

COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR ACCOUNTABILITY ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT: GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES



IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

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Publisher The *IDS Bulletin* is published by the Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261.

Cover photo New Delhi, India. Protesters near the India Gate hold up placards and chant their demands for justice and better safety for women after a brutal sexual assault on a young medical student. The 23-year-old student was violently gang raped on a moving bus on 16 December 2012 and her male companion brutally beaten. She died 13 days later.

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Online open access This journal is available online at bulletin.ids.ac.uk. Visit the site to search for articles and authors and register for table of contents email alerts.

Information for subscribers The *IDS Bulletin* is published in four issues per year.

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IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

Volume 51 | Number 2 | September 2020

Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives

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Notes on Contributors	iii
Collective Struggles Against Sexual Harassment: What We Have Learnt About Pathways to Accountability and their Outcomes Mariz Tadros and Jenny Edwards	1
Fighting Sexual Harassment on Campus: How Local Contexts of Different Universities Affect the Dynamics and Outcome of these Efforts Amal Hamada, Ahmed Kheir, Enas Hamdy and Heba Youssif	21
Women Politicians Navigating the 'Hostile Environment' in Pakistan Ayesha Khan, Zonia Yousuf and Sana Naqvi	43
'Me Too' and the 'List' – Power Dynamics, Shame, and Accountability in Indian Academia Adrija Dey	63
Multilevel Responses to Sexual Violence in Schools in West Africa Jordan J. Steiner and Anne M. Spear	81
Uniting Against the Tides: Filipino 'Shefarers' Organising Against Sexual Harassment Lucia Tangi	97
Disruption and Design: Crowdmapping Young Women's Experience in Cities Sophie Tanner, Nicole Kalms, Hayley Cull, Gill Matthewson and Anthony Aisenberg	113
Collective Silence and Accountability for Sexual Harassment in Lebanon Menaal Munshey	129
Accountability with Teeth Maha El Said	149
Glossary	167

Funder acknowledgements

Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA) is an international research programme which explores how social and political action can contribute to empowerment and accountability in fragile, conflict, and violent settings, with a particular focus on Egypt, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

Led by the Institute of Development Studies, A4EA is being implemented by a consortium which includes: the Accountability Research Center, the Collective for Social Science Research, the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives, Itad, Oxfam GB, and the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research. It is funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed in this *IDS Bulletin* do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funder.

Produced as part of:



Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020:
'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual
Harassment: Global Perspectives'
DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.125

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Collective Struggles Against Sexual Harassment: What We Have Learnt About Pathways to Accountability and their Outcomes^{*†}

Mariz Tadros¹ and Jenny Edwards²

Abstract The #MeToo movement that spread across the internet in 2017 sparked a focus on sexual harassment as an issue; this article, however, highlights the grass-roots work that had been happening for years before this collective action against sexual harassment and which has been hidden by the spotlight on a (white) Western perspective. It argues that this focus not only negates the work done in many other countries and localities, but also risks losing what can be learnt from these places, as well as potentially hindering that work by giving it the label of a Western agenda. This *IDS Bulletin* seeks to pluralise voices, experiences, and insights from the world that offer opportunities for learning. This introduction uses examples from the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* to explore the triggers to collective action and the pathways for mobilising for accountability. It concludes by looking at key issues in relation to collective action for countering sexual harassment.

Keywords sexual harassment, collective action, accountability, #MeToo, mobilisation, feminist, power.

1 Introduction

The words 'collective action against sexual harassment' may immediately conjure up images of the #MeToo movement that spread across the internet from 2017. But the story contained in this issue of the *IDS Bulletin* on sexual harassment shows that collective action predates that movement. Well before the #MeToo campaign went viral across the internet, there have been expressions of collective action around the world – and in the United States (US), by women of colour – that have ruptured silences on the prevalence of sexual harassment, made it extremely difficult for powerholders to bury evidence of its existence, and mobilised successfully so that perpetrators

© 2020 The Authors. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.127

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did not go unpunished and broader institutional politics were challenged. Why were they not looked to for inspiration, learning, and transnational solidarity?

Even '#MeToo', which went viral in 2017 in response to calls by actress Alyssa Milano to speak up against sexual harassment in the film industry, had its origins in a movement with the same name that had been founded a decade earlier by Tarana Burke (Vagianos 2017). While Milano was quick to recognise the origins of the movement, the way in which many parts of the media report on these issues highlights a clear pattern: 'Feminist movements are often whitewashed when they're brought into mainstream conversations. Women of colour are often overlooked and left out of the very conversations they create' (*ibid.*). When Burke was invited to the Golden Globe awards, her initial reaction was 'Why? I'm trying very hard not to be the black woman who is trotted out when you all need to validate your work' (Brookes 2018).

What accounts for this oversight, this non-recognition? Is it that in Western societies (and some non-Western societies as well!), it is acceptable for women of colour to 'represent their own' but not womenkind or humankind at large? Is it that diversity means, as Burke put it, that you are 'trotted out' when the optics of plurality are important but the campaigns you initiate are never good enough to be seen as a trendsetter for the rest of the world?

In 2011, groups of young people initiated a formidable movement that involved a highly effective interface of online-offline mobilisation to respond to a sudden spike in sexual harassment in public spaces (Tadros 2015). Success here refers to an ability to capture the imagination of a deeply patriarchal society about the meaning of women's bodily integrity and to empathise with their messages; success also refers to an ability to encourage hundreds of women to speak up and not feel ashamed; and finally, success refers to receiving hundreds of applications from young people who want to make the streets safe, volunteering to spread the message that it is never OK to harass women.

