Online sexual harassment among young female students in Ward 10, Baneshwor, Kathmandu, Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Background
Incidences of sexual harassment that occur over the internet are growing with the development of new technologies and virtual communities. This is a hidden form of sexual harassment that emerges unpredictably and poses a public health challenge. The objective of this study was to determine the extent of online sexual harassment experienced by female students (aged 15–24 years) in Baneshwor (Ward 10), Kathmandu, Nepal.

Methods
A total of 382 female students aged 15–24 – high school (10+2 level) to bachelor level – participated in a quantitative cross-sectional study. A semi-structured questionnaire, in the English language, was designed for self-administered data collection. It comprised six sections: sociodemographic information, internet accessibility, use of social media, experience of online sexual harassment, student's awareness and online behaviour.

Results
Around 66.5% of respondents reported having been exposed to online sexual harassment at least once, and most of the respondents (73.2%) had been exposed to online sexual harassment multiple times. Just under two-thirds (62.8%) of the respondents had been exposed to online sexual harassment before they reached 18 years of age. The mean age at which the young women experienced online sexual harassment was 18.94±1.79 years. Respondents studying in high school (10+2 level), those residing in urban areas and those accepting friend requests on social media from people they did not know offline were at higher risk of experiencing frequent online sexual harassment (P=0.000, P=0.011, and P=0.013 respectively).

Conclusion
The rate of online sexual harassment recorded was high. This shows an urgent need to address the problem; universities and the government need to play a part. A new module of comprehensive sexuality education for virtual communication is suggested as an addition to current academic curriculums.

Keywords: Online media, Sexual harassment, Female students

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INTRODUCTION
The internet is a powerful and useful technology that is used nearly everywhere today. The development of new digital technologies and their reasonably easy accessibility has impacted many aspects of modern life. The internet enables the creation of virtual communities and facilitates easy interaction

and online communication. The ever-increasing number of internet users worldwide has revolutionized how people in the 21st century socialize and communicate, how they access information and how they conduct business, changing ways of thinking and bringing considerable advantages.[1] Young people and adolescents, who tend to be early adopters of new technology, make up a high proportion of internet users globally. Many reports also show that those in the age group 15–24 years are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment as well as to violence regarding their sex and sexuality.[2]

Violence against women is a sad reality of the world and represents a widespread violation of human rights. Sexual violence, the most common form of violence again women globally, is defined by the World Health Organization as, "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work."[3]

Sexual harassment is a part of sexual violence and is also known to be a precursor for acts of sexual violence. It is outlined as, "any unwelcome sexual advance, unwelcome request for sexual favours or other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that makes an individual feel offended, humiliated and (or) intimidated, where a reasonable person would anticipate that reaction in the circumstances."[4] It is additionally outlined as, "unwelcome verbal or physical sexual overtures that may be made a condition of employment or otherwise have an effect on one's job or careers and (or) create a hostile or intimidating work environment."[5]

Online sexual harassment is sexual harassment or any unwanted sexual conduct that primarily occurs over digital platforms. It can also be called internet harassment, cyber-harassment, or technology-facilitated harassment. It is recognized as a form of sexual violence. Online harassment encompasses a variety of behaviours that use digital content (including images, videos, posts, messages, pages and comment sections) on various platforms (private

and (or) public). It can make a person feel threatened, exploited, coerced, humiliated, upset, sexualized or discriminated against.[6]

Additionally, online sexual harassment includes online trolling, attacks on the receiver's sexuality, exposure of personal information, threats based on morality or religion, manipulation of images, non-consensual distribution of intimate images or distribution of sexual videos for blackmailing, bullying, threatening or hurting anyone by using online media platforms. These different behaviours are often experienced simultaneously and can overlap with offline (face-to-face) experience of sexual harassment. Such harassment can occur through various mediums including chat rooms, e-mails, messaging platforms, advertising, social networking sites, news portals, online gaming portals, automatic linking sites, etc.

Most acts of sexual harassment take one of these forms: online sexual attention using direct personal communication to convey sex-related messages; sexual coercion through pressuring the victims to obtain sexual cooperation; or gender harassment (verbal or graphic) in which the harasser uses gender humiliating comments or images or sexual remarks.[7]

A 2017 report of the World Bank[8] shows that approximately 1,481 million adult women (aged above 15 years) globally and 802.6 million in the East Asia and Pacific Region have no legal protection against sexual harassment within the education system. Estimates of the number of women currently lacking legal protection against sexual harassment in employment, education and public places stand at 359 million, 1.5 billion, and 2.2 billion, respectively.

