

Forum: United Nations Women Committee

Issue # 18-01: Measures to prevent gender-based violence and harassment against women

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Introduction

Around the world, women are forced to put up with harassment and gender-based violence on a daily basis. Gender-based violence and harassment imply acts of violence targeted towards women. These types of violence include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Harassment has become one of the most frequent interactions women face when they leave their homes. Smaller scale acts include: being constantly catcalled on the street, being touched inappropriately, and being audibly depicted on their body. Most women are typically silenced after suffering this harassment to the point that it becomes normalized. Regardless of the common misconception that harassment only includes physical and sexual misconduct, all forms of harassment are equally vital and triggering to women. Most of the world chooses to ignore these smaller, yet equally important forms of violence. Gender-based violence is clearly a very under-researched topic, nonetheless, every existing form of research and studies has proven that this is a prevalent issue. The IRL, a non-profit organization, has gathered significant data through multiple studies. One of their studies concluded that eighty-five percent of

women in the survey had faced street harassment before the age of 17. This goes to prove that harassment, whichever form, has become predestined to women of all ages due to the standards that are currently established in society.

In previous years, women's fight with abuse has been pushed under the rug. From political stands to marches for equality, this issue has now slowly resurfaced and gotten more attention. The 'No Means No' and 'Me Too' movements have played a significant role in addressing this fight. The amount of women participating and sharing their stories for these movements has only gone to prove how drastic this issue has become worldwide.

As previously stated, acts of harassment have typically become regular occurrences that are normalized. Women being silenced has only contributed to the severity of this issue. With this, there are obvious negative consequences. The National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) concluded that out of 1000 sexual assaults, only 230 are reported to the authorities. Additionally, out of the 1000, 995 of the offenders will walk free.

Definition of Key Terms

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment includes any unwanted or non-consensual sexual advance, sexual pressure, and any form of physical or verbal harassment. This can apply to all genders be it at their homes, at their workplace, etc.

Gender-Based Violence

Any act of violence committed for the sole reason of the victim's gender.

Street Harassment

Street harassment is a form of harassment, primarily sexual and verbal, that involves unwanted provocative acts, catcalling, sexual comments, and inappropriate physical contact by strangers in public areas such as the street or sidewalks.

Gender Equality

The belief that any gender should have equal opportunities whether it be in economic, social, or political contexts.

#NoMeansNo Movement

The #NoMeansNo movement is a global rape prevention movement started by the NMNW organization. The target mission of the movement is to end sexual violence against women. This movement has spread and gotten attention worldwide as thousands of women continue to share their stories.

General Overview

Defining Sexual Harassment

The term 'sexual harassment' has often been debated to determine what is included in its definition. Australian Human Rights Commission or AHRC defines the legal term of sexual harassment as "An unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcomerequest for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual naturewhich makes a person feel offended, humiliated and/or intimidated, where a reasonable person would anticipate that reaction in the

circumstances." AHRC's Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 defines any of the previous interactions as unlawful. Additionally, it is considered unlawful to victimize a person for making or contemplating making a complaint of sexual harassment to the commission. Although this definition is commonly used, there are infinite other definitions. The EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) has defined sexual harassment as interactions including sexual requests or any other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when it creates a hostile work environment or when the approach is used as reasoning for employment decisions subject to such individual. As can be seen, there are various definitions for sexual harassment, leading to an extremely broad level of explanation. This causes individuals to have different interpretations of the issue, which is a problem of its own. While victims of physical sexual harassment have a more direct way of explaining the interaction, victims of verbal harassment have a more difficult time placing their encounter into the definition.

Regardless of this issue, most victims and enforcement officers can agree on the definition of "behavior that prevents someone from completing their current task or job, which can vary anywhere from sexual assault to unwanted remarks". Unwanted remarks could include catcalling, comments on someone's body, or even repeated attempts to get the victim to go out with you.

