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STREET HARASSMENT AND SOCIAL INTERACTION ANXIETY AMONG UNIVERSITY GOING WOMEN OF LAHORE, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

It has become important to conduct research on the topic of street harassment given the debate on its status as an important social problem. The purpose of the present research was to investigate the relationship between street harassment and social interaction anxiety. The sample included 391 university going women with an age range 18-28 (Mean Age= 20.92; SD=1.90). Street Harassment Scale (SHS) and Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) were used in present research using purposive sampling technique. Correlational research design was used. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, Linear Regression Analysis, and One Way Analysis of Variance were used. The results concluded that street harassment was a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety. Further, there was a significant difference in the experience of street harassment among women using different modes of transportation. Additionally, women who used university bus and public transport reported high on street harassment and social interaction anxiety. Moreover, women who wore dresses such as jeans/pants, skirts reported to have experienced the most street harassment. Women who reported high on street harassment reported high on social interaction anxiety. The clinical and social implications include health intervention for such women and effective policy making to avoid incidents of street harassment.

Keywords

Street Harassment, Social Interaction Anxiety, Mode of Transportation.



1. Introduction

Harassment has been a serious problem in our society for many years. It covers a broad range of behaviors of hostile nature. It is usually known as behavior that degrades, mortifies or humiliates an individual, and is mostly recognized by its unlikelihood in terms of social and moral sensibility. Harassment is also the act of consistent and continued undesirable and irritating activities of one party or a group that includes threats and demands (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Street harassment includes verbal and non-verbal behavior that includes winking, unwanted comments, honking, display of inappropriate gestures, wolf whistling, invasion of personal space, staring, following, touching, groping, and exhibitionism while a person is walking on the street. *Cat calling* is using crude language at a public place but that does not include any physical contact. *Wolf whistling* is a two toned whistle that usually men do to display sexual attractiveness towards a woman. It is considered to be offensive. *Exhibitionism* is exposing private body parts i.e genitals to a woman at a public place (Manalo *et al.*, 2016). Women and men both face harassment but mostly harassment is faced by women. Street harassment is one of the major issues in today's world. On a regular basis, women in public areas become target of catcalling, winking, honking, unwanted comments, wolf-whistling, staring, and many more (Whittaker, & Kowalski, 2015). Harassing women on streets is a widespread issue and it has negative effects on them. Women are regularly subjected to street harassment simply

because they are women. Present day statistics show a very disturbing picture of women's lives. A study about the prevalence of street harassment shows that women across the globe face harassment. In 2016, a survey was conducted by ActionAid on street harassment in various countries. They found that 79% of women living in India, 86% in Thailand, 89% in Brazil, 93% in Afghanistan, 87% in Australia, 85% in Canada, 75% in London, and 96% in Pakistan have faced harassment or violence in public areas (Wilkinson, 2016). Street harassment is a way of objectification; it is an action where women sensualities, bodies, and gender identities are considered by others as objects. Street harassment makes women self-conscious about the way they look and also frightened them for their safety. Objectification gives women a continuous feeling of anxiety and it even contributes to depression (Gattuso, 2017).

1.1 Street Harassment in Pakistan

Presently, street harassment is very common in Pakistan. Pakistan is one of those nations where 70% women and young ladies experience physical or sexual brutality in their lifetime by their close accomplices and 93% women experience some type of sexual harassment in public places in their lifetime (Kazi, 2017). Women feel unsafe and uneasy in public places. In Pakistan, women who use public transport can easily become victim of harassment. Women who use private taxis and have their own vehicles has also reported incidents of harassment. Aurat Foundation conducted a study which was co-led by Women's Development Department (WDD) Punjab and UN women, in cooperation with Punjab Commission on the Status

of Women (PCSW), Chief Minister's Strategic Reform Unit and Punjab Safe City Project (PSCP). As stated in the report, the most prevailing form of harassment at bus stations includes stalking, staring, gesticulation, whistling, unwanted comments, and touching. Around 82% of the women passengers reported that they regularly faced harassment at bus stations and 90% of the women reported that they had been subjected to sexual harassment on buses (Warraich, 2018). Hadi (2017) states that patriarchy is embedded in Pakistani culture which has resulted in women being considered inferior by most men. Men are the ones who decide the code of behavior for women to which they are supposed to follow. This is further evidenced by men as the ones who decide the code of behavior that they believe to be appropriate for women. He further described the two main reasons of why women experience harassment in Pakistan. The first reason is that the culture and society endorse men's view of women as an object which can lead to women being perceived as sexual object by men as well. The second reason could be the superior position given to men at workplace and house which makes them target of sexual harassment at all platforms including workplace, institutes, markets, and public places. Men tend to display behaviors that include harassment, both physical and sexual, primarily to display power. Because of this culture, Pakistan was given the ranking of 3rd most dangerous country for women in the world.