As use of the internet increases, so too do opportunities to exploit online media for illegal and socially unacceptable activities, including sexual harassment. This is particularly concerning as face-to-face (offline) youth violence and online harassment are closely linked.[9] Online interaction can leave people exposed and vulnerable to sexual harassment and can work as a preparatory step to offline violence. Online harassment can threaten the victim's career and restrict their day-to-day activities.

Online sexual harassment mostly targets females. Female college students and young women in general are vulnerable to sexual harassment from online strangers as well as from partners with whom they have been intimate in offline settings. Unfortunately, online sexual harassment cannot always be tracked easily, particularly in cases where the harasser's identity or location is unknown. Online sexual harassment involving the use of social media and other platforms therefore warrants further research. The main objectives of this study were: to determine the extent of online sexual harassment; analyze factors associated with online sexual harassment; and identify the role of social media use among young female students (aged 15–24 years) in Baneshwor (Ward 10) Kathmandu District, Nepal.

METHOD AND MATERIALS
Study design
The study was a descriptive cross-sectional study, using quantitative methods, to determine the extent of online sexual harassment directed at young female students in the 15–24 years age group. The study population comprised female students aged 15–24 years, studying in high school (10+2 level) and at bachelor level from a number of different colleges and universities within the Baneshwor (Ward 10) area of Kathmandu District, which has one of the highest levels of internet penetration and service use in Nepal.[10] Previous studies suggest that youths aged 15–24 are highly vulnerable to sexual harassment[11].

Sample size
The total sample size was 382. This was calculated by taking a previously recorded prevalence of sexual harassment of 47%[12]. The level of significance was set at p<0.05 with a confidence interval (CI) of 95%.

Degree of confidence (Z): 95% (i.e. 1.96)
Level of significance: 5%
The margin of error (d): 5%
Prevalence (p): 47% = 0.47

By using the formula:
Sample size (n) $= (z^2pq) / d^2$
$= 1.96^2*[0.47*(1-0.47)] / 0.05^2$
Total Sample Size (n) = 382
A total sample size of 382 was determined.

Sampling technique
All the colleges in the study area were included in the sampling unit, and all female students aged 15–24 years. A multistage (probability) sampling technique was applied. Firstly, we developed a complete list of colleges attended by high school (10+2 level) and bachelor level students (15+22=37 colleges) within Baneshwor (Ward 10). Then, we picked an equal proportion (50:50) of colleges attended by bachelor level and high school students (10+2 level), and levelled randomly (using the lottery method) by developing two different sampling frames.

Out of the total (n=382) sample students, we took a 50% sample from high school (10+2 level) and a 50% sample from the bachelor level, divided by the respective number of selected colleges.

Total +2 colleges in Baneshwor (Ward 10)= 15
= 15*50% = 7.5 = 7 colleges
Total bachelor level colleges in Baneshwor (Ward 10) = 22
= 22*50% = 11 colleges
The total selected colleges for data collection = 7+11 = 18 colleges

Number of the sample from each of the bachelor level colleges = (382*50%)/11
= 191/11 = 18
Number of the sample from each of the +2 level colleges = (382*50%)/7
= 191/7 = 27

Tools and techniques of data collection
A semi-structured questionnaire in the English language was used for self-administered data collection. The questionnaire comprised six sections: sociodemographic information; internet access; use of social media; experience of online sexual harassment; student's knowledge of sexual harassment; and behaviour on online media sites. A few open-ended questions were included for additional information. The questionnaire was cross-checked and verified by the supervisor and was also pre-tested before the data collection commenced. During data collection, we picked the students by convenience sampling according to predetermined number of samples from each selected college.

Data management, analysis and interpretation

The collected data were reviewed for completeness and combined into a single dataset. Data coding and editing were undertaken manually and analyzed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) software version 23.0. Descriptive analysis of the data included frequencies, percentages and mean followed by a chi-square test to draw significance between the dependent and independent variables. The standard $\alpha = 0.05$ was taken as the cutoff value for significance.

Validity and reliability of the study

All the research activities were conducted under the close guidance of the research supervisor. A literature review was undertaken to ensure the accuracy of the information and the validity of the tools. The data collection tool (questionnaire) was cross-checked and verified by the supervisor and pre-tested on a similar target group at another college. The research methodology, guidelines and feedback from the supervisor were followed strictly.

