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### **Sexual Harassment and its Effect on College Going Girls in Mumbai, India**

**Menon Asha**

HOD, Associate Professor, Dept of Human Development, S.P.N. Doshi Women's  
College, Ghatkopar, Mumbai-400086.

Mobile: 9892474794.

Email: [ashamaheshmenon@gmail.com](mailto:ashamaheshmenon@gmail.com)

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#### **ABSTRACT**

At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. The objective of the study was to understand the relationship between experiences of Sexual harassment, feelings of depression and anxiety in college going girls. It is a quantitative study and co-relational design was used. The study was conducted on college going girls between the age group of 17 to 25 years studying in Mumbai. Snowball sampling method was adopted for the purpose of research. The tools used for this research were: Sexual Experiences Survey - Long Form, Koss, Abbey et al., 2012, Beck Depression Inventory (1988) and Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck et al., 1988. The results presented evidence that sexual harassment, even at relatively low frequencies, exerts a significant negative impact on girl's psychological well-being. The correlation seen between experiences of sexual harassment and depression and anxiety is 0.2673 and 0.2084 respectively. The findings presented in this study have implications for the management of academic groups in which tension exists because of sexual harassment.

**KEY WORDS:** Sexual Harassment, Depression, Anxiety, Stress.

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#### **\*Corresponding Author**

**Dr. Asha Menon**

HOD, Associate Professor, Dept of Human Development, S.P.N. Doshi Women's  
College, Ghatkopar, Mumbai-400086.

Mobile: 9892474794.

Email: [ashamaheshmenon@gmail.com](mailto:ashamaheshmenon@gmail.com)

## INTRODUCTION:

Sexual violence is "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by a person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting." Sexual harassment is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. It is a problem of pandemic proportions. At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with the abuser usually someone known to her. Anxiety & Stress symptoms affect mostly women because of the sexual harassment. The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Sexual Harassment refers to the unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favor and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature by males towards females<sup>1</sup>. According to<sup>2</sup> the following are three dimensions of sexual harassment:

1. **Gender Harassment:** This dimension encompasses a verbal and non verbal behavior generally not aimed at sexual cooperation; rather they convey insulting, hostile, degrading and sexist attitude about women.
2. **Unwanted Sexual Attention:** It includes both verbal and non verbal which ranges from repeated, non reciprocated, request for dates, intrusive letters and phone calls, touching, grabbing and cornering; and gross sexual imposition or assault. Although frequently experienced as intimidating or coercion, it can be distinguished from the third category (sexual coercion) by its lack of job related losses or benefits, either explicit or implicit.
3. **Sexual Coercion:** It is the classic instances of quid pro quo harassment. Behavior of this type refers to bribes or threats, whether explicit or subtle, that conditions some job-related benefit on sexual cooperation.

Depression is the result of faulty or maladaptive cognitive processes<sup>3</sup>. The emotional and physical symptoms are consequences of the thinking patterns that Beck assumes to be the cause of the disorder. Depression in psychology is a mood or emotional state that is marked by feelings of low self-worth or guilt and a reduced ability to enjoy life. Depression is a common but serious mood disorder and anxiety is an emotion characterized by an unpleasant state of inner turmoil, often

accompanied by nervous behaviour. It is the subjectively unpleasant feeling of dread over anticipated events. It also affects how you feel, think, and handle daily activities. Sexual harassment has the same psychological effects as rape or sexual assault. It deprives women from active social and economic participation. According to<sup>4</sup> anxiety as "a future-oriented mood state in which one is ready or prepared to attempt to cope with upcoming negative events". Anxiety can be appropriate, but when it is too much and continues too long, the individual may suffer from an anxiety disorder.

The health and psychological effects of sexual harassment are depression, anxiety and / Or panic attacks, sleeplessness and / or nightmares, shame and guilt, feeling betrayed and / or violated, feeling angry towards the perpetrator, feeling powerless or out of control, loss of confidence and self-esteem, withdrawal and isolation, post-traumatic stress disorder, complex post-traumatic stress disorder and suicidal thoughts or attempts to name a few.

