

A Quantitative Study On the Occurrence of Sexual Harassment of Females in Public Spaces and What Males Perceive About It in The City of Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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Abstract

In this paper the situational conditions of different types of sexual victimization faced by females in public spaces are examined by conducting a survey of a sample of 170 females and 85 males based in Kolkata. Two separate question schedules for males and females are considered as the primary tool of the study. The research focuses on female safety and male perception on the sexual offenses against females in public space. It has been found out that irrespective of socioeconomic and cultural population subgroups, females accept, tolerate and keep quiet about such experiences due to the various social stigma attached to the victim. It focuses on categories of public space and sexual harassment while comparing the gender based perception. Seriousness of each sexual offense against females and responses of each gender has been categorized. Adoption of zero tolerance policy by the government and by-passengers is the sole solution to combat this problem.

Keywords: Sexual offence, public space, females, male perception, Kolkata

1. Introduction

Street harassment is not trivial because of their frequency, their constancy that the sexual threats expressed on the street are so effective, and so foundational. They shrink the female rather than enrage them. In the work of Patricia Williams, Deirdre Davis street harassment is defined as "spirit murder" (Deirdre, 1994). Spirit murder generally consists of many micro aggressions, spirit injuries and major and minor assaults.

Provocative dress is often used as an excuse for street harassment. Though, multiple types of harassment occurring to female clad in saree or burqa rejects the argument which states that females who wear revealing clothing "ask for" the harassment.

In India, offenses against females have shown an increased trend over the years. In Haryana the number of such crimes was 9834 which increased to 14,326 between 2016 and 2018. In Maharashtra the number of crimes rose from 31,388 to 35,497 in between 2016 and 2018. Orissa faced an increase from 17,837 in (2016) to 20,274 in (2018). Uttar Pradesh saw a significant rise from 49,262 crimes in 2016 to 59,445 crimes in 2018. Comparatively in West Bengal, the number of crimes decreased from 32,512 in 2016 to 30,394 in 2018. (NCRB, accessed on 17th May, 2020).

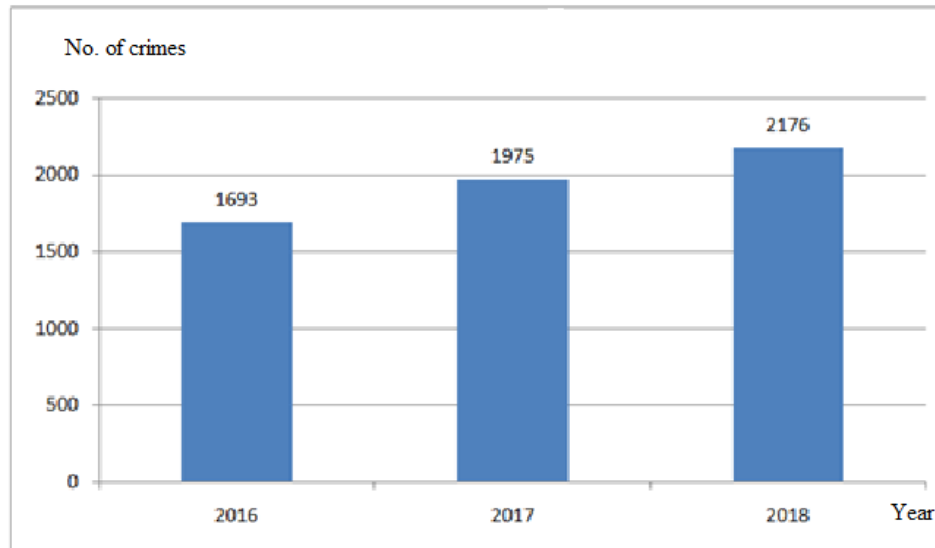


Figure 1. Rate of Crime Against Females In Kolkata

Though the rate of crime against females is showing a decreasing trend in West Bengal, it shows a rising trend in the metropolitan city of Kolkata. The rate of crime against females in the city of Kolkata as per the data of National Crime Records Bureau (2018) shows an upward trend (Fig.1). In the year 2016 the numbers of cases of crime against females were 1693, which rose to 1975 crimes in 2017. In 2018 the rate of crime against females further increased and reached up to 2176 number of crimes during 2018. It is to be noted that the crimes included all the punishable offenses against females under the IPC.

