamy, 2018**) supported our findings as they showed that 91.4% of physical injuries were simple

Regarding the site of exposure to harassment, school or street was the commonest place of exposure 84%, while only 3% exposed in the workplace and 13 % exposed in other places. These results were in contrast to (**Gale, Mordukhovich, Newlan, & McNeely, 2019**), where there was significant prevalence of harassment in workplaces. In the past year alone, 63% of cabin crew have experienced verbal abuse, 26% experienced sexual harassment, and 2% had been sexually assaulted at work. This could be explained that the number of working women in Egypt is much less than that in the United States and Canada. So, the women in Egypt are more exposed to harassment in the street than in working places. Also, it could be attributed to underreporting of harassment in workplaces and the fear of stigma.

The current work showed that in most cases (97%), the perpetrator was not known to the victim, and only in 2 %, the perpetrator was a friend and in 1% of cases was a relative. These results are similar to

(Sivertsen et al., 2019) who conducted a national student survey in Norway for higher education students and found that the vast majority of past-year sexual harassment acts (77%–86%) were committed by someone outside of the university (neither a fellow student nor a member of university staff). Overall, fellow students committed harassment in 18%–29% of cases, while a member of the university staff reported harassment in 0.6%–4.6% of the cases.

Regarding reporting harassment to police, the current study showed that police service against harassment was known only to 66 % of victims and, only 25 % of victims trust that police will help them. However, only 11% of victims tried to contact police. Despite the difference in culture between women in Egypt and those of United states, the results of our work came accordance with the 2015 U.S. National Domestic Violence hotline survey, which discussed women's fears about the involvement of law enforcement (Logan & Valente, 2015).

The U.S. study showed that Four out of five women (80%) who had never called the police before, were, to some extent, scared of calling them in the future; 59% were concerned the police might not believe them or take any action, 70% were feared of calling the police because they could make things worse or would have negative impacts on them and 45% expressed their concern that calling the police would have negative impact on the life of the offender. Moreover, nearly one in four women (24%) who had previously called the police reported that they would not call again in case of future sexual assault. However, 1 in 2 women (50%) were uncertain if they would call the police in the future, and about 1 in 4 women (26%) were very likely to call the police in the future. Those who called the police 30% of women said they felt less safe, while 20% felt safer. However, 50% of women felt no difference in safety. The previous results, whether in our work or that of the National Domestic Violence Hotline in U.S, reflect that woman

are reluctant to report harassment to police authorities for different reasons, including them well of privacy, fear of retaliation from the abuser, or their fear from stigma.

In our study group B had more knowledge about harassment and more frequent exposure which could be because they were students and were exposed to streets daily unlike group A who were mostly housewives. However, group B had a higher frequency of verbal harassment, but lower rates of physical harassment compared to group A which could be due to that the harassers are afraid of highly educated women as they usually face the perpetrator aggressively after verbal harassment, so they cannot proceed to physical type.

Concerning the victim's reaction to harassment, it was found that in group B, most of victims seemed to just go away and had the lowest trust in police. Unfortunately, their attitude was because they did not feel that they can protect them. A study Interviewed some police officers and found that most of them communicated that they do not take sexual harassment cases seriously and often ignore the case (Ebaid, 2013). Also, sometimes, in cases of harassment, if there is no other witness, it will be the victim's word against the perpetrator's word so it would be hard to press charges against the perpetrator. In some cases, the perpetrator and even the witnesses try to beg the victim to forgive the perpetrator and not to press charges against him saying, "Don't you have a brother like him? You are going to ruin his future."

The government has to implement anti-harassment laws effectively and to educate and train the executive and judiciary authorities. The government also needs to carry out programs and projects in the educational and public sectors to raise awareness of sexual harassment. Not only in Cairo should such measures and campaigns be centralized, but they should also include all Egyptian governorates. The government should encourage people to report incidents and to make the process

smoother for them. Civil society groups need to implement programs and projects to combat and raise awareness of sexual harassment in Egypt (Ebaid, 2013).

### **CONCLUSION**

It is clear from the results of the current study that women's safety will continue to be a concern and will require a multi-disciplinary preventive strategy. Awareness about different types of violence against women is a crucial initial step, especially in the Arabian countries. Anti-harassment units in police, as well as many universities in Egypt, have established five years ago. However, awareness about their services among women and college students is mandatory to encourage them to speak out and report harassment.

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الملخص العربي**التحرش ضد المرأة، بعض الحقائق من مصر**

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**المقدمة :** التحرش الجنسي هو أكثر أشكال العنف ضد المرأة انتشاراً والأكثر خطورة. تتعرض

النساء للتحرش في وظائفهن ، والمدارس ، والجامعات ، وحتى في المنازل.

**المشاركون والأساليب:** تم استخدام طريقة أخذ العينات الملائمة باستخدام استبيان تم توزيعه على

900 امرأة مصرية (بين 15 و 60 عاماً) ، بعد إعطاء الموافقة الشفوية الصريحة و هذا الاستبيان تضمن

عشرة أسئلة حول المعرفة والنوع والاستجابة للتحرش. تم تقسيم المشاركين إلى مجموعتين. المجموعة "أ"

من 500 مريضة من خلفية غير طبية يسعين للحصول على المشورة الطبية في مستشفى قصر العيني

والمجموعة "ب" المكونة من 400 طالبة طب تم جمع البيانات الوبائية للمشاركين بما في ذلك العمر

والحالة الاجتماعية والإقامة والتعليم وحالة العمل.

**النتائج:** أظهرت الدراسة أن نوع التحرش اللفظي كان الأكثر شيوعاً (70٪) ، وكانت المدرسة أو

الشارع أكثر الأماكن شيوعاً (84٪) ، ولم يكن الجاني معروفاً للضحية (97٪). 75.1٪ من دعاوى العنف

الجسدي كانت على شكل جروح بسيطة. خدمة الشرطة ضد التحرش كانت معروفة فقط لـ (62٪) ، و

(11٪) فقط من الضحايا حاولوا الاتصال بالشرطة.

**الاستنتاجات :** تتطلب سلامة المرأة استراتيجية وقائية متعددة التخصصات ، ويعد الوعي بأنواع

العنف المختلفة ضد المرأة خطوة أولية حاسمة ، وتحسين وصول المرأة إلى الموارد ، وزيادة دور وحدات

مكافحة التحرش في الشرطة وكذلك العديد من الجامعات في مصر.