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Investigating the Level and Types of Street Harassment

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A B S T R A C T

The purpose of conducting this research was determining the level and types of street harassment in the city of Ilam. Statistical population of this research included males and females aged over 10 years in Ilam from which 500 subjects were selected through simple random sampling method. The measurement instrument was a questionnaire designed by the researcher including 25 items. Results indicated that 56.1 percent of males and 71 percent of females in one way or another have had the experience of street harassment. Highest level of street harassment was observed among married women, single women, married men, and single men respectively. Jobs that require higher levels of social relationship are faced with street harassment more than others; for instance, visitors, drivers of public transportation means, and journalists. The most common types of nuisance in Ilam included nasty look (58.46 percent), verbal nuisance (54.4 percent), honking and deliberate stopping of personal automobiles for pedestrians (34.12 percent). And, the least common types included shouting (21.01 percent), physical assault (21.55), and touching (21.87). Results of data analysis indicated that there are significant differences in the level of street harassment with respect to variables such as educational degree, time span of being out of home, subjects' companion, age ranges, social-economic classes, types of cell phone lines, and males and females' clothing style. However, there were no significant differences in the level of street harassments with respect to means of transportation.

Keywords: Street harassment, Clothing, Females' veils.

INTRODUCTION

One of the social ills with which our society is currently faced is the phenomenon of street harassment that through its remarkable and hidden growth has disturbed the mental peace of individuals and families and, in some cases, has harshly imposed insecurity and anxiety on societies. This phenomenon is not new but its severity is so high that, as one of the serious harms and social ills has allocated some part of the activities of security and disciplinary planners and agents to itself.

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Today, almost in all families, anxiety about street harassment has been experienced. However, the social and cultural context of society has made people especially women and girls conceal their unpleasant experiences. Although women and girls are worry about encountering harassers, few girls or boys reveal their unpleasant experience of encountering nasty looks, accosting, offensive and vulgar words, deliberate stopping of personal automobiles for pedestrians and veering by motorists to intrude on the girls' attention.

Street harassment is one of the main anomalous social behaviors that plays a significant role in producing social insecurity and disturbing individuals' peace. Bantering, vagrancy, jostling, immoral behaviors in public gatherings and insulting people's chastity are examples of street harassments.

From a psychological perspective any kind of relationship with opposite gender contrary to the custom of society is considered to be an unusual behavior. Therefore, street harassment which is a type of relationship (false relationship) with opposite gender is considered a morbid and unusual behavior.

Daily, we are seeing that young people collectively spend their time dawdling without any purpose or plan in unentertaining canters such as streets, stores and shopping centers. In such conditions, it is quiet natural to expect street harassments. In this study, besides investigating the level and types of these harassments, reasons and factors behind this phenomenon would be investigated from the viewpoint of residents of Ilam. Furthermore, solutions for reducing this social harm would be investigated from the viewpoint of people and with respect to scientific and Islamic texts.

Street harassment is defined as verbal, behavioral, and nonverbal characteristics that are performed to annoy and harass women. These harassments are performed by men and strangers who are in sidewalks and other places like street or metro stations¹. Bowman believes that street harassment has reduced women participation in social activities and has made them to deal with home affairs. According to previously conducted research, in urban societies almost all girls and women, depending on the distance they walk or the time span they spend in streets, one to twenty times would be subjected to verbal and physical harassment. However, research conducted in Canada indicated that 80-90 percent of women have experienced street harassment at least once². In different countries proportional to its cultural conditions, people especially women are trained in different methods for confronting this phenomenon. For instance, in New York women are advised to take photograph of molesters with their mobiles and send it to police. Similarly, in japan there are particular clothes for women who may be subjected to street harassment to cover themselves. These methods are closely related to the culture of societies. In our country confronting and controlling this social problem is quite different with respect to its Islamic culture because adolescents and youths are aware of rules and regulations. This study set

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out to answer these questions: what is level of street harassment in Ilam? What types of harassments are observed repeatedly in Ilam?

Street harassment and its developments throughout city would destroy the modesty and chastity which are important factors in controlling moral hazards. Consequently, individuals whose social modesty previously prevented them from committing social corruption appear on social sphere and turn the city into an appropriate environment for such nuisances.

Bowman in defining street harassment stated that there are many behaviors that are included within the domain of street harassment. Stranger sexual harassment includes behaviors such as verbal and nonverbal actions such as whistling, winking, leering, pinching, touching, taunting, and street remarks. Street remarks usually have sexual content including statements about the physical appearance of women or their presence in public places.