1.2 Social Interaction Anxiety

Social interaction anxiety is described as a fear of communicating and expressing oneself in front of

others (Mattick & Clarke, 1998). It is described as determined and overstated fear of social circumstances, for example, meeting outsiders, dating, or open talking in which humiliation or a negative judgment by others may happen and that causes significant distress, regularly bringing about an evasion of such circumstances and disability of normal social or occupational activities (Sushma, Padmaja & Agarwal, 2016). Social interaction anxiety can be a risk factor for multiple psychological problems including depression, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, lower grades in class and increased risk of substance abuse (Teachman & Allen, 2007).

1.3 Relationship between Street Harassment and Social Interaction Anxiety

Manalo *et al.* (2016) conducted a research to investigate the association between the frequency of street harassment and the level of self-esteem and self-objectification of women. From this research, they found out that there was a significant negative relationship between street harassment and self-esteem, a significant positive relationship between street harassment and self-objectification and a significant negative relationship between self-esteem and self-objectification. The research concluded that street harassment decreases women's confidence and self-respect.

1.4 Rationale

Previous researches have also established relationship among sexual harassment, self-esteem and social anxiety in adolescents (Apell *et al.*, 2019); public harassment, body image, self-esteem and avoidance behavior (Lord, 2009); sexual harassment and mental health consequences in

nurses (Mushtaq, Sultana & Imtiaz, 2015); eve teasing and its relation to socio-economic and social factors (Akhtar, 2013) and sexual harassment and safety perceptions of women (Macmillan, Nierobisz, & Welsh, 2000). All these researches have investigated relationships of sexual harassment with multiple psychological variables in Pakistan and the rest of the world but these researches did not specifically investigated the link between street harassment and social interaction anxiety. As social interaction anxiety has also been stated to be related to multiple psychological consequences (Teachman & Allen, 2007), there is a need to investigate the relationship of street harassment with social interaction anxiety in university going women. Furthermore, previous researches have rarely investigated the additional factors that could be contributing to street harassment such as a female's dressing in a patriarchic culture of Pakistan. After reviewing previous literature, the present research investigated relationship between experience of street harassment and emergence of symptoms of social interaction anxiety in university going women of Lahore, Pakistan.

1.5 Hypotheses

H1. There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between street harassment and social interaction anxiety in university going women.

H2. Street harassment is likely to predict social interaction anxiety in university going women.

H3. There is likely to be a significant difference in social interaction anxiety between groups of women with low and high experience of street harassment.

H4. There is likely to be a significant difference in the experience of street harassment and social interaction anxiety among groups of women based on their primary mode of transportation.

H5. There is likely to be a significant difference in the experience of street harassment among groups of women based on their dressing preferences.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

Correlational research design was used to find relationship between street harassment and social interaction anxiety

2.2 Participants

Total 391 women were included from private and government universities of Lahore with the age range of 18-28 years (M=20.92; SD=1.90).

Purposive Sampling strategy was used to recruit sample.

2.3 Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria are as follows:

- Those women were included who had experienced any kind of street harassment from an opposite sex (winking, unwanted comments, honking, display of inappropriate gestures, wolf whistling, invasion of personal space, staring, following, touching, groping and/or exhibitionism). Participants were asked a screening question where they had to identify all the types of harassment they experienced.
- Only university going women with age range 18 to 28 years were selected
- Women studying only in co-education universities were selected

2.4 Exclusion Criteria

- Any woman diagnosed with psychological illness in past or at present was excluded.
- Any woman having any physical disability was also excluded.

