



Research Article

AWARENESS OF UNDERGRADUATE GIRL STUDENTS ABOUT AVOIDANCE STRATEGIES FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT

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ABSTRACT

Young female adults are most vulnerable to harassment and violence towards them. These strategies could be learned either from circumstances surrounding young female adults or by some organized training. A descriptive, cross sectional survey design on 200 female undergraduate students from the University of Delhi, India was undertaken using convenient sampling technique. A semi structured interview and a structured awareness questionnaire developed by researcher was used. Results: Most of the subjects feared for facing sexual harassment of self whenever they went out alone. Most of the subjects reported high level of alertness from strangers and identified dark, isolated, lonely streets as most probable place for sexual harassment. More than half of the subjects were unaware about legal provisions and two fifth of the subjects never complained to any higher authority or police official. Nearly half of the subjects had fair level of awareness about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment. Awareness was not found to be correlated to any of the variables and the type of college (women or co educational college) they attended. Implications: Youth need to be aware and avoid risk factors for safety of self and how to report the incident to prevent further harassment. Conclusion: Overall awareness about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment of undergraduate females of the University of Delhi was found to be less than satisfactory.

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INTRODUCTION

Perception of threat from a situation makes an individual alert and decides when to take action for self safety. Despite of high literacy levels young female adults show tendency to tolerate harassment and delay in early identification of warning signs, leading to sexual harassment. Strategies are identification of risk before the incidence occurs and understanding the meaning of sexual harassment. Females should be aware of any behavior uncomfortable is to be perceived as harassment, incidence happening in their own surroundings, be able to calculate the overall risk of that particular situation and plan for safety action. Fear of harassment could be from any person known or unknown, and at any situation particularly in dark and isolated places or situation where victim becomes alone and could not call for any help. So the present study has explored the awareness strategies to be used for avoiding sexual harassment of young female adults. According to a report of Delhi police cited by *Dna.com*, 16% increase in registration of crime against women (molestation, eve-teasing and stalking) in the city Delhi after *Nirbhaya case*. In a study by Jagori in 2010 females used avoidance strategies like avoiding certain places, not going out at dark, maintain dress code and using pepper spray. The present study was undertaken to assess the

awareness of strategies for avoiding sexual harassment as it could be the easiest solution for the current scenario of increasing violence against women.

The objectives of the study were:

To find out the awareness of young female adults about strategies to be used to avoid sexual harassment, with regards to-

1. Description of sexual harassment,
 2. Reasons for sexual harassment,
 3. Identification of high risk situations for sexual harassment,
 4. Strategies for prevention of sexual harassment,
 5. Strategies for prevention of date rape,
 6. Actions to be taken against sexual harassment including legal provisions, and
 7. Training to prevent and combat sexual harassment,
- To find out the association between awareness of young female adults about strategies for avoidance of sexual harassment with selected demographic variables.
 - To find out the association between awareness of young female adults about strategies for avoidance of

sexual harassment with type of college (women/Co-ed).

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach, cross sectional survey was used and 200 young female adults studying in degree courses in the age group of 17-21 years from four selected colleges of Delhi University, two co-educational colleges and two women colleges were included by convenient sampling method. Students unwilling to participate were excluded from the study.

November 2014. Data were analysed using STATA 16.1 by appropriate descriptive statistics-frequency, percentage and inferential statistics- Pearson's chi square test and Fisher exact test.

Description of the subjects

Mean age of the subjects was 18.77± 1.118 years and the maximum age was 21years and minimum was 17 years. All (100%) subjects were unmarried. Almost half (54%) of the subjects monthly family income was greater than Rs 60,000 /- Most (89.5%) of the subject belonged to Hindu religion and Most (65%) of the subjects were residing in urban area in Delhi NCR.