Sexual harassment may be higher in countries with more traditional approaches towards gender role³. Iranian societies in which tradition and gender ideologies are deeply rooted are no exception in this regard. Investigating and conducting research on the issue of street harassment is important from two aspects. Firstly, according to results obtained from previous studies conducted by other researchers^{2, 4, 5} street harassment is much more prevalent than sexual harassment in academic settings and workplaces. Findings of a study carried out by MacMillan et al² revealed that 85 percent of women have experienced at least one type of street harassment. While the percent of women experiencing non-stranger harassment was 51 percent. Secondly, the negative effects of street harassment, at personal and social levels, in university and working place are highly widespread in comparison to sexual harassments. One of undesired consequences of street harassment for the whole society is excluding nearly half of potentially active population of society from public sphere and deporting them to the more private environment of homes. In this regard Bowman stated that due to street harassment, women draw back from public sphere toward the more private environment of homes, gender roles and cliché would be reinforced, and equality between men and women would be denied. Fairchild⁶ also wrote: in fact, sexual harassment is a punishment for those who go beyond the traditional boundaries of gender roles. Therefore, sexual harassment toward women as a passive sexual instrument intends to punish women because of withdrawing their traditional feminine roles. Sexual harassment is an instrument by which gender roles and cliché would be reinforced in the culture of a society. Considering these facts and findings of another study under the title "the silence of law and social sciences literature against street harassment"¹, examining this destructive social phenomenon seems necessary.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is a significant difference in the level of experiencing street harassments with respect to educational degrees.

2. There is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to the type of automobile used.
3. There is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to the times of going out.
4. There is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to subjects' companions.
5. There is a significant difference in in the level of street harassment with respect to different age ranges.
6. There is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to gender.
7. There is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to marital status.
8. There is a significant difference in the level of experienced street harassment with respect to social-economic class.
9. There is a significant difference in the level of experiencing street harassment with respect to the types of cell phone line used.
10. There is a significant difference in the level of encountering street harassment with respect to clothing styles of men.
11. There is a significant difference in the level of encountering street harassment with respect to clothing style of women.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey research. This type of research is used to answer questions like how is the nature of the current condition. What is the relationship between events? And how is the current condition? ⁷. In addition, in this study comparative method through covariance analysis was used to reduce differences and heterogeneity among groups (same reference). In order to investigate the level of street harassments a questionnaire was designed and administered among male and female pedestrians. In this questionnaire, items are focused on asking about the level and the type of harassment experienced or those experienced by others.

Data gathering was carried through using a questionnaire, closed interviews, and observation. The questionnaire was designed by the researcher and its validity was determined by experts of psychology and social sciences. In addition, reliability of this questionnaire was estimated through computing Cronbach alpha coefficient.

Statistical population of this study included males and females aged over 10 years that according to the census in 1390 were 141353 persons (71731 males and 69622 females).Considering the survey design of the study and having a large population, sampling table of Krejcie and Morgan⁸ was used to calculate sample size. In estimating the size of sample, this table estimates the highest number for sample size. According to this table, for an urban population of 140 thousand, 386

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subjects were selected; then, this number was increased to 500 persons in order to have a representative sample. This sample was randomly selected from the statistical population in crowded sidewalks, public parks, and training centers like high schools and universities. Questionnaires were distributed and collected by inquirers under the close supervision of project's executor. In administering questionnaires 4 inquiring teams cooperated with the agreement of disciplinary force and research institutes and organizations to issue inquiring card and in some cases the researchers mediated to prevent created problems in the process of administering questionnaires.

For data analysis descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviations were run; in addition, for independent groups, inferential statistics of t-tests and one-way ANOVA were utilized.

RESULTS

Findings of this study indicated that among married men 57.4 percent have experienced street harassment while 58.8 percent of single men were subjected to harassment. Likewise, 74.2 married women and 70.4 single women have experienced street harassment. Accordingly, the highest level of street harassment was observed among married women, single women, single men, and married men respectively. It is noteworthy that men were subjected to harassment by both males and females while women mostly reported harassments by men.

76 percent of university students, 36 percent of employees, 80 percent of those with free jobs, 65 percent of unemployed persons, 100 percent of journalists, and 68 percent of female staffs at drugstores have experienced street harassment. It seems that jobs that involve more social relationship are highly subjected to street harassment. For instance, in this study, visitors, drivers of public transportation means, and journalists have entirely had the experience of street harassment.