As co-editor of this *IDS Bulletin*, I (Mariz) shared the idea with an important international donor of bringing the activists to speak to human rights activists, feminists, and development practitioners in the West. Therein was the problem: the case of young people initiating a movement to respond to the spike in sexual harassment was set in Egypt. To sum up the donor's response, 'It is great that there is so much learning. It may be worthwhile bringing together other activists in the Middle East to hear and discuss this.' The message was clear: horizontal learning across the 'global South' is welcome, but the starting point to sharing and disseminating globally starts from the West.

Since the emergence of #MeToo, local activists have capitalised on the media interest in the global spread of the campaign to

highlight aspects of the problem they had been campaigning against in their own contexts. However, instead of using the #MeToo campaign to spotlight local activism which has gone on for decades, the narrative in the media sometimes became one attributing the emergence of local struggles to the global campaign (Kurian 2019a, 2019b; Ajayi 2018).

Such a framing is problematic and even dangerous on several levels. First, it is ahistorical; as Titilope Ajayi, a Ghanaian feminist scholar, writes:

Tagging [#MeToo] as the vanguard in the global fight against sexual harassment implies that the problem didn't come into sight until 'the West' named it. Spotlighting movements like #MeToo has a way of obstructing our vision of longstanding mobilisations on the ground in other parts of the world against the same issues. As much as transnational activism agendas are set in the 'West', a lot of significant movements tackling the same issues – even long before #MeToo – went on or are going on elsewhere (Ajayi 2018).

Ajayi cites the mobilisation in response to the ban on miniskirts in Uganda in 2014, #MyDressMyChoice protests in Kenya, and movements of similar scale and impact in other countries including Nigeria and South Africa in support of her argument (*ibid.*).

Framing local struggles as being inspired by #MeToo can also hinder the work of local movements. As Munshey (this *IDS Bulletin*) notes, movements in the 'global South' can experience pushback if their agenda is seen as coming from the West, a phenomenon which she reports from her experience in Lebanon as being criticised as 'American imperialism in a new form'. Ultra-nationalists and religious extremists have time and time again sought to vilify women's rights as a Western concept intended to corrupt pious local communities while vilifying women's rights advocates as traitors and proxies to the West.

This *IDS Bulletin* aims to represent the genealogy of collective action around countering sexual harassment. Collective action against sexual harassment did not start with the #MeToo campaign and perhaps, if the prospects of learning, sharing, and dissemination were not so skewed in one direction, from the West to the rest, other campaigns that began in other contexts, whether Egypt, India, or South Africa, way before #MeToo, would have also served as the 'spark' of solidarity.

A great deal is at stake here. First, narratives that misrepresent accountability for sexual harassment globally as the offspring of #MeToo inadvertently contribute to the negation of the voices, experiences, and struggles of those who have trod the path of collective action at the grass roots for some duration, and sometimes at great cost. It is almost as if decades of struggle

were wiped out, and their agency reduced to responding to a global campaign. Such a narrative denies recognition where it is due and understandably creates among some, a sense of resentment.

Moreover, the muting of the mobilisation of women and men against sexual harassment globally over many decades risks losing opportunities of learning associated with eliciting positive transformations in the struggle to counter sexual harassment. One of the most powerful messages from #MeToo was about the appropriation of social media for breaking the silence. However, experiences from around the world also offer much learning around questions such as 'When and under what conditions are tipping points reached in transforming an individual or group experience into a campaign of national scale?', 'What strategies of effective mobilisation challenges powerholders?', and 'What does justice or accountability look like?'

In other words, restricting our learning to one global campaign limits the horizons of what pathways of claims-making can look like, and it potentially risks straitjacketing what accountability entails. This *IDS Bulletin* seeks to address the questions of 'What triggers and enables collective action for countering sexual harassment to hold powerholders accountable? Under what conditions is it effective, and under what circumstances is it stalled?' The perspectives shared here from Australia, Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, India, Lebanon, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Spain, and Uganda demonstrate a whole spectrum of experiences from well-defined and visible collective action to contexts where voices are still silenced.

In presenting these perspectives, the intention is not to pitch voices and perspectives from the global South against the West. Such a binary polarisation is counterproductive at many levels. Binary framings of the Western feminist versus the authentic woman have often been politically appropriated for delegitimising struggles as not sufficiently authentic, grass roots, or indigenous (Tadros and Khan 2018). The framing of the championing of women's rights as a Western agenda is used to invoke some imaginary traditional social hierarchy in which women's natural place is to accept their inferiority in the gender hierarchy to men (Tadros and Khan 2019). In such contexts, local feminist activists can sometimes find themselves not only fighting local hostilities but also Western feminists who are judging them as too elitist/secular/inauthentic to legitimately champion a women's rights agenda.

Thus, in critiquing the power dynamics that have informed the representation of collective action around sexual harassment, the intention here is not to inadvertently entrench binaries. The intention is also not to deny that international movements can energise, galvanise, and open spaces for national and local

movements to become more visible and have their voices amplified. For instance, as Ayesha Khan (2018) notes in the context of aid agency support for women's movements in Pakistan and the campaign for a women's quota in elected assemblies in the 1990s:

Activists who took part recalled how aid agencies took decisions during the 1990s within a broader global context that gained momentum from a strong international feminist movement and landmark UN conferences – Vienna '93, Cairo '94 and Beijing '95 – after which Pakistan committed to act on women's rights and signed CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women] (Khan 2018).

Rather, our goal is to pluralise the voices, experiences, and insights from around the world that offer opportunities for learning and potentially forging new solidarities.

Before engaging with the themes of this *IDS Bulletin*, we briefly interrogate, in Section 2, the concepts of collective action, sexual harassment, and accountability. In Section 3, we explore the tipping points, and the triggers, that elicit action that brings people together, and in some cases, generate a snowballing. In Section 4, we explore the pathways of mobilising for accountability in terms of modalities and tactics and the sites and spaces. Finally, in Section 5, we identify three key points that have particular relevance to the praxis of organising to achieve accountability outcomes for redressing sexual harassment.