Since India is a fast developing country of the world, most females are engaging in professional work life and thus need to access the public spaces more often. This research therefore focuses on the situational conditions of different types of sexual victimization faced by females in public spaces. This is done by examining specific vulnerable public spaces with regard to the occurrence of the sexual harassment of female. The levels of seriousness of these behaviors are quantified and the likelihood of occurrence of sexual harassment is compared with actual experiences. Finally, gender differences are examined in the perceived seriousness considering the specific behaviors which constitute sexual harassment.

In this study, public space is defined as a combination of public transit (such as public bus, metro and taxi) and public space (e.g., roadside, public parks, bus stops, and neighborhood parks). Females frequently use the streets and public spaces, such as sidewalks, bus routes, subway lines, and trams. Females use the streets and public spaces frequently, such as using cities' networks of public spaces, sidewalks, bus routes, subway lines, and trams, and for a much greater variety of reasons as they now split their time between work and family. It is important for cities to have efficient and secure public transport as well as safe public spaces for females.

Generally, it is said that "civic inattention" prevails among strangers that characterizes relations between them in public places. People tend not to stare at one another, or to talk to strangers in public. They are aware of their surroundings, but don't intrude on one another unless there is some particular reason to do so. This "civic inattention" holds generally among men and among females, but not between men and females. In societies which are prejudiced or discriminated towards female gender, men treat females as so-called "open persons," with little regard and intrude the women according to their (men's) own will. This intrusion on females' space comes as sexual harassment. It includes comments that are passed subjecting their bodies or their presence in the public space, unwanted touching and lewd gestures towards them

Another term called "girl-watching" is supposed to be a national pastime. Females organize their lives to avoid being alone in public where they know they will be harassed. It is seen that women use avoidance as the common response to harassment in most public places. It can be sensed that the avoidance is motivated by fear. In sexist society the

mindset that “males must have access to females” causes most of these unacceptable behaviors in public forums. Other forms of abuse include stalking, unwanted look/gesture, showing pornography, exposing genital, catcalling, whistling, asking sexual toned questions, using offensive language, unwanted touching/rubbing/squeezing of body parts, poking and many other such lewd behavior.

Many females report that if they show anger to the harasser, he often becomes more hostile and abusive because it goes against the harasser’s attempt to regain dominance. Also, there is a tendency of females blaming themselves for the harassment. From the perspective of traditional views of gender, a female is not harassed unless she is doing something wrong. In misogynist society, harassment is used as an indicator that the female has violated some norm of gendered behavior. Traditional frameworks differentiate between good and bad females. Good females are mostly the ones who are obedient and dutiful wives and daughters. For example, in India, good females see their lives primarily in terms of service to others. Females “carry the burden of ‘honor’ and ‘shame’ for their families and communities.” Bad females are those who disobey, or who have no male protection, or who go places where females are not supposed to go. Both good and bad females are controlled by a variety of tactics. Those females who by choice, or because of lack of choice, end up in spaces where they are not meant to be are harassed. These spaces can be on the street, in the office, at school, on public transportation - just about anywhere. According to Jennifer Berdahl, “females who violate feminine ideals are most likely to be sexually harassed in their social and working lives” (Berdahl, 2007). This reflects that in both modern or traditional culture, females are governed by certain norms, and if they fail to abide by them, then harassment is used for keeping them in line.

The important factors that imply the need to study on what the sexual harassment is in public space, an equally important area of focus centers on specific behaviors that constitute harassment. UN Female (2011) identified nine specific behaviors which constitute sexual harassment keeping in mind the Indian subcontinent context which includes sexual harassment in the form of verbal, nonverbal, and physical. The Indian Penal Code (IPC) defines sexual harassment as an assault on a female which intends to outrage or insult her modesty. Sexual harassments are of various forms which include unwelcome physical contact, advances or demands or requests for sexual favors, stalking, making lewd gestures, etc. This study focuses on this set of concepts and uses specific factors of physical, verbal, and nonverbal behaviors against female experiencing sexual harassment and perception of male about it. It should be kept in mind that men can also experience sexual harassment (Thompson, 1994), but the main focus of this research is on female, due to its widespread occurrence towards the female population.