2.5 Assessment Measures

2.5.1 Demographic Questionnaire

The demographic related questionnaire was developed to find out demographic characteristics of the participants. The questionnaire included variables such as age, education, university, type of harassment, places where harassment was experienced etc. Table 3.1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

2.5.2 Street Harassment Scale (SHS; Sullivan, 2011)

Street Harassment Scale (SHS) was developed by Sullivan (2011) to measure the extent of street harassment experienced. The scale was used in English language. The scale has 28 items which are rated on a 7 point Likert scale from 0-6 that range from “Never” to “Multiple times a day” and these items were conceptualized as demonstrating a series of experiences on two dimensions –benign to severe and complimentary to hostile. The reliability value of scale for the present research is $\alpha=.94$

2.5.3 Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS; Mattick & Clarke, 1998)

Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) was developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998) to measure the symptoms of social interaction anxiety. The scale was used in English language. The scale has 20 items which are rated on 5-point likert scale from 0-4 with response options ranging from “Not

at all” to “Extremely true for me”. The reliability of scale for the present research is $\alpha=.85$

2.5.4 Procedure

The data collection started after the official permission of the universities from which data were collected. The women were approached in different areas of university and were requested to read the criteria. They were requested to make sure that they fulfilled the criteria before filling the form. The respondents were thanked for their cooperation. The ethical considerations were taken into account while collecting data which included informed consent, right to privacy and confidentiality. The response rate was 100%. After the data collection, the data were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 to analyze the results.

2.5.5 Ethical Considerations

Firstly, the permission was taken from the respective authors to use the measures. The permission letters for data collection were obtained from Department of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore. Secondly, the permissions were also requested from the authorities of respective universities. Thirdly, the participants were ensured that the information given by them will be kept confidential and the information provided by them will be used only for educational purposes. They were also given the freedom to leave the study at any time in case of feeling discomfort.

2.5.6 Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were used on demographic variables to analyze the characteristics of participants. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to investigate the relationship

between street harassment and social interaction anxiety. Linear Regression analysis was used to predict social interaction anxiety from demographic variables and street harassment. Independent Sample T-test was used to compare groups of women experiencing low and high street

harassment on social interaction anxiety. One Way Analysis of Variance was used to find the difference in experience of street harassment of women based on their primary mode of transportation and their dressing preferences.

3. Results

Table 3.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=391)

Characteristics	<i>M(SD)</i>	<i>f(%)</i>
Age (Years)	20.92(1.90)	
Education (Years)	15.99(.66)	
University		
Private Sector		193(49.4)
Government Sector		198(50.6)
Types of harassment experienced by participants		
Winking		97(24.8)
Unwanted Comments		221(56.5)
Honking		43(11.0)
Display of inappropriate Gestures		119(30.4)
Wolf-Whistling		45(11.5)
Invasion of Personal Space		14(3.6)
Staring		245(62.7)
Following		118(30.2)
Touching		77(19.7)
Groping		11(2.8)
Exhibitionism		27(6.9)
Places where harassment was experienced		
Market/Public Place		185(47.3)
Their residential area		60(15.3)
In university premises		49(12.5)
Streets/Roads outside residential area		257(65.7)
When experienced harassment, they were with		
Male Members of Family		39(10.0)
Female Members of Family		121(30.9)
Opposite Sex Friends		6(1.5)
Same Sex Friends		151(38.6)
Alone		211(54.0)

Table 3.1 shows demographic characteristics of research participants. Results show that mean age of participants was 20 years (SD= 1.90). The mean education of participants was 16 years (SD= .66). 49% participants were from private sector universities and 51% participants were from government sector universities. 25% females got winked at on the road while 57% females reported that they have heard unwanted comments from the strange men on road. 11% females were honked at, 30% females were displayed inappropriate gestures, 12% were wolf whistled at and 4% females reported invasion of personal space. 63% females reported that they have been stared at, 30% were followed by strangers, 18% were touched without their consent and 3% females experienced groping while they were outside their house. 7% females reported exhibitionism which includes

flashing of private body parts by strangers, 47% females experienced harassment in markets/public places, 15% females experienced harassment in their own residential area, 13% females experienced harassment in their universities premises and 66% reported that they had experienced harassment on streets and roads outside their residential area. 10% females reported that they were with the male member of their family (father, brother, husband) when they experienced harassment. 31% females were with their female family member when they experienced harassment. 39% females were with their same sex friends when they experienced harassment while only 2% females reported harassment when they went out with opposite sex friend. 54% females reported that they were alone when they experienced harassment.