2 Framing our enquiry

The framing of this critical enquiry requires defining how we use terms such as 'sexual harassment', 'collective action', and 'accountability' as well as some elucidation of the underpinnings of our framing.

There is no internationally agreed definition of sexual harassment. There are often legal definitions emanating from generic criminal law or sometimes embedded in gender-based violence legislation. What constitutes sexual harassment and what does not is complex, given that it is not only about the nature of the physical contact, but its intention, whether it was consensual, and how it made the person receiving it feel. The UK Equality Act defines sexual harassment as 'unwanted conduct of a sexual nature which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them'.³

The key words here are 'unwanted' which suggests non-consensual; the words 'purpose or effect' convey intent and impact. The words 'creating an environment' may be very broad; however, the way sexual harassment itself is being expressed is now broader than decades ago. For example, sexual harassment

is now often carried out via online spaces and on the phone. This has taken many forms: girls and women are blackmailed through sexually compromising images and videos of themselves; they are sent demeaning or intimidating sexual messages via the phone; and in social media spaces, they are 'trolled'⁴ with comments explicitly targeting their bodies. The UK Equality Act definition is by no means standardised or universalised, and in many contexts, there are dynamic debates regarding what constitutes sexual harassment.

In this *IDS Bulletin*, the contributors are engaging with phenomena that broadly speak to the definition above. They discuss forms of sexual harassment that encompass everything from name-calling, touching, and groping, to digital forms. The contexts that contributors describe, as with others globally, are ones where sexual harassment occurs side-by-side with forms of gender-based violence that are distinct, such as rape. It is important here to note that this issue of the *IDS Bulletin* does not engage with rape as a weapon of war or its use as an instrument of genocide. There is a rich and prolific scholarship on sexual violence in relation to UN Resolution 1325 (UNSC 2000) which recognises the impact that conflict and war has on girls and women. While we recognise that sexual harassment exists on a continuum of gender-based violence that also includes the use of women's bodies as a battlefield for broader geo-strategic goals, this lies outside of the scope of this *IDS Bulletin*.

While most contexts in this *IDS Bulletin* engage with sexual harassment in public spaces, there is a recognition that the demarcations between the public and private are blurred, as for example, pertaining to the position of domestic servants (see Munshey, this *IDS Bulletin*). The lines of responsibility for action are sometimes also blurred; for example, in the case of women on ships who cross different national jurisdictions in a context of the absence of a universally agreed maritime law (see Tangi, this *IDS Bulletin*).

Sexual harassment is often experienced at an individual level, though sometimes it is experienced *en masse*. In this *IDS Bulletin*, we particularly focus on the relationship between the individual and the collective. When women experience individually a violation of their bodily integrity, sometimes this has significant implications on their coping strategies. First, there is the individual sense of responsibility: was it my fault? Was there anything in my appearance, character, or behaviour that elicited this? Second, there is the question of how powerholders will react: will schools, universities, places of employment, the police, the judiciary, etc. engage with the complainant as a deviant? Third is the prospect of redress: what will come out of it?

On account of these and many other factors, one of the most critical issues with countering sexual harassment is breaking

the culture of silence. And the kind of silences that need rupture are many: the silence with regard to blaming assaults on bodily integrity on what women wear; the silence around the conditions under which women are seen as 'fair game', in particular, when they come from despised classes, ethnic groups, religious minorities, and so forth; and the silence around the fact that in some contexts, these are not unconnected cases, but of broader cultures, sometimes reaching epidemic proportions. There have been many brave women and men who have broken this silence singularly through their testimonies, their legal battles, and media advocacy. However, it is when they capture the imagination of others that they are able to create strong ripple effects. This interface between individual experience and broader societal engagement is, for us, key to understanding how the status quo is challenged.

Collective action, this *IDS Bulletin* argues, is critical for transforming sexual harassment into an issue that is everybody's business. We borrow Tilly and Tarrow's (2007: 5) definition of collective action as 'coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs'. Collective action can take a myriad of forms involving different levels of organisation, unity, and mobilisational power. Collective action can express itself through one-off events such as protests and marches, to more sustained and ongoing forms of activism such as campaigns, coalitions, and movements. In looking at how this is triggered, how the silence is broken, we draw on Rowlands' understandings of power, as power from within, power with, power to (Rowlands 1997). The 'power within' is the strength inside individuals that forms the basis of 'self-acceptance or self-respect', which is an important ingredient of working towards 'power with', i.e. the power of individuals to work together to solve issues, and from thence the 'power to': 'generative or productive power that creates new possibilities' (*ibid.*: 13).

However, the exercise of power with or collective action needs clear actors that are being held accountable. This collective responsibility needs a face: actors to whom we can direct our claims and hold to account. Most understandings of accountability are underpinned by two principles: (1) answerability – the responsibility of duty-bearers to provide information and justification about their actions, and (2) enforceability – the possibility of penalties or consequences for failing to answer accountability claims (McGee and Gaventa 2011: 11). Accountability is not a concept that is easily translatable to other languages, and the contexts in which women and men are mobilising are not ones where even governments recognise citizens' entitlement to hold them to account in the first place.

For example, in the Arabic language, the literal word for accountability, '*mouhasaba*', immediately conjures the word 'accounting' since they are the same. Some academics have been reluctant to take an approach that is premised on 'we will

recognise accountability when we see it'. Such an approach, they would argue, runs the risk of diluting accountability of any concrete meaning. In this *IDS Bulletin*, we seek to take an approach that recognises the need for some level of conceptual rigour, while also being inductive, drawing on the experiences of actors on the ground to inform what accountability means in a contextualised manner.