Street harassment follows the same principle. Post-Nirbhaya incident (2013), many research studies have emerged that elaborates potential risks of females in public spaces like in the metropolitan cities of India attempting to understand female’s behavior in response to the threats they experience in public spaces (Nalla and Mahesh, 2016). One of the findings from these studies is the relationship of sexual harassment in public spaces with crime and victimization. Researchers across the world worked on this issue and came out with some interesting facts and information. Crouch, (2009) said that sexual harassment tends to traditionally keep females in place by 'controlling' their behavior. Sexual harassment in public place is also known as street harassment. Bowman, (1993), described street harassment to be of the following characteristics -the targets are female, the harassers are male, the harassers are unacquainted with their targets, the encounter is face to face, the forum is a public one, to which the public generally has access. Madan & Nalla (2016) in their research have proved that compared to men very few females feel safe in public space and most of the females tend to experience harassment during daytime. Thompson (1993) mentioned that street harassment has become a trivial and natural fact which acts as everyday reminder to females that men control their safety and they have no right of passage through public space. Farley (1978) findings showed that quid pro quo and harassment in hostile environments against females was the first reported workplace harassment indicating that a job or educational opportunity is conditioned on some kind of sexual performance. Street harassment follows the same principle. Fitzgerald *et al.* (1995) in their study showed that unwanted, unwelcome, unreciprocated sexual attention of any form is the main component of harassment. It involves the crude form of gender harassment using sexually crude terms which insults people based on their gender using words such as “slut” to refer to a female by passenger. Lilienfeld (2017) introduced the concept of microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations including calling people by using offensive names. Use of the term micro is misleading, because it implies that these experiences are minor acts. Another concept of ambient sexual harassment was defined by Magley and Shupe (2005) as the frequency of sexually harassing behavior experienced by the females which may include various offending behaviors such as pornography being displayed in a common area or sexually abusive language being used publicly.

In India development takes place first in the metropolitan cities. Then it gets concentrated and spreads to the other regions. The city of Kolkata is one such example where the urban agglomeration plays an important role. Kolkata became the first Indian million cities in 1901 and experienced fast growth and development until 1971. Thus, the urban influence of Kolkata could be seen in the adjoining suburban cities and towns of eastern India. Most females, especially those who live in urban environments like Kolkata can offer vivid definitions of street harassment by

sharing stories similar to those mentioned in the introduction. A female is often subjected to overt observation, evaluation, and verbal commentary by male strangers when she walks into the public world. The aim of the study is to investigate the situational conditions of females being harassed sexually in public space, address types of offensive behavior against females, examine how both the genders perceive the seriousness of assaulting behaviors against females and find out ways to overcome the stated problem (awareness generation).

It is to be noted that sexual harassment is linked with gender stereotypes and female's oppression. In most problematic situations experienced by females worldwide men are the perpetrators and females are the primary victims. Sexual harassment can occur in public spaces like public transport, in shopping malls or even in restaurants and other spaces. In this research, the focus is on sexual harassment in public spaces, such as in the streets, roadsides, sidewalks, parks, and public transport and bus stops.

1.1 Merit of the study

This study holds immense importance in today's world to examine and find out the situation and conditions under which the female steps out of the house considering the risk of getting sexually harassed at any time and; any place. The study also focuses on man's interpretation of the situation to consider the difference of understanding of both the gender on a matter where males are the maximum perpetrators.

1.2 Hypothesis

Drawing upon the situational conditions of crime the following hypothesis has been considered:

Hypothesis-1: Females are likely to perceive a higher likelihood of sexual harassment in public spaces compared to male.

Hypothesis-2: Males do not take the crime of sexual offences against females seriously.

Hypothesis-3: Females more are likely to experience harassment during night time compared to the day time

2. Materials and Methods

This research is directed to accomplish the descriptive purpose of social research, which attempts to explain and provide additional information about the topic. Hence the proneness of sexual harassment against females the city of Kolkata in public space considering both male and female perspective is considered in this paper.

Two separate questionnaires were prepared for male and female keeping the urban social structures and behavioral factors in mind. Factors like safety in public spaces, sexual harassment experiences and comments about the type of abusers were taken into consideration in the questionnaire. The main objective to develop the questionnaire was to analyze the actual experiences of the female compared to the other gender's perception about the sexual harassment. Hence, the majority of the questions were the same, only the structure varies to bring out the differences between experience and perception.