Pretesting

Pretesting was carried out using 10% of the total sample size (36 samples) in a college similar to, but not one of, those surveyed for the main data collection. Statistical tests were performed to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire and these found it highly significant. Following the pre-testing, the redundant questions and some terminology were excluded from the questionnaire, and the remaining questions simplified to make the questionnaire easier to understand and some questions more comfortable for students to answer.

Limitations of the study

The study was limited to college-going female students (10+2 years and bachelor levels). It does not address the experience of girls and women in this age group who do not attend college.

Ethical considerations

Approval was received from the Department of Public Health, National Academy for Medical Sciences, Purbanchal University and from Nepal Health Research Council, Kathmandu (Ethics approval letter Ref. No.: 298).

RESULTS

Background information of respondents

A total of 382 female students consented and participated in the study: a response rate of 100% eligible participants. The respondents were aged between 15 and 24 years, of whom 45% were below 18 years of age; 55% were 18 years or above. The mean age of the respondents was 18.89±1.80 years.

Most of the respondents (63.4%) were from urban areas, and the primary source of household income was from service-related jobs (37.2%), business (31.4%) and agriculture (15.2%). Around 74% of respondents belonged to a nuclear family and most (76%) live with family members. The majority of respondents (69%) came from a household with a monthly average income of Nepalese rupees (NPR) 10,000–50,000 (US$85-420). (See Table 1.)

Use of social media/internet

The study found that the majority of respondents (68.3%) spent 1–5 hours per day on social media, while 14.7% of respondents spent 5–10 hours. The mean time spent on social media was 5.46 hours per day. Around 12.6% of respondents reported using social media for less than one hour per day, and 4.5% reported more than 10 hours of use per day. Most of the respondents (79.8%) had received a friend request from a person they did not know at least once in their lifetime and 24.59% (n=305) of respondents had accepted such requests. Two-thirds (66%) of respondents had been made to feel uncomfortable or awkward by a comment made directly toward them on social media. The study revealed that about 13% of respondents have sent someone a sexually explicit photo or video through online media without asking for their consent. Around 31.9% of respondents tried to talk to people they do not know offline but who appeared good looking or otherwise attractive through online media. About 39.3% of respondents have seen adult content on the internet, and 37.8% (n=172) of them saw it when they were below 18 years of age. Moreover, only 58.5% of respondents been set any rules or had received warnings from their parents about their use of the internet. Most of the respondents (80.1%) have heard about government laws and policies on cybercrime (See Table 2).

Experience of online sexual harassment

Two thirds (66.5%) of respondents had been exposed to sexual harassment at least once (but only 25.9% considered this to be sexual harassment). The mean age of exposure was 18.94±1.79 years. The majority of respondents (73.2%) had experienced sexual harassment multiple times, while 26.8% had experienced it only once or twice. Among the total (n=99) respondents who felt that someone had sexually harassed them through online media, 36.37% had been subjected to non-consensual sharing of intimate images and videos; 26.26% of had experienced exploitation, coercion and threats; 14.14% had experienced sexualized bullying; 23.23% had seen unsolicited sexualized content; and 38.4%

had experienced harassment by their peers or college friends (16.2% by a person they described as their boyfriend). This was greater than the extent of harassment experienced from people they did not know offline (37.4%). 1% reported being sexual harassed by healthcare providers. Just over 61% of respondents reported not responding to harassment or ignoring it, and only 24.2% made anyone else aware that it had happened; 3% reported trying to harm themselves after they had been sexually harassed. Among the 45% of respondents who were under 18, the prevalence of online sexual harassment was 62.8%; and 44.19% of respondents reported that they had been asked to meet or go on a date even after they had said "no" at least once. See Table 3.

Table 1 Background information of respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Age		
15-18 years	172	45.03
19-24 years	210	54.97
Total	382	100
Permanent residence status (n=382)		
Urban	242	63.4
Rural	140	36.6
Total	382	100
Level of study (n=382)		
+2 Level	191	50
Bachelor Level	191	50
Total	382	100
Type of family (n=382)		
Nuclear family	283	74.1
Joint family	99	25.9
Total	382	100
Primary income source of the household (n=382)		
Agriculture	58	15.2
Job (Govt/Pvt sector)	142	37.2
Labour	20	5.2
Business	120	31.4
Foreign employment	39	10.2
Others	3	0.8
Total	382	100
Average monthly income of the household (n=297)		
<Rs.10000	15	5.1
Rs.10000 to Rs.50000	205	69
Rs.50000 to Rs.100000	60	20.2
>Rs.100000	17	5.7
Total	297	100