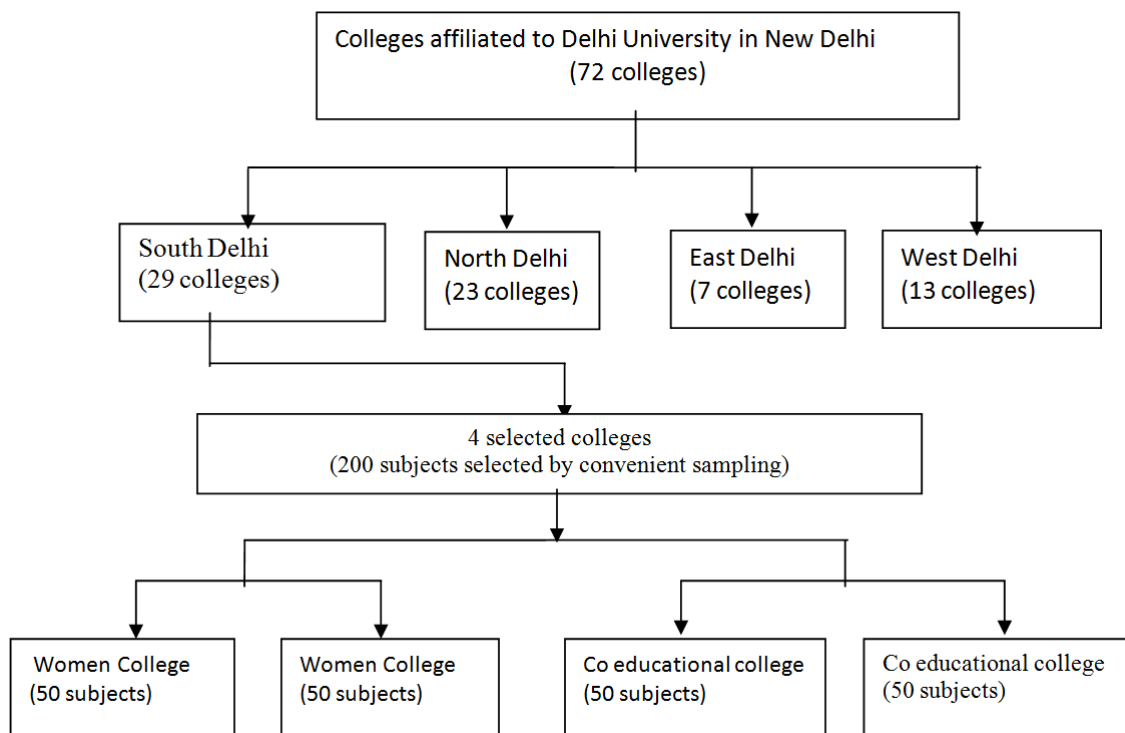


Fig no.2 Sampling design

Tools used: Subject data sheet: structured questionnaire for socio demographic profile and selected variables of the subjects and informed consent form. Tool 1: Interview schedule (IS) (05 items) to assess previous experience with sexual harassment either on self or observed by subjects and preferred action against sexual harassment and whom they would like to inform in a situation of sexual harassment. Tool 2: Structured questionnaire (AQ) (40items-12 single answer questions and 28 multiple answer questions) for assessing the awareness of Young female adults about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment divided into seven groups. Each item was given a score of one and maximum score could be 172. The awareness was scored on five point scale, some<36, slightly (36-72), fair (73-108), just enough (109-144), good (145-172) and was further categorized as awareness levels-Excellent- good awareness scores, Satisfactory-just enough awareness scores and less than satisfactory-fair awareness scores. The content validity was done and reliability of the tool was assessed by test retest method by McNemer Chi square test and p value was found not significant for all questions. Pilot study was done on 30 subjects and was found to be feasible. Ethical clearance was obtained from ethical committee of AIIMS, New Delhi and informed consent was obtained from subjects. The data was collected from June to

Major findings and discussion

Avoidance strategies: Strategies used by subjects to avoid sexual harassment like physical training, verbal resistance, avoiding situation, knowing description of sexual harassment and feeling the threat to safety.

In the present study nearly half (54%) of the subjects showed understanding of the meaning of sexual harassment approximately (Fig no1).