2.1 Data Collection

- Population
Target population for this research included people residing in Kolkata whose age ranges between 15 to 30 years. 170 females and 85 male respondents were interviewed.
- Sampling procedures
Selective sampling has been used for first few respondents (based on age, familiarity with the notion of public space, exposure to the outer world) and afterwards snowball sampling was used for this research.
- Data collection method

The survey was conducted in English, Hindi and Bengali language to ensure participation from respondents who were comfortable with either of the three popularly spoken languages in the city. Given the sensitivity and nature of the survey questions, using pen-and-pencil interviewing technique, face-to-face survey interviews were done. Each survey interview was estimated to take nearly 30 minutes. Respondents' consent prior to the interview was obtained, affirming confidentiality, anonymity and the nature of participation was voluntary in the study. Meetings were held from the month of November 2019 to March 2020 in the residences of the interviewees and in public places like malls and cafes. The researcher came in touch with the interviewees and elaborated them about the rationale and objective of the research. The interviewees then willingly participated for the interview.

- Instruments for analysis

This research was a mixed method research where both the quantitative and qualitative questions were asked to the respondents. The main character of qualitative research is that it offers a complete description and analysis of a research subject. On the other hand, the quantitative data received from the respondents aims to classify and count features and construct statistical models to explain what is observed. The quantitative data were entered using the MS-Excel and data were checked randomly at every 20–30 surveys to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data. The close ended questions contributed towards the statistical development of the mind frame of the focused youth group. 3 point Likert Scale (3= experienced the most to 1= never experienced) has been used to identify the important factors contributing to sexual harassment of females in public space.

3. Results

Counting of total population has been carried out on 255 respondents out of which 170 females (67% of the total population) and 85 males (33% of the total population) participated in the survey. The data collection for this study lasted nearly for five months. It was planned that the sample size of male would be 50% of the sample size of female.

Table 1. Basic Demography of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Male	Female	Total percentage
Age	Below 16	4	3	2.8
	16-20 years	2	27	11.42
	21-25 years	51	117	66.14
	26-30 years	27	23	19.69
Education qualification	Class 10	0	3	1.2
	Class 12	2	23	9.84
	Graduation	33	58	35.83
	Post-Graduation	49	85	52.76
	PhD	0	1	0.34
Income (Rs)	Unemployed	30	116	57.48
	100-20,000	22	29	20.08
	20,001-40,000	19	18	14.57
	40,001-50,000	8	2	3.94
	50,001 and above	5	5	3.94
Relationship status	Unmarried but single	51	95	57.48
	Unmarried but in a relationship	29	62	35.83
	Married	3	13	6.3
	Separated	1	0	0.39

Table 1 consists of the age range of the respondents which ranged from 16 years to 30 years. The education level of the participants was from class 10 to Ph.D. level and the income range consisted of unemployed individuals to high

salary earning persons. The relationship statuses of the respondents were taken into consideration to understand the nuisances of the issue.

Table 2. Females Feel Safe to Use Public Spaces as Freely as Men Do

[N=255; N(Female)= 170; N(Male)= 85]

Female		Male		Total population	
N	%	N	%	N	%
21	12.35	18	21.17	39	15.29

The construction of Table 2 considering the positive responses of the given question has been only considered (where the respondents feel that females do feel safe to use public spaces just like men). Among the female respondents, 21 females and 18 males gave positive responses. Thus, it was seen that only 15.29% of the total population said that public spaces are safe for females. Therefore, it has been concluded that 84.71% of the total population feels that females are likely to perceive a higher likelihood of sexual harassment in public spaces compared to men.