Catcalling and Street Harassment

Catcalling has been a clear global issue for centuries. It is defined by Merriam Webster as "the act of shouting harassing and often sexually suggestive, threatening, or derisive comments at someone publicly." Catcalling commonly

takes form in street harassment and is rampant in public spaces. These typically include buses, trains, sidewalks, and the workplace. According to UN Women, three out of five women have reported an experience of sexual harassment on public transportation. This includes but is not limited to catcalling, as many women have also reported instances of stalking and groping in these areas. For girls of ages 18 through 24, the regularity of these occurrences are as high as 88%. Considering the alarming rate of sexual harassment, the rate for reports is extremely low. Whether due to shame or fear of the consequences, women typically ignore and keep quiet regarding these issues. If reported, victims are commonly further harassed, made ashamed, and even ignored by authorities. A stigma of blame tends to exist where women are ridiculed and faulted for speaking up about harassment. As can be seen by multiple public cases, women who report getting sexually harassed are constantly being interrogated with questions such as: "What was she wearing?" and "Did she drink?". These questions are typical ways of trying to sway the blame back to the victim. The lack of laws most countries have against these interactions have caused the rates of harassment to increase every year.

Education

According to UNESCO, there are 132 million girls around the world that are completely out of school. This includes 34.3 million out of primary school, 30 million out of middle school, and 67.4 million out of secondary school. These numbers are incredibly alarming, yet don't prove the full extent of the problem. The topic of education for women does not only refer to girls' access to some form of an education. It also refers to the safety of these girls. 60 million girls are

sexually assaulted every year as they make their way to school. Lots of these cases appear in poverty-stricken countries. In these countries, dropout rates are significantly higher, proving a recurring cycle. Although this global issue is still a large problem, many countries have worked with UN programs to help. To name a few: The Campaign for Female Education or CAMFED describes itself as a pan-African movement and works to multiply the amount of girls in school, while providing them with new opportunities for leadership. According to Charity Navigator, CAMFED has allowed over 3.3 million students to attend school in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Ghana, Tanzania, and Malawi since 1993. The American Association of University Women or AAUW is another organization dedicated to breaking educational and economic barriers for women across the world through advocacy, education, and volunteer work.

Education can also be a large factor in the rates for sexual harassment. Many experts believe that the first step to prevent sexual harassment starts by teaching kids since their early childhood. Many parents and teachers do not do this as they fear they are starting too young or simply feel uncomfortable. This is where the issue commences. Due to the lack of sexual education parents and schools provide, kids do not get a grasp on essential rules for respect and communication. Additionally, in various countries, schools scold girls for their outfits and are "dress-coded" with the explanation that the male children will be distracted. Instead of taking this approach, schools should be teaching boys to be respectful and to control their behaviors. If not, these behaviors will slowly continue and progress into their adult lives.

Reporting Sexual Harassment

One of the most prevalent subtopics of sexual harassment is the lack of reports. Most cases go unreported as victims fear violence and being ridiculed for taking a stand. As previously mentioned, women are casually shamed for their harasser's behavior by being interrogated on their behavior during the occurrence. They are told that they "asked for it" due to what they were wearing, that they were drinking, or even that they were being too friendly. This social consequence and pressure forces women to stay silent. They believe that speaking up can only hurt them. Nevertheless, this isn't the only repercussion in society. Many times, women who speak up are fired, ignored by potential employers, and blackmailed. When a powerful man is the perpetrator, these consequences are especially common and lead to women's silence.

Bystander Intervention

Reporting sexual harassment will always be more helpful than letting it happen unreported. Although many women commonly fear standing up for themselves, bystanders should always attempt to intervene, may that be through stopping the perpetrator, calling for help, or attending to the victim. Early intervention can help or even prevent the sexual harassment from taking place or leading to a greater issue. Considering that most catcalling and sexual harassment occurs in public areas such as the street, it is likely that there will be witnesses. For this reason, it is so important for these witnesses to stick up for victims who cannot. Bystanders, particularly men, can change the stigma and culture around this issue when they witness harassment, whether in the workplace or in public areas.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