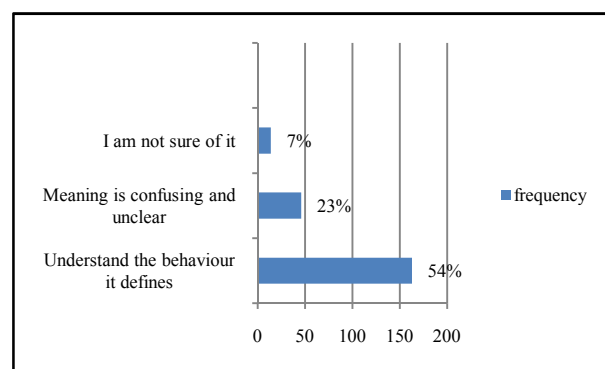


Fig no.1 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about sexual harassment (n=200)

The findings were supported by Menon (2011), in South Africa that 74% of the female students understood the meaning of sexual harassment. Most (65%) of the subjects feared about facing harassment while going out alone (Fig.no.2 and avoided (54.5%) being out any time of the day due to fear of harassment (Fig.no.3) and 45% of subjects reported often being stalked and commented, these results are similar to findings by survey in a Delhi University college(2013), that most of the subjects feared going out in evening and night and 54.6% of the subjects faced stalking very often when they went out alone and contradictory to Jagori survey(2010) (Delhi) that women faced harassment during day time the most.

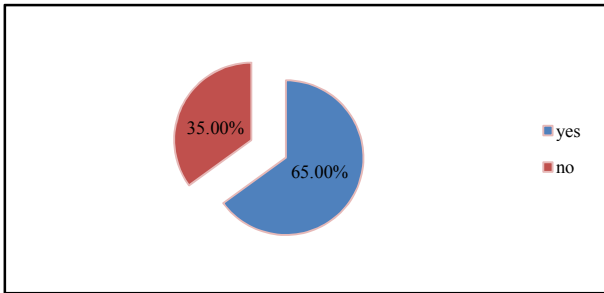


Fig no.2 Pie diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about fear of sexual harassment (n=200)

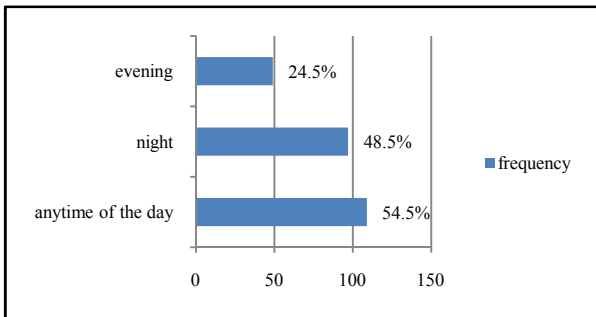


Fig no.3 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about time to be avoided for going out due to fear of harassment (n=200)

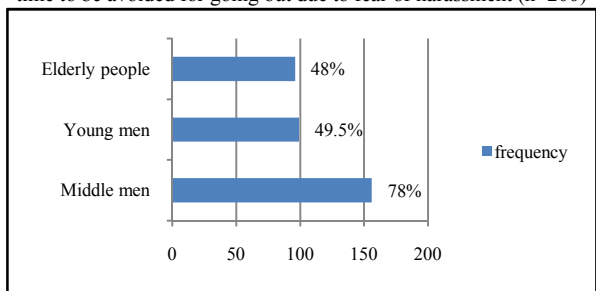


Fig no.4 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about age group they fear of most probable harasser (n=200)

Regarding behaviours that constitute sexual harassment mostly (63%) said it includes contact without victims consent, pushing against will, use of force and coercion. Similar findings were reported by Abe (2012) (Nigeria) who reported that most (75%) of the subjects identified sexual harassment behaviours. Majority (78%) of the subjects feared to be harassed by middle age men, these findings were contradictory to Jagori survey (2010) (Delhi) that 64.8% of subjects feared men of younger age the most. (Fig.no.4)

In present study four fifth of the subjects reported physical training like karate judo, commando training as most effective to combat sexual harassment where as earlier studies reported

that females preferred to avoid situation of harassment beforehand instead of confronting the perpetrator.