Table 3. Likelihood of Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces

[N=255; N(Female)= 170; N(Male)= 85]

Mode of transportation	Female			Male		
	%	Mean	SD	%	Mean	SD
Public bus	74.7	3.1	0.83	71.76	2.9	0.88
Metro	55.9	3.4	0.96	49.41	2.5	0.96
Railways	68.2	2.9	0.97	69.41	2.9	0.94
Taxi	51.2	2.6	1.06	44.7	2.4	1.03
Auto	51.8	2.6	0.93	48.23	2.5	0.93
Bus stop	33.5	2.2	0.85	31.76	2.1	0.89
Metro station	25.9	1.9	0.87	18.82	1.7	0.79
Neighborhood streets	48.8	2.5	1.03	51.76	2.6	0.96
Neighborhood shops	20.6	1.9	0.91	18.82	1.8	0.78
Crowded streets	63.0	2.9	1.08	61.17	2.7	1.10
p value (2 tailed, type 2 T-test): 0.000839						

The comparison of male's perceived likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment in public space and self-reported data based on actual victimization of females is taken into consideration. Table 3 is structured based on a 4 point Likert Scale where 1=no chances at all, 2=less chances, 3=more chances and 4=very much chance. Considering the likelihood of sexual harassment, responses of the respondents have been clubbed 3 and 4 in the Likert Scale (much chances and very much chances).

74.7% of female respondents and 71.76% of male respondents find public bus as the potential place for violation of human rights. 55.9% of female respondents and 49.41% of male respondents feel metros are a vulnerable space for sexual harassment. 62.8% of female respondents and 69.41% of male respondents consider railways is unsafe for females. 51.2% of female respondents and 44.7% of male respondents fear that sexual harassment may occur in taxis. 51.8% of female respondents and 48.23% of male respondents consider autos as a potential public space where sexual harassment may take place. 33.5% of female respondents and 31.76% of male respondents feel that bus stops are unsafe. 25.9% of female respondents and 18.82% of male respondents have the notion of metro stations being vulnerable for females. 48.8% of female and 51.76% of male respondents fear that sexual crimes may occur in neighbourhood streets. 20.6% of female respondents and 18.82% of male respondents consider neighbourhood shops as a place of perpetration. 63% of female respondents and 61.17% of male respondents feel that sexual harassment can also occur in crowded streets.

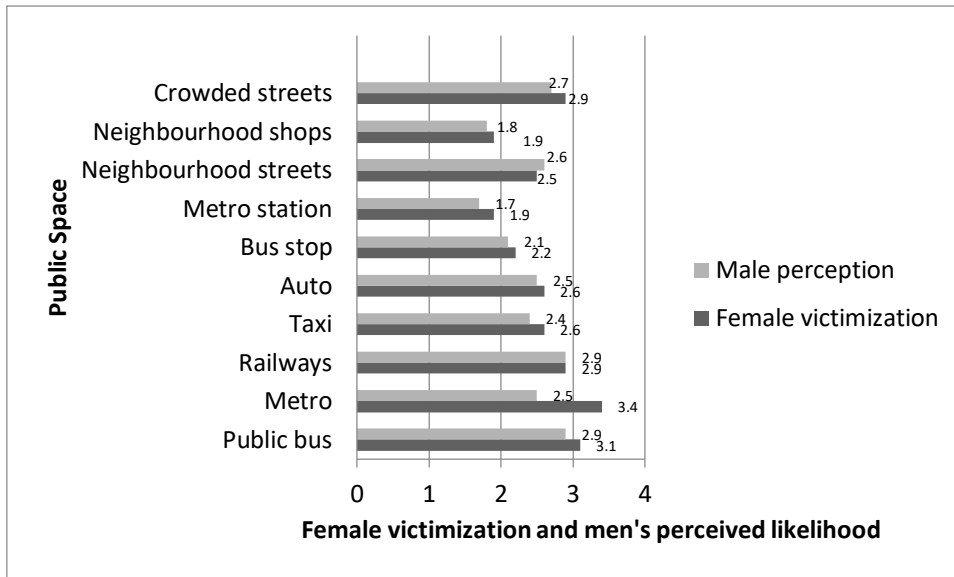


Figure 2. Comparison of Female's Victimization of Sexual Harassment Versus Male's Perceived Likelihood of Experiencing Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces

Female's actual victimization of sexual harassment is compared with male's perceived likelihood of experiencing sexual harassment in public space (Fig 2). The Y axis indicates the type of public space and the X axis measures both female victimization and men's perceived likelihood of such occurrence. The comparison is done considering the mean of all the responses recorded from the responders of both the genders. Here the vertical axis measures the mean of the Likert scale ratings given by both males and females and the horizontal axis measures the categories of public space. Females shared their responses on basis of sexual harassment faced by them in these public spaces. Considering the differences among the actual occurrence and perception, it is observed that the difference between experience and perception in case of railways is nil. That means both the genders perceive the same level of seriousness about the sexual harassment incidents that happen in railways. Only in case of neighbourhood streets the mean of males (1.9) is higher than that of females (1.8). For all other public spaces the mean of females is very slightly higher than that of males with mean difference of 0.2 in public bus, 0.9 in metros, 0.2 in taxi, 0.1 in auto, 0.1 in bus stop, 0.2 in metro station, 0.1 in neighbourhood shops and 0.2 in crowded streets.