Table 3.2: Correlation Matrix showing Relationship among Demographic Variables, Street Harassment and Social

Variables	Interaction Anxiety (N=391)				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age	-	.09	.11*	.04	-.04
2. Education		-	.11*	-.01	.06
3. University Sector			-	.10*	-.00
4. Street Harassment				-	.17**
5. Social Interaction Anxiety					-

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, Private Sector University=0, Government Sector University=1

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to investigate the relationship of age, education, university sector with street harassment and social interaction anxiety. Table 3.2 shows the correlation matrix of study variables. Street harassment had significant positive relationship

with social interaction anxiety which demonstrates that women who experienced behaviors like winking, catcalling, inappropriate gestures by men on the street reported the symptoms of anxiety while going in public places and meeting other people.

Table 3.3: Linear Regression Analysis with Demographic Characteristics and Street Harassment as Predictor and Social Interaction Anxiety as Outcome (N=391)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients		
1 (Constant)	30.891	1.054		29.318	.000
Street Harassment	.101	.028	.178	3.562	.000

Note: Private Sector University=0, Government Sector University=1

Linear Regression analysis was used to analyze if street harassment predicted social interaction anxiety. Table 3.3 shows Linear Regression Analysis with demographic characteristics such as age, education, university sector and street harassment as predictor and social interaction anxiety as outcome. Street harassment was significant positive predictor of social interaction anxiety which illustrates that women that experienced street harassment developed fear of going out in public places and meeting new people.

Table 3.4: Results of Independent Sample T-test showing Differences in Groups of Women with Experience of High and Low Street Harassment on Social Interaction Anxiety (N=391)

Variable	Low (N=195)		High (N=196)		95% CI		Cohen's d		
	M	SD	M	SD	t(389)	p	LL	UL	
Social Interaction Anxiety	32.14	13.57	35.45	12.87	-2.47	.01	-5.95	-.68	0.25

Table 3.4 shows Independent Sample T-test which was used to see differences in social interaction anxiety of women who experienced low and high levels of street harassment. The results concluded that those who experienced high levels of street harassment reported high on symptoms of social interaction anxiety as compared to those who experienced low levels of street harassment.

Table 3.5: One Way Analysis of Variance showing Differences on Street Harassment and Social Interaction Anxiety Based on Different Modes of Transportation (N=391)

	Primary Mode of Transportation	M	SD	f	p
Street Harassment	Walking	26.32	19.77	4.89	.001
	Private Vehicle	25.45	20.89		
	Private Van	24.38	21.74		
	Public Transport	30.97	25.67		
	University Bus	39.10	27.07		
Social Interaction Anxiety	Walking	32.06	13.25	2.36	.05
	Private Vehicle	32.56	13.94		
	Private Van	32.20	14.00		
	Public Transport	36.74	13.32		
	University Bus	36.06	11.22		

Table 3.5 shows One Way Analysis of Variance which was used to determine group differences in the experience of street harassment based on the primary mode of transportation. The highest level of street harassment was reported by those women

who used university bus and second highest by those who used public transport to travel to university every day. The same two groups also reported high on social interaction anxiety.

Table 3.6: One Way Analysis of Variance showing group differences in Street Harassment Based on Dressing Preferences (N=391)

Variable	Shalwar Kameez N=229		Modern Dressing N=27		Abaya N=135		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
SH	29.59	23.33	42.18	28.98	25.02	21.44	6.45	.002

Note: SH= Street Harassment, Shalwar Kameez= clothes covering head and body, Modern Dressing= pant/jeans shirt, skirts, no covering of head, Abaya= Loose black overall with covered head (hijaab)

Table 3.6 shows One Way Analysis of Variance which was used to determine the group differences in the experience of street harassment based on the dressing. Women who had modern dressing such as pant/jeans shirt, skirts, dresses that did not cover their heads, reported to have experienced street harassment more often as compared to other two groups. Women who wore *abaya* which is a loose black overall along with *hijaab* which covers their head completely, experienced the least incidents of street harassment of the three groups.