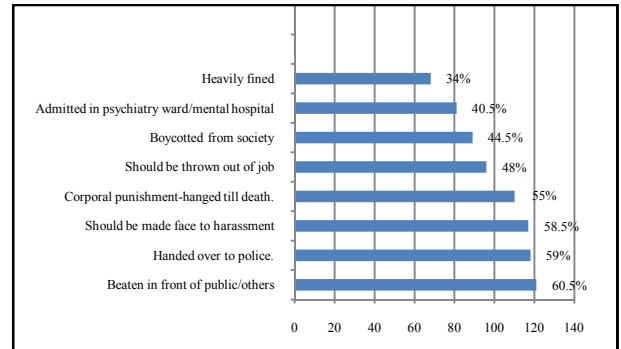


Fig no.5 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about punishment to be given for sexual harassment (n=200)

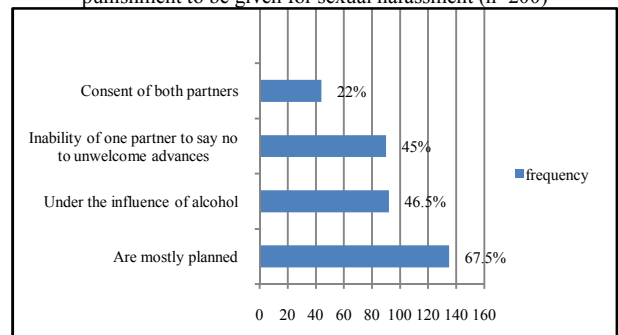


Fig No. 6 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about reason for date rape (n=200)

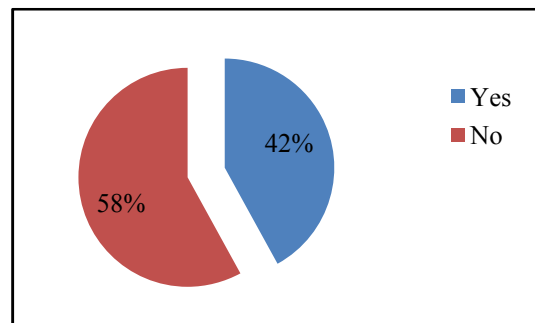


Fig no.7 Pie diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about legal provisions against sexual harassment (n=200)

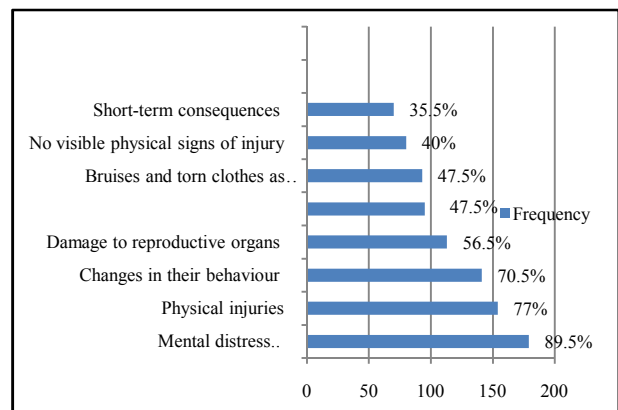


Fig no.8 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about sufferings of women who have been sexually harassed (n=200)

Confrontation: The ability to identify threat to self safety and fight back. It includes low tolerance to sexual harassment and asking back harasser for any unwanted behavior being faced and verbally asking him the reason for sexual harassment.

In present study most (80%) of the subjects had the view victim should stop unwanted behaviours on the spot itself if one feels discomfort and only one fifth of the subjects would ignore sexual harassment, these findings are contrary to study among college students in (2011) (Honkong) where victim tolerated and did not report to higher authorities due to fear of facing embarrassment. Two fifth of the subjects wanted the harasser to be beaten in front of others to teach a lesson to others, similar findings were reported by Sheikh (2014) (Karachi) that harasser should be punished in front of others. Most (67.5%) of the subjects reported that date-rape may occur during outing with a friend or fiancé mostly by planned actions. (Fig.no.10)