3 Triggers to collective action

Triggers to collective action can emanate from seemingly single voices calling out unacceptable behaviour after years of frustration with a lack of institutional answerability, whose voices are then joined by others. Or they can come from humanity-shaking acts of violence so indescribably awful that they spur anger and action; for instance, the gang rape and murder of a young Indian university student in Delhi in 2012. In some cases, collective action is taken in the name of the cause even when the subject herself has not sought representation or has not engaged in the delegation of others to speak on her behalf. Collective action occurs when the subject of sexual harassment comes to be emblematic of a broader phenomenon where people can legitimately say 'if it can happen to her, it can happen to us'.

The contributors to this *IDS Bulletin* highlight a few such trigger moments: the speech by the marine captain in the Philippines sharing her experience of sexual harassment (Tangi, this *IDS Bulletin*), the posting on Facebook of a list of Indian academics alleged to have committed sexual assault (Dey, this *IDS Bulletin*), and the sexual harassment of a young student caught on CCTV at Cairo University (El Said and Hamada *et al.*, both this *IDS Bulletin*). For the few who do take the first brave step in speaking up, this can be a demonstration of 'power within', which Kabeer suggests is a necessary step before moving to 'power to': undertaking action for control of our own resources, agendas, and decision-making (1994: 229). But for action and voice to be sustained and to effect institutional change and accountability, there needs to be collective action and the 'power with' (Rowlands 1997). This is the power that comes from people working together for a common goal; as Cornwall and Edwards note, it 'comes from being embedded in kin and community relationships, principally with women, which enable women to gain the power to act' (2010: 5).

These triggers ignite action, but they do not happen in a vacuum. They occur in the context of grass-roots work, like a fireworks display which bursts into life but where the work to get there is hidden from view. This is the case with the #MeToo movement. Tarana Burke had been working with young female survivors of sexual abuse for ten years under the banner of 'Me Too', before #MeToo taken up on Twitter acted as a flashpoint (Garcia 2017). These kinds of actions can move things forward and create a snowball effect as they did to an incredible extent in the #MeToo

example: the tweet was shared 12 million times in the first day (*ibid.*). The articles in this *IDS Bulletin* demonstrate a spectrum of experience on the path to collective action for accountability and they all show that this is a long and hard journey.

In the case of the Philippines' seafarers, Tangi (this *IDS Bulletin*) shows how women seafarers sharing their experiences of sexual harassment proved cathartic, but also paved the way for the women's committee of the seafarers' union to work together to mobilise for a sexual harassment policy to be included in contracts. This sits within a context of gender inequality, with the first Filipino women only entering the seafaring industry in the 1990s. In India, Dey (this *IDS Bulletin*) explores how the publication of a list of academics accused of sexual harassment led to a student movement mobilising against sexism and sexual abuse. The students were frustrated by years of inaction and the inability to get their complaints heard through the system. This example, however, complicates the idea of 'power with' as the publication of the list on Facebook split the young student feminists from some older feminist academics causing 'a civil war in Indian feminism' (Ghosh 2017 cited in Dey, this *IDS Bulletin*) over the way the names were shared.

The examples from Egypt (El Said and Hamada *et al.*, both this *IDS Bulletin*), show how one incident can be the tipping point towards action, setting in train the establishment of anti-sexual harassment units within universities to hold abusers to account. Yet the process to get real accountability is still ongoing. Along with other issues, without independent financing, the work of the anti-sexual harassment units is hampered. At the other end of our spectrum of collective action, running from visible and organised to less visible and isolated, is the article from Steiner and Spear (this *IDS Bulletin*) which looks at sexual violence in schools in Benin and Burkina Faso. The authors detail an experience which is still unformed, noting that 'mobilisation against sexual violence in schools within the last decade lacked a critical mass', although there are some pockets of resistance at the grass roots. Drawing on Novelli (2010), Weldon and Htun (2013), and Jaffe (2018), Steiner and Spear make an important point about the ingredients missing from these contexts which we see elsewhere:

a privileged class willing to continually and sustainably speak out... long-term activists and legacies of women's movements... building steps toward collective action with an increased critical mass of opposition, and friendly international media sources that support the movement (this *IDS Bulletin*).

The Pakistan study from Khan, Yousuf and Naqvi (this *IDS Bulletin*) provides a salutary lesson for what happens when someone bravely speaks out, but the action fails to trigger collective support or action. The authors highlight the case of Ayesha Gulalai, who claimed that she had received unwelcome

text messages from her party leader. Despite her saying that other women in her party had had similar experiences, only women from other political parties supported her. Ultimately her career was wrecked, and she left the party.

4 Pathways to accountability

The pathways to accountability for sexual harassment via collective action are ridden with conundrums, ethical dilemmas, and hidden and invisible power dynamics. A courageous woman rupturing the silence by public testimony may propel a centripetal coalescing of women and men who want to support her quest for justice, but consensus still needs to be established about what strategy/strategies to pursue for accountability. Divergence on how to strategise may lead the movement to disintegrate. Even when collective actors agree on the agenda, the struggles are endless because of the scope of the hostilities and opposition they face from counter-organised movements and powerful individuals. For example, Khan *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) point to the role of the media in normalising derogatory and inflammatory language towards women politicians in parliament by its repetition and dissemination. As they note, 'verbal insults to women – normalised in everyday exchanges – become amplified when they are reported in the media'. Moreover, when collective actors are mobilising for institutional change, this requires sustained activism over years, perhaps decades and this is not always easy to maintain emotionally, financially, or politically.