United States

As one of the most active countries in the world, the United States of America, is quite well-connected. With this being said, many movements and critical events taking place in the United States deeply affect the views on the topic at hand for the rest of the world. Recently, a larger conversation has been had following the arrest of Jeffrey Epstein in 2019. Epstein's case brought to light how multiple public figures used their power to abuse young women. The allegations against Epstein caused thousands of women to begin sharing their stories through social media. The long history of Epstein's abuse stimulated a national wide conversation about sexual harassment across the United States, specifically focusing on powerful individuals who shame and scare their victims into fear. This way, they hope their victims won't speak out. For hundreds of years, the United States has had increasingly high rates of rape and sexual assault. According to the NSVRC, one in five women in the United States have experienced rape in their lifetime. These rates are significantly higher than the world average. Sexual harassment and rape are grossly underreported due to victim shaming, fear of law enforcement not taking a case seriously enough, and the fear for a lack of prosecution for the abuser. According to World Population Review data, only 9% of these rapists will get prosecuted as a whole, meanwhile only 3% of rapists will spend over one day in prison, and 97% of rapists in the United States will walk free. Due to the lack of justice served, victims of harassment and rape do not feel they are safe or receiving justice. This causes less and less victims to report assaults, creating a decrease in reported cases every year.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan has infamously been named the “most dangerous country” for women multiple times. Reports of sexual violence in Afghanistan have been hindered by gender inequality, and a lack of support for victims. Through 2020, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported a decrease in cases of sexual misconduct and gender-based violence. These numbers were a significant decrease from previous years. It is suspected that the reasoning behind this is the pandemic’s containment. One of the most frequent forms of sexual harassment performed in Afghanistan is called ‘virginity testing’. This consists of a doctor’s examination of a woman to review whether the hymen is intact or not. This test has been condemned by the United Nations as “painful, humiliating and traumatic”. As of 2018, these tests were made illegal, unless allowed by a court order. This, however, has not proven to solve the issue. Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission identified traces that multiple forced and unconsented gynecological tests were still being performed. The Commission conducted a survey with 129 women. They found that 92% of women had been tested illegally and without consent. The government has done little about this form of abuse. Virginity testing undermines, humiliates, and insults women.

Brazil

Brazil has had an infamous relationship with sexual harassment in the past. It is said that harassment occurs so often in Brazil that women don’t bother reporting it. Datafolha’s survey concluded that forty-two percent of women had said they experienced sexual harassment in public. Police forces do not take the issue

seriously and are even occasionally the perpetrators. Prior to 1988, women who were married would be legally subordinate to their husbands. Although this has changed over time, Brazil still has incredibly high rates of harassment. The OMCT organization reported that around 40 women are raped every day in Brazil. Psychological intimidation as well as physical aggression were reported in most cases. Many times, prejudices against women lead them to be seen in a certain light after going through sexual assault. Victim-shaming is common, where people will disqualify the victim's feelings. Brazil's main issue in the topic is the taboo behind sexual harassment. As victims continue to ignore their abuse, the situation only seems to get worse and the rates get higher.

India

India has on multiple occasions been called out for its high rates of sexual harassment and rape. The World Population Review's data states that as of 2020, the number of rape incidents in India per 100,000 citizens was 22,172. India also recorded an average of 87 rape cases daily in 2019. The primary concern for India is in how young girls are taught to behave. From a young age, girls in India are taught to ignore harassment. The most common way of doing this is to stay quiet and continue along. These protocols have led women in India to go without reporting or stopping sexual harassers. Nevertheless, they aren't truly better off when they do end up reporting these cases. Most of the time, women will get shamed once they report any form of harassment. Societal rules prefer these situations to go quiet. Consequently, multiple studies have proven that almost every woman in India has gotten harassed in her lifetime.

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea tends to present a more violent baseline for women. In Papua New Guinea, more than 90% of women and underaged girls were reported to have experience sexual harassment or gender-based violence on public transport (UN Women). It is suspected that the lack of education and the low economic status feed into this problem. These acts of harassment have been criminalized and proscribed under the 2013 Family Protection Act, yet only a tiny amount of abusers are sentenced. The police rarely attend these cases and even commonly demand money from victims. Now, the government of Papua New Guinea has begun establishing Family and Sexual Violence Units (FSVUs), hospital-based Family Support Centres, as well as a gender-based violence plan. Although the process has been begun, these rules are yet to be implemented.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
July 19, 1848	First women's rights convention organized by women is held in New York
February 28, 1909	First National Woman's Day in the United States.
June 26, 1945	Charter of the United Nations is signed, pressing for equality between men and women for the first time in the world's history
July 2, 1964	President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, including a ban on employment discrimination based on sex.

March 8, 1975	United Nations begins celebrating International Women's Day
July 2, 2010	United Nations Women is founded
September 20, 2014	Emma Watson launches the 'HeForShe' Movement
October 4, 2017	The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) commences new anti-harassment training that focuses on creating a respectful workplace environment.
October 15, 2017	The #MeToo Movement is begun after actress Alyssa Milano encourages others to speak up, following Harvey Weinstein allegations
December 18, 2017	Time's "Person of the Year" magazine acknowledges the "silence breakers" who went public with their stories of sexual harassment in the workplace.
February 24, 2018	Olympics introduces the first sexual assault centers, with at least 10 cases reported.
May 10, 2021	The European Parliament calls for countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention fighting gender-based violence.

UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The United Nations Women organization recognizes the various consequences of sexual harassment. Since the organization was founded and created on July 2nd, 2010, it has shown how the UN prioritizes women's safety and needs. It has worked simultaneously with UN Member States to create laws, design policies, plan movements, and implement programmes to intervene with this issue.

UN Women works together with the UN Member states globally to allow the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals to be a reality for women. To do

this, they have an agenda leading up to 2030 with their goals. The organization adopts frameworks and laws to reduce violence, increase women benefits, and allow women to contribute and influence decisions in sustainability.

One of the longest lasting projects associated with UN Women has been the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Last year, the project celebrated 25 successful years. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action sets out to remove any systemic barriers that target women's participation in any and all areas of life. With the help of UN Women, women's rights activists have been bringing together the next generations of women's rights activists have contributed enormously to implement this project. More recently, these women have been brought together to participate in a groundbreaking and diverse campaign: "Generation Equality: Realizing women's rights for an equal future". The UN Women Organization plays a huge role in the success of this campaign and advocates for it on a daily basis.

UN Women has fought to implement numerous resources to increase education regarding women's rights. These implemented resources have been made for the public, hence they are free to access on the internet. One of these resources is the Virtual Knowledge Centre to End Violence against Women and Girls. This site offers insightful information and suggestions for the implementation of laws and programs. The site also includes successful projects, case studies, and additional tools. The resources added together have the proper goal of educating the public on these important issues.

Another program implemented by UN Women has been the UNiTE to End Violence against Women Campaign. Similarly to the Virtual Knowledge Center, the UN Secretary-General's campaign obtains the purpose of spreading public awareness of women's issues as well as increasing political participation and resources regarding the prevention of violence against women throughout the world. This campaign was implemented in 2008 and has continued since. The program calls on governments, women's organizations, the media, and the public to work together to address the global issue of violence against women. With these separate forces, UN Women helps the campaign build on existing international legal and policy frameworks. The adoption and implementation of national laws preventing violence against women are of utmost importance.

Past action

As previously mentioned, multiple strategies have been used to solve this global issue. Regardless, there is still much improvement needed in laws, policies, and programs to ensure safety for women. Most previous actions have only been successful to a smaller extent as they have been limited. Most action taken has been done on a national level, while true change must take place worldwide. As an example, the Beijing Declaration was extremely successful. Nevertheless, this policy was not implemented on a worldwide level. For it to be impactful for everyone, more nations and UN programs must adopt these legislations.

Possible Solutions

All solutions must address multiple factors that go into the overall issue of both the prevention and the reporting of gender-based violence and sexual

harassment. Besides prevention and the reporting, the implementation and enforcement of any solutions is crucial to the progress of this global issue.

Up to now, most solutions have focused on the help and resources that can be offered to survivors of this abuse. Although this is essential, it does not address the factor of prevention.

By starting at the root of the issue, organizations must focus on avoiding the abuse in the first place. UN Women has suggested that this prevention begins at home for young children. They believe that teaching children from their early childhood is of utmost importance. Most influential/parental figures in these children's lives refuse to do this as they feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, without any education, there can be no change. With new policies and programs being implemented, children would have the opportunity to learn what is correct and ethical from a young age.

In regards to the reporting of these instances, many women choose not to speak up about their abuse in fear that they will be harmed, neglected, will lose their jobs, or worse. Unfortunately, there is no way to punish the perpetrators unless the victims speak up. Therefore, most laws will not be effective if a majority of women do not report their abuse. It is essential that these women feel comfortable. This could possibly be achieved by awareness programs, which could ensure women that they would be supported after their reports.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

Sustainable Development Goal number 5 is titled “**Gender equality**”. This connects to the issue at hand due to sexual harassment and gender-based violence being the setback in society being able to achieve gender equality. If these two issues were resolved, gender equality could become a reality. This would happen as women's safety has become a rare right throughout the world. If this was not a factor, trust between women and police forces could increase. Addressing this issue would prevent this issue as well as increase the reporting from women.

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Appendix

- I. Country Profiles Provided by UN Women Regarding Violence against Women
<https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries>
- II. Gender Related Policies Provided by UN Women
<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osaginem/fpgenderpolicies.htm>
- III. Humanitarian Action and Previous Solutions
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- IV. CNN Article Regarding How Sexual Harassment Stands Around the Globe
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