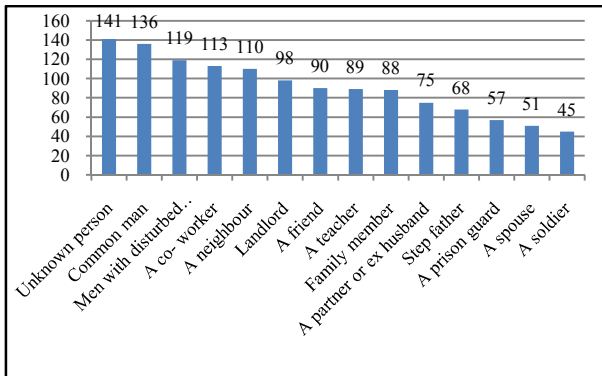


Fig no.09 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about most probable harasser (n=200)

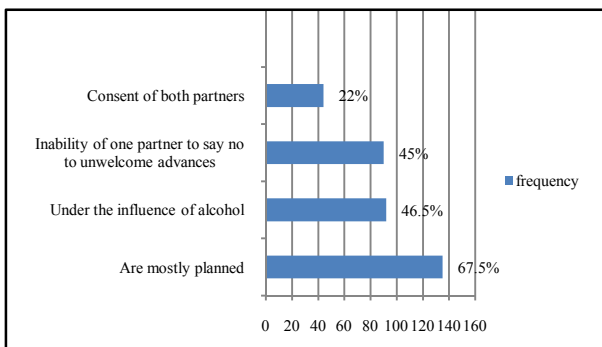


Fig no.10 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about reason for date rape (n=200)

Advocacy seeking: The subjects need to be prepared about whom to seek help if a situation of sexual harassment occurs to minimize the harm caused and to prevent future occurrence of sexual harassment. The victim could seek help from family, friends, nearby person, media and legal help from police.

More than half (58%) of the subjects were unaware about the legal provisions and legal facilities available for prevention of sexual harassment. Most (89.5%) of the subjects reported mental distress as the most common suffering faced by victim following sexual harassment, these findings are supported by Sheikh (2014) (Karachi). (fig no 8)

Social coping

Support from family and society for the victim of sexual harassment to have the courage to inform to others for help and to take an action against the harasser. Public awareness about sexual harassment would decrease the number of sexual harassment being faced by females.

Table no.1 Frequency distribution showing awareness of subjects about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment (n=200)

Awareness category about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment	Scores (range 172-0)	Frequency(%)
• Some	0-35	01(0.5%)
• Slight	36-72	75(37.5%)
• Fair	73-108	94(47%)
• Just enough	109-144	31(15.5%)
• Good	145-172	00

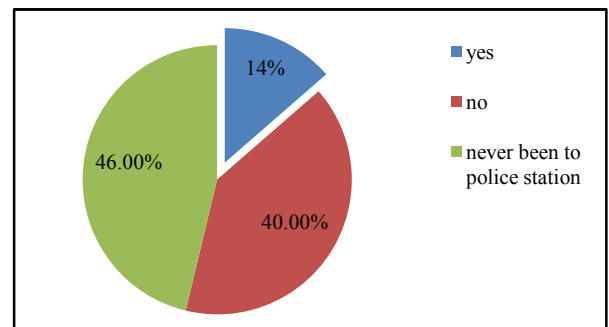


Fig no.11 Pie diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects whether they felt safe at police station (n=200)

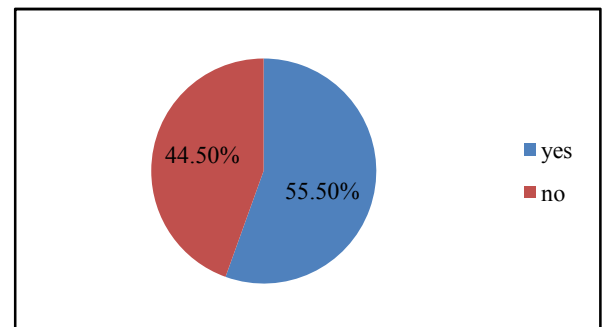


Fig no.12 Pie diagram showing frequency percentage of subjects about complaining to police or any high official regarding sexual harassment they have faced (n=200)