Thinking about accountability in the long haul is not always easy. Against the backdrop of the popularity of 'advocacy campaigning' in the twentieth century, sometimes we have been conditioned to think about pathways for change in boomerang terms: citizens/organisations mobilise, policies change, citizens/organisations revert back to collective action to ensure enforcement. This theory of change is problematic. The pathways to policy change can be opaque and ridden with behind-the-scenes actors' actions. Years of mobilisation for a policy change may be reversed in a strikingly short time by popular reactionary movements' counter-mobilisation. While recognising the centrality of organising as 'a major route to change and a key pathway of empowerment' (Pathways of Women's Empowerment 2011: 9), the articles in this *IDS Bulletin* are a sobering reminder that any romanticisation of collective action that overlooks the conundrums at hand will be at our own peril, if we are to achieve accountability with teeth. Of the many such conundrums, here we will briefly touch on three.

4.1 Protecting those seeking accountability

One of the major struggles facing women and men engaging in collective action to address pervasive forms of sexual harassment is the personal safety risks emanating from state crackdown and non-state individual and collective actors' pernicious assaults on them. Undoubtedly, to speak truth to power will always come at

a price, and challenging norms, values, and practices that have enabled those who have engaged in sexual harassment to avoid accountability is going to be a battle. However, it is important also that in defending the rights of the survivors of sexual harassment, we consider ways of shielding participants in those struggles from becoming objects of trolling, abuse, and even physical violence. Such shielding is required both for the survivors as well as for those whom they have delegated to speak on their behalf if the latter are also in vulnerable positions.

The cases from Lebanon (Munshey, this *IDS Bulletin*) and on crowdmapping across various contexts (Tanner *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*) are examples of organising under the radar and in safe spaces. In Lebanon, a context where migrant and domestic workers are extremely marginalised and vulnerable, being entirely within their employer's power in terms of living in their house and often having to forfeit their passport to them, Munshey (this *IDS Bulletin*) describes how the women 'turn to a limited underground network for support' using their only day off a week to join with colleagues to advance their rights. This has echoes of the domestic worker movement in Brazil about which Creuza Oliveira (former domestic worker who became President of the Brazilian National Federation of Domestic Workers) notes:

It is fundamental to establish partnerships with organisations and entities of the social movements... The objective is to fortify the struggle of the domestic workers also incorporating the agenda of these movements, in the struggles against racism and sexism (Goncalves 2010: 66).

Describing the Free to Be project, which crowdmapped women's experiences of sexual harassment across Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid, and Sydney, Tanner *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) note the importance of respondents' entries being anonymous, not only to ensure their safety but also to overcome a reluctance on the part of women to share their experiences, particularly if they have been met with resistance or a lack of response from authorities when previously reporting incidents. This process facilitates the sharing of stories which paints a powerful picture of a pattern of sexual harassment across urban spaces around the world – providing a valuable tool for activism while shielding participants from myriad sources of vulnerability.

4.2 What kinds of outcomes constitute accountability?

There are sometimes dangers in confusing mobilisation (which can be a positive result in and of itself in terms of developing the concept of 'power with' and 'power to'), and a change in policy or practice which is the end goal. Such conflation is understandable given that both can constitute change in the status quo: mobilising brings a rupturing of the existing inertia with action while pushing for a change in policy or practice in the desired direction.

However, if accountability only counts when laws and policies are changed or 'have teeth', then the situation, as described by the contributors to this issue, looks bleak. In Benin and Burkina Faso, Steiner and Spear (this *IDS Bulletin*) observe that laws are not applied as they are too vague and there is not enough investment to ensure their integration. Instead, pervasive patriarchy and rigid social norms translate into sexual harassment, causing shame for a girl's family, meaning that survivors have no family support, there are no mechanisms for reporting incidents, and perpetrators are left unpunished. In Lebanon, similarly to Benin and Burkina Faso, Munshey (this *IDS Bulletin*) notes that the reporting system is inadequate, particularly for the most marginalised such as domestic and migrant workers, and this is exacerbated by a lack of trust in the authorities. Tanner *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) note that a lack of trust in the system means that many incidents of sexual harassment go unreported in cities.

In Pakistan, although progressive laws have been introduced, particularly the law against sexual harassment in the workplace in 2010, women politicians, who have to work in a toxic environment of verbal harassment and threats to their safety, have felt unable to report or progress any cases, due to this oppressive organisational culture (Khan *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). In the Philippines – as in Pakistan – there is a sexual harassment law, but for this to have real meaning and 'teeth' in the context in which seafarers work, Tangi (this *IDS Bulletin*) notes that this needs to be integrated into seafarers' contracts.

In the universities in Egypt, anti-sexual harassment units are being established to tackle harassment on campus which is a positive move, but there are still issues, as Hamada *et al.* and El Said note (both this *IDS Bulletin*). The units lack independence from the university which hampers how cases are dealt with; it is rare for a verdict to be implemented against a professor, and in a case where a student is accusing a professor, it is not unknown for the student to suffer repercussions.

However, in all of these cases, the presence of these forms of contestation have changed the power equation. True, in the immediate term, the outcomes they aspire to achieve may not have been fully accomplished, but this does not mean that accountability is unachievable. It may be that the timing of the assessment of accountability outcomes may need to be rethought. In other words, in order to fully appreciate the contribution of collective action for addressing sexual harassment to accountability outcomes, we may need to assess these very contexts and cases in five or even ten years' time. Sometimes accountability outcomes cannot be delivered through fast delivery or fast-tracking. The impact of collective action requires that accountability is conceived of for the long haul.

4.3 The end versus the means in feminist accountability struggles

In the case of the anti-sexual harassment struggles in India discussed in this issue, Dey (this *IDS Bulletin*) shows that it was the frustration of years of getting nothing achieved through using the formal mechanisms that led students to use a more drastic method of naming and shaming via social media. Raya Sarkar, a law student, posted a crowdsourced list on Facebook of male academics accused of harassing students in Indian academia. The shock caused reverberations around the Indian academic sphere, and an important case for this tactic is that it gets the conversation out into the open. However, as Dey reports, there are concerns for due process when claims are not supported by evidence and there is a complete withholding of survivors' identities. It is important to note here that the divergence is not over the goal. There needs to be a zero tolerance policy towards all forms of sexual harassment, a holding to account of perpetrators, and an assurance of redress for survivors, instituted at all levels.