77.7 percent of women with mantua were subjected to street harassment while 63.7 of women with Chador faced such misbehaviors. Other findings of this research indicated that the lowest age of experiencing street harassment was 9 with 9% and the highest age of experiencing this problem was 30 with 9%.

The most common types of street harassment in Ilam included nasty looks (58.46 percent), verbal nuisance (54.4 percent), honking and deliberate stopping of personal automobile for passengers (34.12 percent). Shouting (21.01 percent), physical assault (21.55 percent), and touching (21.8) had the lowest level of occurrence.

42.7 percent of participants stated that the first type of harassment they faced with was verbal harassment; in addition, 17.4 percent mentioned nasty look, 9 percent jostling, and 8.4 stalking as the first experience they faced.

37.7 of participating women stated that they experienced the highest level of harassment in streets, 32.2 percent on the way to school, 3 percent in taxi, and 8 percent in bus.

14.1 percent of participants experienced once a day, 12.9 percent 2 or 3 times a day, and almost 6 percent of subjects experienced street harassment more than 4 times. 7.6 percent encountered street harassment once a week and 13.2 percent experienced it once a month.

58.6 percent stated that highest level of harassment occur in the afternoon. 18.3 percent of harassments occurred at noon and nearly 10 percent occurred when conducting special ceremonies. Based on these findings, afternoon and noon are peak hours for street harassments.

39.1 percent of subjects encountered harassment when spending time with their friends, 35.8 percent of them experienced harassment when being alone in the streets or public places, 6.9 percent faced harassment when being with their classmates, and 6.3 percent had the experience of harassment when accompanied by their wives.

63.72 percent of respondents believed that usual customary coverage is one of the protective factors against street harassment. 45.9 percent believed that in order to be protected against street harassment, one should avoid going out after dark. 37.22 percent suggested that constituting human organizations and institutes can be effective and 36.81 percent stated that wearing no make-up when going out can be protective against street harassers.

To 55.2 percent of participants lack of preventive rules is a factor of increasing this social phenomenon and 52.2 percent stated inattention to implementing law against street harassers as the main factor. In addition, 51.1 percent said the main factor in increasing this problem is the fact that street harassment has become commonplace. Legal procedures of taking proceedings against street harassment, cultural atmosphere, and fear of its ensuing affray in families are among the main factors preventing them from taking legal action against street harassers. As indicated by the reports of disciplinary force, a low percentage of cases reported to police lead to written complaint and prosecution. In respondents' opinion the main reasons behind street harassment includes unemployment (34.3 percent), women's clothing (20.5 percent), and decrease in religious beliefs among people (13.8 percent) respectively.

54.23 percent believed that street harassment leads to fear of empty places among abused persons. Also, 45.45 percent believed that it leads to anxiety among people and 44.3 believed that it causes serious difficulty in shuttling to university and school.

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28.8 percent of subjects considered appropriate clothing as a method for reducing harassments. 19.7 percent stated creating culture and improving public culture as effective factors and 18.7 percent suggested punishment and serious confrontation with street harassers as a method for reducing this social ill. Reports of the disciplinary force shows that social ills like street harassments, after driving crimes and affray, are the third influencing factor in the crimes referred to disciplinary force of Ilam province.

Statistics regarding street harassment pointed out that the level of this problem increases during the second half of the year especially in Mehr due to the beginning of academic year. Results of investigating the hypotheses of the current study indicated that there is a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to education levels. There is a significant difference in the level of encountering street harassment among people with diploma, associate, elementary, and master degrees and other educational levels. The level of experiencing street harassment among persons having associate, diploma, master, or higher degrees was lower compared to other educational levels; and among elementary students it was higher than that experienced by other educational levels.

Moreover, there was no significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to the type of automobile utilized. The level of street harassment among owners of any type of public transportation means was approximately equal.

Other findings of this study revealed that there are significant differences in the level of street harassment with respect to the time span of being out of home. The level of experiencing street harassment among those who spend no time or less than 1 hour out of home was lower than that experienced by those who spend 1-2 hours out of home. Furthermore, the highest level of street harassment was experienced by person spending 2-3 hours out of home which is different from other time spans.

There was a significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to subjects' companion. Those who get out with their classmates or their wives encountered lower levels of harassment. Except for these two conditions, the level of encountering street harassment in other conditions was approximately the same.

Results of this research show that there is a significant difference in the level of street harassment in relation to different age groups. The lowest level of encounter was seen among subjects aged higher than 50 years; and, among those belonging to the range of 26-40 equal conditions were observed. Of course, within the age group of 46-50 years which is different from other age ranges, there was an increase in the level of harassment.