(Kazi, 2017). University going women who used university bus and public transport reported to have experienced the highest levels of street harassment and social interaction anxiety. It is well established by previous literature that street harassment is common at public places, thus, women using public transport reported high levels of street harassment as it makes them an easy target for the harassers. Also, the reason that those women who took university bus also reported high street harassment could be that they might have to either take public transport or walk to the bus stop to catch university bus. The university bus does not usually pick university students from their houses. This might have led them to experience same levels of street harassment as those who used public transport. The fact that harassment was reported in university premises is also alarming. This implies that women are not safe even in their own institutes, let alone streets. The reason could be weak implementation of rules within the university premises and outside as well. The present research concluded that street

4. Discussion

The findings of present research demonstrate that participants mostly experienced harassment in market or crowded public places and most of the times when they were travelling alone. It is consistent with the findings of previous researches that found that women experienced harassment most of the times at public places (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014). It has been found that in Pakistan, 93% of the women have experienced some type of sexual harassment at public places in their lifetime

harassment positively predicted social interaction anxiety which means that women who encountered behaviors like catcalling, whistling, winking, and touching by strange men reported to have increase in fear of going out and meeting new people. It was also found that women who reported increased street harassment also reported high social interaction anxiety as compared to those who reported lower levels of street harassment. A research was conducted by Davidson *et al.* (2016) to investigate the possible outcomes of street harassment, including perceptions of safety and anxiety among college women. From this study, they found that safety perception in public places serves as a mediator between relationship of street harassment and anxiety. So, there was a notable relationship between street harassment, safety perceptions and anxiety. The findings of present research are consistent with the previous findings. In the present research, significant difference in the experience of harassment was found among groups of women based on their dressing. Women who were completely covered reported fewer incidents of street harassment which displays that harassers targeted those women more who were wearing clothes that did not conceal their body appropriately. This highlights the prejudice that is present in Pakistan related to dressing. Like Gattuso (2017) stated that harassment is a way of objectification of women's body parts which could be the reason that women experience more harassment when they are wearing clothes in which their body parts are visible. The contributing factors to such kind of harassment could be the patriarchal culture of Pakistan where certain men who support

patriarchy do not tolerate women going against the norms that they have decided for them. Hadi (2017) stated that men try to exert control over women by harassing them and those women who do not wear traditional clothes become an easy target as they do not abide by the norms of traditional Pakistani culture. Men believe that because of their superior status in society, they can punish women who go against the norm by harassing them. Hadi (2017) further stated that when men believe that a woman's behavior is a threat to the code of behavior men have decided for them, their bodies are punished for them in the form of physical and sexual violence. Interestingly, even wearing *abaya* did not guarantee women's safety at public places; it just resulted in fewer incidents of harassment and not the complete absence of it. There are numerous factors other than what a woman wears that could be associated with these findings such as the places these women visited and timings they were out of the house. There are certain public places that are not considered very much safe for women. Also, these women who wear *abaya* might have had some rules set for them such as not going outside after a particular time of the day for safety purposes. These could be the additional reasons for them experiencing comparatively lesser harassment. In Islam, there are many laws proposed to prevent harassment which includes proper dress code for both men and women and code of conduct including lowering their gaze as they see opposite sex regardless of what they wear. Both are instructed to respect the privacy of other sex regardless of circumstances and severe punishments await for those who commit crimes

related to sexual harassment as individuals are held responsible for their behaviors (Mohamed & Baig, 2014). These findings suggest that even though there are laws for harassment and other forms of violence against women, the non-implementation of those laws indirectly endorses unsafe environment for women in Pakistan. The results of present study have clinical and social implications. There should be intervention plans introduced for women who become victim to any form of harassment. In terms of social implications, such policies must be introduced and implemented that can reduce the incidents of harassment and make college and university going women feel safe. Further, participants faced harassment even in university premises which indicates that there is a need to make universities more secure for women as such incidents can de-motivate them to pursue education. Further, women must be educated about the policies against street harassment via seminars in their respective institutes. Teachers can play an important role in educating youth including men and women about the mentioned social issue. Female students could be taught necessary self defense techniques that could make them safe on the roads and other places. For the present research, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

5. Limitations

The limitations of the present research are as follows

1. The present research is limited in scope in a way that there was no comparison group that could help understand the difference in

variables between women who experienced sexual harassment and those who did not.

2. The frequency of visiting public places was also not included in the present research which could be related to the number of experiences of harassment overall.
3. The characteristics of harassers in any way were not included in the research which could also give insight into harassing behavior.

6. Recommendations for Future Research

Future researchers can collect data from all over Pakistan to find out the prevalence of street harassment. Qualitative research can be conducted in future to explore the extreme experiences of harassment and how they affected the victims. It is also recommended to study forms of harassment and their relationship with psychological disorders. Future research can be conducted to understand the factors related to harassers as to why some men harass and others do not. The cognitive framework of men who believe in patriarchy could be studied to understand its relation with street harassment.

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