Moreover, the contention here is not around the normative values underpinning the struggle for accountability – those feminists choosing naming and shaming as a strategy and those expressing concern over due process come from a common point of departure. This point of departure is that there are power inequalities in institutional politics which obstruct survivors' chances of securing justice through official channels such as the legal and judicial pathways. The issue here is whether in the absence of an equal playing field and with biased formal pathways of accountability, naming and shaming without giving detailed evidence is justifiable.

This raises important ethical questions of a political philosophical nature. Ethically, is naming and shaming justifiable without a survivor speaking out herself or himself, and in the absence of detailed evidence? Just by dint of the fact that the actor is a feminist, should their naming and shaming therefore be taken for granted as 'truth'? Some advocates of gender justice are uncomfortable with this because it assumes that feminist claims-making is necessarily always and consistently in a position to make superior moral judgement and can never be driven by ulterior agendas. This poses a moral dilemma: in their claims-making, should feminists not be held by the standards that everyone else is held to, namely, to provide evidence for accusations or at least to allow survivors to speak for themselves?

The ethics of claims-making for addressing sexual harassment is not one of simply political philosophy. The 'means to achieve the end' (accountability for sexual harassment) are of such importance to collective actors that on occasion, such as in the case study presented by Dey (this *IDS Bulletin*), they risk creating real schisms within movements. Disputes over the legitimacy of claims-making in the absence of due process can escalate

into attacks not on positions but on the people or organisations behind them. This not only challenges the strength of collective action, but it paves the way for opponents to critique feminists as holding others to account for values that they themselves do not uphold. The word 'witch hunt' becomes particularly poignant in this case. Historically, women were the objects of vicious witch-hunt campaigns; however, if allegations are made about perpetrators of sexual assault without evidence or the survivors themselves speaking out, some are concerned that feminists would become seen as instigators of a different kind of witch hunt.

5 Collective action for accountability in addressing sexual harassment

In this section, we offer three key points. First, collective action may not be the only path towards achieving justice and accountability in relation to sexual harassment, but as this *IDS Bulletin* shows, its contributions are significant in terms of providing 'power with'. When an individual on her/his own speaks out against sexual harassment, opponents may launch vicious smear campaigns targeting her/his personal character, behaviour, or both (see Khan *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*). A collective front makes speaking out less traumatising and helps to empower individuals to withstand vulnerability to such forms of assaults.

Moreover, the process itself of coming together – independently of the outcome – can be empowering. In a context where, as Tanner *et al.* (this *IDS Bulletin*) note, 'sexual offences more broadly face low levels of reporting and successful convictions', the Free to Be tool allows women to experience 'power with' by sharing their stories and thereby experiencing agency by giving them an action to take against the perpetrators. Moreover, when collective action is undertaken by the survivors themselves, it supports the legitimacy of the claims-making. As a migrant domestic worker (MDW) representative in Lebanon says:

*Throughout the years there has been a growing number of groups that are self-led by MDWs. Like we see in the last three years, less dependency on NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and more groups trying to help each other and trying to form their advocacy and also their community work so that's a great positive change because they're the ones who are more aware of their needs... (Munshay, this *IDS Bulletin*)*

When the claims are informed by data gathered from hundreds, perhaps thousands of survivors, it makes it more difficult to deny its prevalence. The Free to Be project (Tanner *et al.*, this *IDS Bulletin*) like others such as HarassMap and Fiu Fiu (Peuchaud 2014; Berke 2018) show the power of collectively gathering data to demonstrate the scale of street sexual harassment and to bring the conversation into the public domain.

Second, collective action for accountability for redress for survivors of sexual harassment is an absolute necessity in view of the strength of anti-feminist movements who collectively organise to circumscribe women's rights. Kretschmer and Meyer (2013: 393, in Tadros 2016: 51–52) define anti-feminist movements as 'those meant to counter the claims and gains of feminist movements, protecting or restoring traditional gender norms. They are, understandably, generally conservative in nature, defending traditional gender roles for both men and women'. Against the backdrop of the growing power of ultra-nationalist and extremist religious movements, anti-feminist movements that are committed to reversing the gains made by feminist movements are gaining ground.

It is important to note that anti-feminist movements are not movements that diverge on only some ideas or issues in the gender equality agenda. Rather, they reject the fundamental legitimacy of a movement that is ideologically committed to women's liberation (see Tadros 2016). In the case of Egypt for example, when women protestors were being exposed to sexual violence in Tahrir Square, anti-feminist activists challenged the very right of women to be protesting in the first place and decried the feminist movement mobilisation for the right of women to be occupying such spaces.

Such attacks are not only in Egypt. Anti-feminist movements are thriving in India, Pakistan, and elsewhere, and they are engaging in collective action, making their claims-making on the basis of their right to be heard, the strength of their numbers, and being able to claim they are speaking on behalf of women who have delegated them with this right. They too are making counter-accountability claims *vis-à-vis* powerholders. A lack of attention to movement building to break the silence on the impunity of those who engage in sexual harassment will serve to strengthen the counter-claims of anti-feminist movements that demand that women go back to their homes to avoid sexual harassment 'by strangers'.

Third, there needs to be a commitment to plurality within anti-sexual harassment movements (Langohr 2013, 2015; Tadros 2016). Historically, women's movements have recognised that achieving gender equality requires the pursuit of multiple strategies, entry points, and perspectives (Aina *et al.* 2019; Nazneen and Sultan 2010). It also requires a recognition of the plurality of actors themselves and their different backgrounds, insights, and standpoints (Mohanty 1988). This plurality has to exist within loose parameters of a commitment to women's equality, but by and large, attempts at homogenising identities or strategies are counterproductive.