In addition, there was a difference between the percentage of males and females experiencing street harassment but, there was no statistically significant difference in the number of encounters experienced by males and females.

There is no significant difference in the level of street harassment with respect to social-economic classes. Street harassment was equally observed in different social-economic classes.

A significant difference was observed in the level of street harassment with regard to the type of cellphone line utilized. Those using Hamrahe Aval lines experienced lower levels of harassment compared to those using just Irancell lines or both types of mobile lines.

Findings of the present study indicates that there is a significant difference in the level of experiencing street harassment by men with sensible clothing and those wearing sports clothing. Further, women with chador and those wearing mantua experienced significantly different level of street harassment.

CONCLUSION

1. Public training through national and provincial media as to legal punishments for this social phenomenon, to a large extent, can both affect harassers and encourage those faced with them to legally bring proceeding against street harassment.

2. Within families children should be taught as to the ways of coping with street harassments.

3. Parents should properly take care of their children either girls or boys.

4. Both genders may be subjected to harassment. Therefore, neglecting boys merely due to their gender is a mistake made by families.

5. Married women also are not protected. Thus, although wearing makeup before one's husband is conventional, women should respect common usage as to clothing and make up when appearing in public places and gatherings.

6. Among boys and men wearing sports and chic clothes increases the opportunity of encountering harassment; so, simple and sensible clothing can protect all even boys from the harms of street harassers.

7. Research findings and Quran verses emphasize that veils especially chador can provide women with security against street harassers. In Tafsir al-Mizan it has been emphasized that god has issued the order of veil for women subjected to verbal harassment and addressed it as a protection against strangers and street harassers.

8. Considering the results of this research, parents should control when their children leave home. Emptiness of noon and afternoon are peak hours for street harassments.

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9. Except for work and education, the more the level of attendance at streets, the higher the level of street harassment. Therefore, society members should be trained to prevent their children either boys or girls from unnecessary attendance and loitering in streets.

10. In recent past, any kind of harassment directed toward girls and women were faced with people's instinctive reaction. Results of this study also referred to the fact that constituting institutes and human gatherings for confronting these social ills can be effective in reducing this problem.

11. Reinforcing informal social control. Greenberg et al. concluded that emotional attachment as the major element of social solidarity is the main factor of controlling because a sense of belonging gives individuals the feeling that they are under the control of their society and that society devotes constant attention to them (Greenberg, 1982). Under these conditions, those who inflict violence cannot go free; as a result, violent behaviors would decrease.

12. Strong and continued emphasis, through mass media, on the issue that police alone is not enough for controlling criminals and maintaining order requires ongoing effort on the part of all society members. Fostering this belief that social control can have preventive effects can have preventive effects, even in its slightest form such as questioning looks at criminals when committing crime, is an example of the role of society members especially when this slight control is exercised by a lot of people.

13. Emphasizing and developing this important belief that informing police and disciplinary force about harassers can immensely influence the process of controlling the behavior of harassers and increase the security level in society. In order to encourage victims of violence and other persons witnessing the violence to inform police, it is necessary to reduce the cost of their action. Formal centers for social control should widely ask for people cooperation in identifying street harassers. When pieced together, information provided by victims and witnesses, though limited, can provide good clues for social control.

14. Developing multiculturalism within the limits of accepted religious values and norms. Every effort for achieving cultural homogeneity in an era in which diversity is increasing day by day has no consequence except that it negatively depicts those who are unusual. This negative visualization provides the sufficient grounds for employing violence against those who are different from others. Cultural differences between different social classes should be widely recognized to increase people's tolerance towards others.

15. Reinforcing social skills among girls and women regarding the ways of encountering violence. Currently, most of the methods for coping with street violence are based on the personal experiences of girls and women. Due to lack of appropriate social structure, there is no possibility for systematic accumulation of

the stated experiences and; consequently, it is not possible to convey confronting skills and knowledge to others. Running training courses in social skills widely in girls' school or creating Internet training websites devoted to this field and creating widespread radio and television programs regarding this phenomenon can be facilitator. Encouraging non-governmental organizations to participate in preventing violence against women can be effective.

16. Facilitating the process of proving this crime and duly verifying of harassment cases are effective strategies for reducing the occurrence of these crimes which in turn encourages people to take legal action.

17. Improving cultural infrastructures is also an effective way for reducing such crimes.

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