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+2 Level	191	50
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Labour	20	5.2
Business	120	31.4
Foreign employment	39	10.2
Others	3	0.8
Total	382	100
Average monthly income of the household (n=297)		
<Rs.10000	15	5.1
Rs.10000 to Rs.50000	205	69
Rs.50000 to Rs.100000	60	20.2
>Rs.100000	17	5.7
Total	297	100

Table 2 Use of social media and the internet

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Time spent on social media per day (n=382)		
<1 Hour	48	12.6
1 to 5 Hours	261	68.3
5 to 10 Hours	56	14.7
>10 Hours	17	4.5
Total	382	100.0
Accepted unknown friend requests on social media (n=305)		
Yes	75	24.59
No	230	75.41
Total	305	100
Ever seen adult content on the internet (n=382)		
No	232	60.7
Yes	150	39.3
Total	382	100
Ever received any rules/guidelines/warning from parents about how to use online media (n=382)		
No	93	24.3
Yes	223	58.4
They don't know about the internet	36	9.4
I don't see the need	30	7.9
Total	382	100

Factors associated with online sexual harassment

The results show the none of the associated factors considered for the study, including age, family residence status, monthly income of the household, and time spent on social media, have a statistically significant role in exposure to online sexual harassment (p>0.05). However, respondents studying at bachelor level and those who accept a friend request from someone they do not offline know are more likely to experience online sexual harassment than high school students and those who do not accept such requests (p<0.05). This study also shows that young women whose parents set rules and give warnings regarding the use of social media are not significantly more or less likely to experience sexual harassment than those whose parents do set such rules (p=0.081>0.05). This suggests that parents may not know how to advise their children (Table 3).

Table 3 Experience of online sexual harassment

Variables (n=382)	Frequency	Percent
Online sexual harassment experienced at least once		
Yes	254	66.5
No	128	33.5
Total	382	100.0
Frequency of online sexual harassment experienced		
≥3 times	186	73.2
1-2 times	68	26.8
Total	254	100.0

Table 4 Factors associated with online sexual harassment

Variables	Exposed (%)	Non-exposed (%)	P-Value
Age (Mean±SD) (n=382)	18.94±1.79	18.78±1.84	0.218
Permanent residence status (n=382)			
Urban	62.20%(158)	65.62% (84)	0.513
Rural	37.79% (96)	34.37% (44)	
Level of study (n=382)			
+2 Level	46.1% (117)	57.82% (74)	0.030
Bachelor level	53.9% (137)	42.18% (54)	
Average monthly income of the household (n=297)			
<10000	5.61% (11)	3.96% (4)	
10000 to 50000	67.86%(133)	71.29% (72)	0.201
50000 to 100000	22.45% (44)	15.85% (16)	
>100000	4.08% (8)	8.9% (9)	
Time spent on social media (Mean±SD) (n=382)	4.14±2.59	3.83±2.95	
<1 hour	10.6% (27)	16.40% (21)	
1 to 5 hours	70.1% (178)	64.85% (83)	0.202
5 to 10 hours	15.7% (40)	12.5% (16)	
>10 hours	3.5% (9)	6.25% (8)	
Accept an unknown friend request on social media (n=305)			
No	71.5% (153)	84.61% (77)	0.015
Yes	28.5% (61)	15.39% (14)	
Have seen adult content on the internet (n=382)			
No	53.1% (135)	75.79% (97)	0.000
Yes	46.9% (119)	24.21% (31)	
Ever received any rules/guidelines/warning from parents about how to use online media (n=382)			
No	(26.38%) 67	(20.31%) 26	
Yes	(58.26%)148	(58.59%) 75	0.081
They don't know about the internet	(9.85%) 25	(8.59%) 11	
I don't see the need	(5.51%) 14	(12.5%) 16	

Factors associated with the frequency of exposure
The results show that factors including length of time spent on social media each day; having ever seen adult content on the internet; and receiving rules/warning from parents have no role in the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment (p>0.05). However, respondents studying high school (10+2 level) from urban areas, and those who accepted a friend request from someone they do not know were more likely to experience frequent online sexual harassment (p<0.05). This suggests that the association between the frequency of exposure to sexual harassment and the age of respondents is statistically significant (p=0.003<0.05). (See Table 5)

Table 5 Factors associated with frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment

Variables	Once or twice (%)	More than once or twice (%)	P-value
Age (Mean±SD) (n=382)	19.18±1.84	18.75±1.80	0.003
Permanent residence status (n=254)			
Urban	75% (51)	57.52% (107	0.011
Rural	25% (17)	42.48% (79)	
Level of study (n=254)			
+2 Level	25% (17)	53.76% (100)	0.000
Bachelor level	75% (51)	46.24% (86)	
Average monthly income of the household (n=196)			
<10000	5% (7)	5.27% (3)	
10000 to 50000	70.6%(98)	77.20% (44)	0.683
50000 to 100000	21.5% (30)	14% (8)	
>100000	2.88% (4)	3.51% (2)	
Time spent on social media (Mean±SD) (n=254)	4.30±2.76	3.98±2.43	
<1 hour	6% (4)	12% (23)	
1 to 5 hours	75% (51)	68% (127)	0.251
5 to 10 hours	13% (9)	17% (31)	
>10 hours	6% (4)	3% (5)	
Accept an unknown friend request on social media (n=214)			
No	83.60% (51)	66.66% (102)	0.013
Yes	16.40% (10)	33.34% (51)	
Seen adult content on the internet (n=254)			
No	57.35% (39)	51.61% (96)	0.417
Yes	42.65% (29)	48.39% (90)	
Ever received any rules/guidelines/warning from parents about how to use online media (n=382)			
No	22% (15)	28% (52)	
Yes	66% (45)	55% (103)	0.368
They don't know about the internet	6% (4)	11% (21)	
I don't see the need	6% (4)	6% (10)	

DISCUSSION
To the best of our knowledge, this is the first research study on the prevalence of online sexual harassment experienced by young female students (15–24) in Nepal. In this study, the association between the use of the internet and online media sites, and the experiences of sexual harassment, were investigated using quantitative methods among the target age group in Kathmandu District, Nepal. The overall prevalence of exposure to online sexual harassment among this age group was 66.5%, rising to 62.8% in those under 18 years of age. This implies that out of every 10 young female students in Nepal, six are likely to have been subjected to online sexual

harassment at least once in their lifetime, directly or indirectly. Our findings also suggest that online sexual harassment is a serious problem, since nearly half (48.7%) of the young women participating in the study reported multiple exposures to online sexual harassment throughout their lifetime.

Prevalence of online sexual harassment

According to this study, the prevalence of online sexual harassment among Nepalese young female students in the 15–24 age group is less than the figures reported from some other countries. For example, almost 80% of female university students in Upper Egypt report cyber sexual harassment, [13] while the corresponding figure in the United States was 85% for online bullying reported by students.[14] According to a survey carried out in 25 countries by the software corporation Microsoft in 2012, every country reported some kind of online bullying, with China and Singapore reporting the highest victim rates: 70% and 58%, respectively.[15] In another study, 47% of respondents in the United States reported that at least one type of media they consumed had depicted sexual situations.[12] Different definitions, measurement tools and duration of the study may partly contribute to the contrast between the results of previous studies and this one. Nevertheless, the prevalence of online sexual harassment in Nepal seems similar to that of more developed countries and is becoming more challenging to counter considering the growing use of online technologies among the vulnerable age group. Nepal is in a transitional stage – neither fully developed nor least developed – and this might create a more vulnerable situation in which cybercrime and online sexual harassment, especially against girls and women, can flourish if left unchallenged.

Factors associated with online sexual harassment

There is no specific single risk factor for experiencing online sexual harassment: it has multiple contributing determinants. Age and gender are the most common determinants: young women of this age group are vulnerable to sexual harassment everywhere – online and offline. According a previous research study from Finland, girls report experiencing at least one form of cyberbullying more often than boys[16] but this study did not undertake a comparison by gender.

According to our study, the association between the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment and the age group of respondents is the factor with the highest statistical significance (p = 0.003<0.05). Age plays a significant role with regards to the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment, with exposure more likely in the younger age group. The mean age of exposure to online sexual harassment was 18.94±1.79 years. Younger women are clearly curious about their sex and sexuality and are keen users of new technologies. Conversely, however, a study conducted in Upper Egypt in 2017 showed that age played no role in exposure to cyber sexual harassment (p = 0.372>0.05).[13]

The findings further reveal that the respondents studying at high school (10+2 level) from urban areas were more likely to experience frequent online sexual harassment (p = 0.00<0.05 and P = 0.011<0.05) than rural students or those studying at bachelor level. Level of education and family residency status plays a significant role in the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment. A similar study in Upper Egypt in 2017 also showed that female students residing in urban areas were more likely to fall victim to cyber sexual harassment more frequently (p = 0.006<0.05); this is likely to be directly or indirectly connected to the easier accessibility and availability of modern technologies (computers, smartphones and internet service) in urban areas. In this study, amongst those who have experienced online sexual harassment, almost 100% had access to the internet at home and 97.4% had their own smartphone or personal computer. Time spent on social media per day, seeing adult content (pornography) on the internet and receiving rules/warnings from parents have no role in the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment (p>0.05). However, the factors associated with exposure to online sexual harassment in this study cannot be considered as strong determinants for frequent sexual harassment without further study – it might sometimes occur accidentally or unintentionally, too.