The case studies in this *IDS Bulletin* attest to the plurality of actors that coalesce into a collective front to counter sexual harassment

as well as the diversity of strategies deployed. However, as we can see from the case study outlined by Dey (this *IDS Bulletin*), contestation around approaches in terms of ethics, for instance, not only influence the prospects of achieving the desired outcomes but also the cohesion and continuity of the collective actors themselves. When advocates in anti-sexual harassment campaigns differ on strategies, how can open disagreements occur without vilification and while resisting the temptation to call those with whom we diverge 'traitors to the cause'?

5.1 Accountability for the long haul

There have been many instances where collective action for countering sexual harassment has elicited transformational change in laws, practices, or even discourses – the anti-sexual harassment units at Egyptian universities discussed by El Said and Hamada *et al.* (both this *IDS Bulletin*) are just one example. However, as most case studies in this *IDS Bulletin* demonstrate, the struggle for recognition is one that is neither unidirectional nor linear. There are incremental successes, but also setbacks that require regrouping to press forward again.

Often there is no fast track to achieving accountability outcomes. Court cases may take years. Policy shifts may contain loopholes. The recognition of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment in public discourses may continuously be challenged by those who wish to enforce qualifiers on the basis of dress, character, or others. Repertoires for claims-making are critical to sustain the struggles for challenging the systems and practices that perpetuate a culture of impunity *vis-à-vis* how sexual harassment is handled. While in some instances the momentum and the will to press on is lost, in many other cases, it is not so much about whether accountable outcomes are possible, as opposed to when we choose to assess the situation. Accountability must be for the long haul.

Recognising the successes of activists fighting sexual harassment, wherever they are located, is essential to the global fight against this phenomenon. The #MeToo case study and its beginnings, as previously mentioned, is particularly instructive. Most Americans initially learnt of #MeToo through the testimonies of privileged, largely white film-industry survivors of sexual harassment by Harvey Weinstein. Yet #MeToo was started by a black woman, Tarana Burke, in 2007, as a way to support young women of colour who had survived sexual assault. Writing in the *Washington Post* in 2017, as the #MeToo movement became a household term in the US, Burke noted that:

I often say that sexual violence knows no race, class or gender, but the response to it does. 'Me too' is a response to the spectrum of gender-based sexual violence that comes directly from survivors – all survivors. We can't afford a racialized, gendered or classist response. Ending sexual violence will

require every voice from every corner of the world and it will require those whose voices are most often heard to find ways to amplify those voices that often go unheard (Burke 2017).

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- † We are grateful for the very helpful feedback provided by Dr Vicky Langohr and Professor John Gaventa on an earlier version of this article. All errors of fact and interpretation remain those of the authors alone.
- 1 Mariz Tadros, Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
- 2 Jenny Edwards, Project Manager, Institute of Development Studies, UK.
- 3 See **UK Equality Act (2010), Section 26**.
- 4 'Trolled' means to experience an anonymous person making deliberately insulting and/or hurtful comments about you on the internet.

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Fighting Sexual Harassment on Campus: How Local Contexts of Different Universities Affect the Dynamics and Outcome of these Efforts*

Amal Hamada,¹ Ahmed Kheir,² Enas Hamdy³ and Heba Youssif⁴

Abstract In a context where sexual harassment and assault against women is widespread, this article examines the approach taken by three Egyptian universities to the issue. The article argues that the outcome of the universities' efforts in combating sexual harassment is influenced by their local context and it is this context that can hinder the route to accountability. It examines the interactive relationship between collective action and accountability in the context of fighting sexual harassment on campus. It applies the methodology of action research as a tool that is capable of producing more democratic relationships in knowledge production. The article concludes that there are many differences between the three universities in terms of defining the problem as well as with regard to their local contexts. Those differences question the notion of collective action and accordingly the concept of accountability.

Keywords Egypt, university campus, fighting sexual harassment, collective action, accountability, action research.

1 Introduction

This article discusses the differences and similarities between three Egyptian universities (Fayoum, Alexandria, and Beni Suef) in terms of fighting sexual harassment on campus. We argue that these differences and similarities affect the outcome of the efforts and are reflective of the local contexts of each university, which eventually hinders the ability of collective action to bring about accountability. The article is part of a more comprehensive project on the impact of collective action on accountability

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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020 'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.



in addressing and fighting violence against women in higher education institutions.

Violence against women and sexual harassment has been one of the most pressing issues for gender and human right activists in Egypt in the last couple of years. Numbers and statistics in this regard are very alarming (UNFPA, NCW and CAPMAS 2015). Yet, it is not how many females are suffering from harassment on and off campus that is the issue; rather, it is the fact that there is growing interest in fighting this on campus through different Egyptian universities and university professors joining forces.

In June 2014, and following the reporting of a case of sexual harassment at Cairo University, the long history of working on campus to address the issue was finally rewarded.⁵ The Cairo University administration decided to launch an Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit, the first of its kind in Egypt. The unit's mission is threefold: first, to raise awareness amongst the university community about sexual harassment; second, to provide legal support to survivors of sexual harassment and lead investigations on reported cases; and third, to provide psychological and/or medical support for victims/survivors.