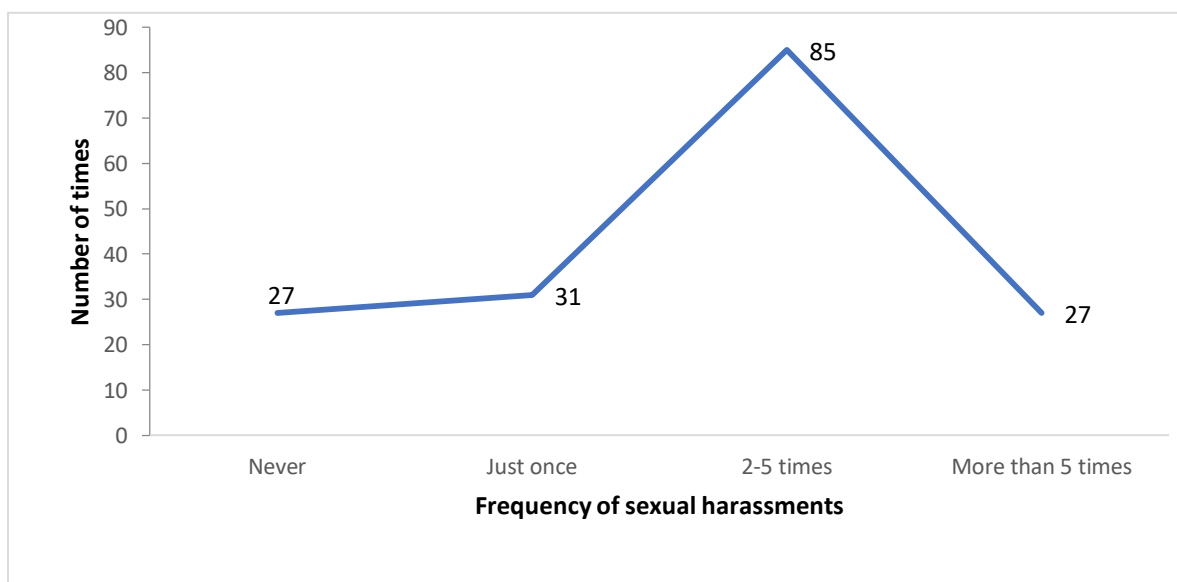


Figure 3. Frequency of Sexual Harassment Experience In Public Space (Female Response)

A summary of female respondents' personal sexual harassment experience in public spaces is analyzed in Fig.3. Here the vertical axis measures the number of female responses and the horizontal axis measures the frequency of sexual harassment experience of the females. The data gives the picture that only 15.9% females have never been sexually harassed but 84.1% of the female population of this study has been sexually harassed in public space at some point of their life. This finding is not surprising considering the condition of female protection surveillance offered in metropolitan cities of India.

Table 4. Sexual Harassment Incidents as Perceived by Respondents (%)