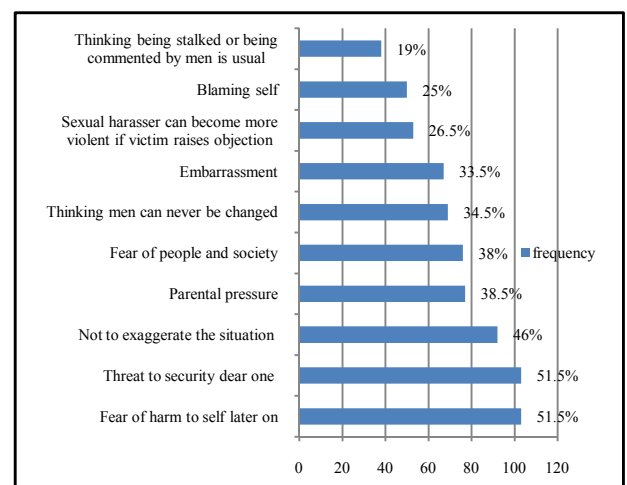


Fig no.13 Bar diagram showing frequency percentage for reasons of subjects not reporting sexual harassment to police or higher authorities (n=200)

Majority (83.5%) had view that women of any age, religion, occupation could become a victim, a quarter (27%) of subjects reported victims were young attractive and who act and dress provocatively and 19.7% of subjects reported victim lie about sexual harassment. Banerjee (2011) (Pune) reported that 37% of the female students felt that females should not dress to attract men (harasser) and only 7% agreed that females lie and enjoy sexual harassment reporting. Most (73%) of the subjects reported feeling of sexual satisfaction as primary motivation behind sexual harassment. Most (70.5%) of the subjects report high level of alertness from stranger due to fear of harassment (Fig no 9), These findings were contrary to findings by Dizimadi (2007) (Malawi), Equal commission report (2013) (Honkong) that most probable harasser was known to the victim and victim's friends or relatives.

1. Nearly half (48.5%) of the subjects reported tendency to be polite and be social as reason for inability to say 'no' to sexual advances of friend's or fiancé (Fig.no.10). Similar results were reported by Ohnishi (2011) (Japan) that females tolerate sexual advances of their partner due to their inability to say 'no' and to avoid annoying the partner.
2. In the present study nearly two fifth of the subjects felt unsafe with the police officials or at police station. About 45% never complained to any higher authority (Fig.no.12), these findings were contrary to survey by Jagorisurvey (2010) (Delhi) where most (58%) of the subjects would not consider reporting to police and only 0.8% of subjects would like to report to police.. Nearly half (51.5%) of the subjects feared harm to self or to their near ones if they reported harassment, these findings are supported by Dizimadi (2007) (Malawi) that subjects feared safety consequences after reporting sexual harassment. (Fig no 13)
3. Awareness about avoidance strategies of subjects was not found to be related to demographic variables of the subjects and the type of college (Women College or co-educational college) of the subjects.
4. Results: None of the subjects had good level of awareness, nearly half of the subjects had fair level of awareness about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment and one third had slight level of awareness (table no 1). Only one sixth of the subjects had just enough awareness about avoidance strategies for sexual harassment.

CONCLUSION

Most of the subjects included in this study showed less than satisfactory awareness levels of strategies for avoidance of sexual harassment, only one sixth showed satisfactory and none showed excellent levels. Hence most of the subjects would not be able to recognize threat and would not be able to use strategies to avoid harassment. Therefore, there is need for creating awareness about how to recognise harassment and anticipate danger, in time so as to plan for avoidance and protection strategies.

Implications: School and college teachers need to identify early signs of harassment and take preventive steps in college premises. Youth need to be aware and avoid risk factors for safety of self and how to report the incident to prevent further harassment.

In all institutional settings there need to identify signs of harassment, counsel the victim and referring to social worker and counselors for further services. Gender sensitization should be included in curriculum and in service education.

Remedial actions taken: During data collection all doubt pertaining to sexual harassment and avoidance strategies were explained if asked by subjects.

Limitations: No follow up counseling could be given to those subjects who required it due to time constraints.

Recommendations: Similar study can be done with larger sample size, with a qualitative approach, among different college going population, general population among boys and men.

Also a study can be undertaken to prepare interventional package for avoidance strategies of sexual harassment among college students.

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