The factors associated with the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment in this study are, however, major risk indicators that should be taken seriously. Seeing adult content (pornography)

on the internet at least once is a significant associated factor for exposure to online sexual harassment (p =0.000<0.05), thought it does not then associate (p=0.417>0.05) with the frequency of exposure. This suggests that such exposure might sometimes happen accidentally or unintentionally due to user carelessness, not having sufficient knowledge of internet safety or an improper approach to internet content.

The role of social media in online sexual harassment and offline sexual violence

Online sexual harassment is linked to the increasing use of computers, the internet and smartphones globally. Virtually 100% of the respondents in this study had used social media. The majority of respondents (68.3%) spent 1–5 hours per day on social media, while 14.7% of respondents reported spending 5– 10 hours. The time spent on social media appears to have no role in the frequency of exposure to online sexual harassment (p=0.251>0.05), however. Those who accept friend requests from people they do not know offline were more likely to experience frequent online sexual harassment (p=0.013<0.05). A similar study undertaken in Upper Egypt in 2017 showed that girls who reported spending more hours online per day were more likely to fall victim to cyber sexual harassment more frequently during the same period as those who spent less time online per day (p=0.001<0.05). Most respondents (79.8%) had received a friend request through social media from people they did not know at least once in their lifetime, and 24.59% (n=305) of respondents had accepted such a request.

The study shows that what we do on social media is more important than how long we spend on the internet. The study also suggests that our activities on social media determine the risk of experiencing sexual harassment, particularly from online strangers. A similar study conducted among youth groups in Central Thailand shows that online harassment (through the internet) and offline (face to face) youth violence are often closely interlinked.[9] During our study, however, only a very few of the respondents shared their own experiences of offline physical violence that had resulted from relationships made online.

Laws and policies regarding cybercrime in Nepal

Nepal has implemented the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) 2063 (2008), [17] also known as the cyber law, and tries to prohibit illegal activities including sexual harassment through online media. Article 47 of the ETA states that publishing illegal content in electronic format can carry a penalty of five years in jail, a fine of 100,000 Nepalese rupees (approx. US$850) or both.[17] In this study, respondents' awareness of cybercrime policies is high (80.1%) but a high prevalence of online sexual harassment still exists. The most common forms of online sexual harassment reported in the study were non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos through online media sites. It seems that this is not being sufficiently addressed by current cyber policies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, online sexual harassment is commonly experienced by young female students aged 18–24 in Kathmandu. A high rate of online sexual harassment has been detected, and most of the respondents had experienced multiple exposures. Around six out of 10 young female students in Nepal may have been subjected to online sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime, directly or indirectly. The study respondents in high school (10+2 level) from urban areas and those who accept a friend request from someone they do not know offline were more likely to experience frequent online sexual harassment. Non-consensual sharing of intimate images or videos through online media sites is disturbingly high. Respondents' behaviour online can put them at higher risk of exposure to online sexual harassment.

Respondents were most likely to experience online sexual harassment from peers or college friends, followed by people they did not know offline who had sent them a friend request, and lastly by a person they would describe as a boyfriend. From this study, it is concluded that online sexual harassment can occur anywhere at any time and that anyone in virtual communities is at risk.

As new technologies develop and new virtual communities form, the young female students surveyed in Kathmandu District are at risk of becoming more vulnerable. This is likely to be

reflected in other regions of Nepal. Reflecting on the associated risk factors for online sexual harassment, a new module of comprehensive sexuality education in virtual communities is necessary. We recommend that this should be taught through schools, colleges and other academic programmes.

Awareness of the risk is of paramount important. Social media users must be aware of online strangers and should not respond to the requests from people they do not know offline. This should be addressed urgently. Specific policies and regulations need to be developed for regular monitoring of online media sites and a national online monitoring system should be implemented. A comprehensive sexuality education, as well as an anti-cyber sexual harassment programme led from the government level, is necessary for schools and colleges. Further studies should emphasize a deeper investigation of the association between online sexual harassment and vulnerability to it through online media.

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