Sexual harassment	Female (n=170)				Male(n=85)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	Mean	(1)	(2)	(3)	Mean
Stalking	29.4	65.3	5.3	1.8	9.4	49.4	41.2	2.3
Sexual look/gesture	7.6	62.9	29.5	2.2	4.7	29.4	65.9	2.6
Showing pornography	85.3	13.5	1.2	1.2	7.1	24.7	68.2	2.6
Exposing genital, masturbation	61.8	37.6	0.6	1.4	0.0	1.2	98.8	3.0
Catcalling	21.8	58.8	19.4	1.9	11.8	16.5	71.8	2.6
Whistling	20.6	65.3	14.1	1.8	2.4	45.9	51.8	2.5
Asking sexual questions	61.8	35.9	2.4	0.8	8.2	37.6	54.1	2.5
Using obscene language	31.2	60.6	8.2	1.5	10.6	30.6	58.8	2.5
Sexual teasing	31.8	62.9	5.3	1.4	4.7	35.3	60.0	2.6
Kissing sound, smacking lips	51.8	42.9	5.3	1.0	2.4	25.9	71.8	2.7
Sexual comments	30.0	57.6	12.4	1.6	7.1	22.4	70.6	2.6
Asking for sexual favours	70.0	27.1	2.9	0.6	8.2	12.9	78.8	2.7
Unwanted touch, pinching	20.0	66.5	13.5	1.8	0.0	7.1	92.9	2.9
Leaning closely, intentionally pushing	17.1	63.5	19.4	2.0	0.0	30.6	69.4	2.7
Pulling/playing with hair	81.8	16.5	1.8	0.4	5.9	27.1	67.1	2.6
Putting hand on shoulder	54.7	42.4	2.9	1.0	9.4	36.5	54.1	2.4
Brushing up against body	12.9	71.8	15.3	2.0	5.9	30.6	63.5	2.6
Touching/rubbing/squeezing breasts	53.5	41.2	5.3	1.0	0.0	2.4	97.6	3.0
Poking with penis	51.2	44.1	4.7	1.1	0.0	2.4	97.6	3.0
Patting on buttocks	60.6	35.9	3.5	0.8	1.2	5.9	92.9	2.9
t value for paired sample t statistic: -9.849								
Mean difference: -1.3								

For female respondents: 1= never experienced; 2= Experienced; 3= Experienced the most

For male respondents: 1= Not so serious offense; 2= Serious offense; 3= Very serious offense

The gender differences based on seriousness of sexual harassment offences are presented based on United Nation's taxonomy (Table 4). The offences are categorized into three categories: verbal, non-verbal and physical. The kinds of sexual harassment a female can face based on these three categories are displayed in the Table 4. The data lists the number of males' (perception based) and females' (experience based) response of the seriousness level of the sexual harassment act. The Table 4 is constructed based on a 3 point likert scale. For the female respondents, the ratings were classified as: 1= never experienced, 2= experienced, 3= experienced the most. For the male respondents, the rating scale has been constructed as: 1= not so serious offense, 2= serious offense, 3= very serious offense. Table 4 describes the number of respondents that have chosen each rating against each of the sexual assault. Then the mean of the total female and male population is calculated.

From Table 4 it is evident that amongst 170 females, the significant number of about 111 experienced someone following or stalking them. 107 females have experienced someone looking them in as a sexual object. Catcalling and whistling was experienced by 100 and 111 females respectively. 103 females experienced someone using obscene language to them and 107 females experienced sexual teasing. 113 females were touched in a sexual manner by strangers. 108 females experienced someone leaning towards them and 122 females experienced someone standing too closely to them in public space.

Among 85 male respondents, the notable responses that were recorded reveal 56 males consider looking at a woman in a sexual way as a serious offense. 58 males think it's very offensive to show pornography to a stranger woman. 84 males, the largest chunk of respondents feel exposing genitals to a stranger is a heinous crime. Catcalling, using obscene language and sexual teasing is considered a serious offense by 51, 50 and 51 males respectively. 61 and 60 males consider making kissing sounds and passing degradable comments to a stranger woman as a very serious offense. Asking for favours which are sexual in nature, unwanted touching a stranger woman was considered too offensive by 67 and 79 individuals. 59 and 57 males considered leaning closely and playing with a stranger woman's hair very offensive. Touching breasts was a very offensive crime according to 83 males. 79 males found patting the buttocks of a stranger in public space very offensive.

Table 5. Time of Harassment

Time/acquaintance	Percentage of female response
After dark	14
Daytime	31
Office hours	11
Accompanied by friends	10
Accompanied by family	11
Travelling alone	23

Table 5 describes the time of harassment most of the female respondents relates to. Here the time may be daytime, after dark, office hours or maybe when they were accompanied by friends, family or were alone. This data set defines when a female is most vulnerable in public space. Among 170 female respondents, the highest number of females (31%) surprisingly said that the harassment happened to them during daytime. 23% of the female respondents said that they were harassed when they were traveling alone. Only 14% said that they were sexually offended after dark. Both the responses for harassment during office hours and while accompanied by family came to be 11%. The least number of females (10%) were harassed in public space when they were traveling with friends.