Sexual harassment can have a demoralizing effect on everyone within range of it, and it often negatively impacts the future of the victim. Parents should make it a habit to open up lines of communications towards their children and discuss issues that their adolescent child would like to talk about. Parents need to acquire knowledge and skills to help their adolescent child deal with life situations in the right manner<sup>5</sup>. This study holds importance because recently four Delhi University students, who followed Union minister Smriti Irani's car in Lutyens' Delhi in an "inebriated" state, have been arrested for allegedly stalking and outraging the modesty of a woman. The question arises how many college going girls in India will have the courage to lodge a police complain when sexually harassed?

**AIM:**

To study the effect of sexual harassment on college going girls in Mumbai.

**OBJECTIVE:**

The objective of the study was to understand the relationship between experiences of Sexual Harassment, feelings of depression and anxiety on college going girls in Mumbai.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted on women between the age group of 17 to 25 years studying in Mumbai. Snowball sampling method was adopted for the purpose of research. 100 college going girls participated in the study. It is a quantitative study and co-relational design was used. The study was conducted on college going girls between the age group of 17 to 25 years studying in Mumbai. Snowball sampling technique was adopted for the purpose of research.

## TOOLS USED:

The tools used for this research were:

Sexual Experiences Survey - Long Form, Koss, Abbey et al., 2012,

Beck Depression Inventory (1988) and

Beck Anxiety Inventory, Beck et al., 1988

## DATA PROCESSING

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure correlation between the two variables : Depression and Anxiety.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

### *1. Correlation Between Experiences Of Sexual Harassment And Depression*

Table 1. Correlation between Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Depression

Variable	Value	Result
Experiences of Sexual Harassment	0.2673	Depression

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to understand the nature of the relationship between experiences of Sexual Harassment and Depression. The correlation seen between experiences of sexual harassment and depression is 0.2673 which showed low positive correlation. This result is in congruence with a study done by<sup>6</sup> on “A correlational Study of Experienced Sexual Harassment, Anxiety and Depression among Working Unmarried Women” showed that there is positive correlation between experienced sexual harassment and depression. Further in a study by<sup>7</sup> concluded that Sexual harassment has been theorized as a stressor with consequences for the physical and mental health of its targets. Though social scientists have documented a negative association between sexual harassment and mental health, few longitudinal studies have investigated the association between sexual harassment and depressive symptoms. They further conclude that sexual harassment early in the career has long-term effects on depressive symptoms in adulthood. Interviews with a subset on coping strategies reveal other aspects of mental health, such as anger and self-doubt.

### *2. Correlation Between Experiences Of Sexual Harassment And Anxiety*

The Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to understand the nature of the relationship between Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Anxiety. The correlation seen between experiences of sexual harassment and anxiety is 0.2084 which showed low positive correlation.

Table 2. Correlation between Experiences of Sexual Harassment and Anxiety

Variable	Value	Result
Experiences of Sexual Harassment	0.2084	Anxiety

The results show evidence that sexual harassment, even at relatively low frequencies, exerts a significant negative impact on women's psychological well-being. The low positive correlation between the variables could be due to respondent biases. But in a study done by<sup>6</sup> on "A correlational Study of Experienced Sexual Harassment, Anxiety and Depression among Working Unmarried Women" shows that there is no correlation between experienced sexual harassment and anxiety.

## CONCLUSION

The effects of experiencing sexual harassment can be profound, and can range from uncomfortable to devastating. They may last a short or long time, and can even generate a "ripple effect" of negative symptoms in the affected workplace or living environment.

The results of this study show a low positive correlation between Experiences of Sexual Harassment, Depression and Anxiety. The low positive correlation between the variables could be due to respondent biases. Public spaces should be safe and empowering places and we should feel free to be there without fear. We need a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment. Support and guidance about how to best mitigate the effects of sexual harassment and sexual violence is urgently required. Government needs to provide real leadership on this issue and widen their vision because every student deserves a safe route to college and back home.

## IMPLICATIONS:

1. The findings presented in this study have implications for the management of academic groups in which tension exists because of sexual harassment.
2. Authorities should not dismiss claims of sexual harassment; even girls who have experienced relatively infrequent levels of harassment may be experiencing negative effects compared with those girls who have not experienced harassment.
3. Organizations and education institutions must be made aware of the scale and severity of the problem and its implications both for individuals and their work performance, and the long-term organizational benefits of combating sexual harassment.

## LIMITATIONS:

1. Since the present study employed snowball sampling technique, it limited the generalizability of results that may be obtained, as the sample size considered was small.
2. A large scale cross sectional study would reveal a better, detailed relationship.

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