3.1 Hypothesis testing

Public spaces represent areas of fair and equal access without any discrimination between citizens. Unfortunately, a section of the citizen faces exclusion and fear of victimization in public space. The findings of this research show that:

Hypothesis 1

This research shows that most female and male respondents feel that public mode of transport is not as accommodating for females as it is for men. India has been growing economically, especially during the 21st century and females now have the opportunity to work and compete with males. Since the majority of the females are not confined within the domestic spheres, violence against females often result from the dominating factor of male (Urukundappa and Agnihotri, 2013). Further, the student's t test indicates the analysis is statistically significant (p value less than 0.05) and thus accepts the null hypothesis. Theoretically we can say that given the situational conditions like overcrowded public transportation; no CCTV supervision in all public spaces makes the areas more vulnerable and unsafe for females. Hence hypothesis 1 is proved.

Hypothesis 2

Another important finding in this research is that while men and females agree about the level of seriousness of sexual harassment behaviors, it is seen that males consider the behaviors as more serious in most of the categories compared to females (Table 4). This finding indicates that the majority of the male respondents who participated in this research are aware and sensitized about the sexual offenses that happen to females in public spaces. This is a ray of hope that the society is tending towards a change where the males empathize with the pain a female goes through such crimes. Statistically at 5% level of significance the calculated paired sample t statistic is -9.849. Here the p-value is less than the alpha level: $p < .05$. Thus the null hypothesis can be rejected as there is no or very less difference between means of both the genders (mean = -1.3). The Hypothesis 2 is therefore proven false.

Hypothesis 3

The last hypothesis was that females are likely to experience harassment during daytime compared to the nighttime. But the findings in Table 5 show that most of the females have faced sexual harassment during daytime. This might be because most of the working females are out of their houses during the office hours, between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm on an average. Also, when a female goes out of her house for any work, she tends to leave early and return back within daytime. Since the exposure of females in public space is mostly during daytime, the frequency of sexual harassment against females happens mostly during the daytime. Thus hypothesis 3 is also false.

3.2 Recommendation

In order to stop the sexual harassment of females in public spaces, self-defense training, principles of gender equality, legal rights of females, what to do as a bystander in case of street harassment should be made compulsory in schools/colleges syllabus and in various digital platform. Recruitment of more female bus conductors, drivers, and police should be done by the government. Females need to go beyond discriminatory values of playing a submissive and dependent role and be independent in their self-concepts and psychological capacities. They should go above the traditional culture which allows sexual harassment to continue and victims to be blamed.

4. Conclusion

The findings in this research draw attention to the lack of the government placing priority on females' safety concerns on public transport and in public spaces. A limitation in this study is that the effectiveness of governmental response and law enforcement efforts in efficiently tackling the problem was not addressed. Future research should address these issues as well as examine whether socio cultural, environmental, and other related factors contribute to the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment in public spaces. Introducing educational programs to raise awareness among children addressing this issue is highly suggested. In addition, the media has an important role to play in public awareness programs as well as public service messages. From a policy perspective, it is vital for the state government, municipal bodies, and local law enforcement agencies to work together and provide safe public spaces that are equitable, safe, and secure for females. Given the current legal framework, it is important to educate both men and females about the legal recourse against sexual harassment. Gender sensitization, education, and developing relevant campaigns on ground and on social media in collaboration with existing campaigns (e.g., Safe Delhi campaign, Safe city 2) can be used in raising awareness about sexual harassment in public spaces. From the findings of this study, public spaces such as bus stops, buses, metros, roadsides, and neighborhood parks should display visible signs like "Zero-Tolerance Policy on Sexual Harassment". Print media poster campaigns should be encouraged to warn the perpetrators under sections of the IPC and urge bystanders' intervention. It is very important to ensure that females' use of public space and transport should not end due to harassment. This study highlights the gender views on the seriousness of sexual harassment and the females' experiences in public places in the metropolitan city of Kolkata. One must understand what harms females in the public sphere to bring new changes. Once men understand how females perceive violence and mistreatment they face in the public sphere, necessary changes should be made by legislation and educational approaches.

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