In collaboration with the Cairo University unit, the Higher Council of Egyptian Universities recommended that every university should launch a similar unit to join forces in addressing the issue of sexual harassment. The National Council for Women (NCW) has similarly collaborated with a number of universities in launching such efforts. The outcome has been that a number of universities – such as Helwan, Monofia, Fayoum, Beni Suef, Aswan, Alexandria, Kafr Al-Sheikh, Banha, Zaqazeq, and Mansoura – have formally launched similar units or are in the process of doing so.⁶

Parallel to the efforts on campus, efforts to modify the penal code to include penalties for sexual harassment were successful in 2014. The change includes the addition of the term 'sexual harassment' for the first time in Egyptian law. Moreover, the law does not stipulate the gender of the victim, allowing for the expansion of protection to both males and females. It also acknowledges the imbalance in power relations between perpetrator and victim, which is a factor when considering punishment.

2 Conceptual framework

Can we assume from the above discussion that there is a growing level of collective action that will lead to increasing levels of accountability? In order to respond to this question, we need first to define what we mean by collective action and accountability, especially in 'fragile' contexts (OECD 2015). Collective action refers to a purposeful and organised series of actions addressing a certain phenomenon and aimed at reaching a goal that is important for the group in general. Collective action can be formal or informal depending on the context and the challenges

faced.⁷ Thus, the concept questions motives for engaging in these series of actions as well as the outcome.

Olson (1965) used the economic approach to analyse motives for engagement and concluded that the outcome of collective action is a public good which might benefit those involved in the collective actions as well as 'free riders', thus reducing the possibility of engagement by rational actors. Individuals conducting a rational choice would not participate in collective action if the cost of this participation is higher than the benefit, and the outcome is more of a public nature. Later literature developed the idea and focused more on non-material goals for joining collective action; for example, personal satisfaction, prestige, and/or passion about a certain cause.⁸ What is the result of collective action? Does collective action lead to social change? Institutional change? Accountability? The fate of collective action differs according to the context, type of issue, size of group, resources available, allies and enemies, as well as other factors. In this article, we focus on the relationship between collective action and accountability in regard to fighting sexual harassment on the university campus.

By accountability we refer to the process of holding institutions (universities in our case) accountable for taking actions to prevent sexual harassment, investigating reported cases, and providing necessary support to victims/survivors. Accountability in this sense has three dimensions: transparency of procedures, answerability to set policies, and enforceability of punitive measures.⁹ The argument is that increasing levels of accountability lead to increasing levels of efficiency and less corruption. Therefore, improving the university's accountability levels would lead to a decrease in its levels of sexual harassment and eventually an increase in safety for all within the university community (McGee and Gaventa 2011).

Since 2011, Egypt has been going through massive challenges at societal and state levels. Discussing these challenges in detail is beyond the scope of this article, but the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2015) defines the Egyptian context as 'fragile'. A fragile context is one that includes one or more of the following fragility indicators: '(1) increasing levels of violence; (2) lack of access to justice for all; (3) lack of effective accountable and inclusive institutions; (4) low levels of economic inclusion and stability; and (5) diminishing capacities to prevent and adapt to social, economic and environmental shocks and disasters' (Green 2017: 9–10). The Egyptian case corresponds to more than one of these indicators.

Yet, in regard to the scope of this article, the third indicator is most relevant. Collective action is perceived as potentially a successful mechanism that would enable effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. As far as collective action is concerned,

most of the literature available deals with it in its relationship to social movements, in which the two are defined together as a 'rational, purposeful and organized action... [and] collective action derives from a calculation of the costs and benefits' (Della Porta and Diani 2006: 14). What characterises collective action is the level of 'structure' that ties together different components of a social movement. In other words, collective action within a social movement relies heavily on the ability of different parties to launch and maintain different structural relations which allows the continuation of the movement; even though some members/parties stop engaging. Those 'structural spheres' do not have to be formal and/or institutional, as they may work as forms of networks or arrangements between different parties to a cause (Johnson 2014: 2–5). Nevertheless, in our case, structure refers to the anti-sexual harassment units created by the three universities in order to institutionalise efforts to fight sexual harassment on campus (Rucht 2013: 171).

This article will examine the contexts of the three universities, to explore the relationship between collective action and accountability. The case study shows some level of institutionalising efforts for fighting anti-sexual harassment on campus, i.e. establishing units for this purpose. Yet, does establishing these units reflect an increasing level of accountability? Or will it lead to increasing levels of accountability? Also of importance, can we accredit the establishment of these units to collective action conducted on and off campus in the last decade? Or was the collective action one force in bringing about this change, yet we need to take into consideration other factors contributing to it?

We argue that in the three cases, accountability meant different things to different actors. For university professors engaged with pushing for the units, accountability meant convincing/pressuring the university administration into recognising the problem and institutionalising efforts to combat it. For students participating within the units' activities, accountability was not clear as a concept. What was more significant for them was the potential to engage in collective action in a context that does not welcome student activities of a political nature. Moreover, institutionalising efforts towards combating sexual harassment should be understood as an outcome of a multi-dimensional process; collective action is one, but not the only, factor.

3 Methodology

This article builds on action research as the methodological tool used in following the activities at the three universities. Action research is defined as the engagement of researchers and the research community in a process of creating and reflecting on actions. Included are three interacting levels of voices: the researchers (first voices), the universities' anti-sexual harassment staff and students (the second voice), and the interactions

and discussions with experts as well as policymakers within the universities.

Action research as an approach lends itself to a better understanding of the research community, more balanced power relations amongst participants, and grounded solutions for identified problems developed by the community. It might be also defined as an emergent inquiry process aiming at providing solutions to existing problems with certain societies and/or organisations, i.e. bringing about social change. This is achieved whilst developing self-help competencies in the research community and adding to scientific knowledge. Finally, it is an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry (Coghlan and Brannick 2010). Action research has to take into consideration the balance between the actions, research, and the participation of the research community (Greenwood and Levin 2007).

The action research discussed within this article included interacting cycles of reflection. The first was amongst the researchers co-authoring the article, and the second was our individual engagement with our respective universities. Balancing the relationships amongst the co-authors is an important matter, in terms of gender, age, as well as academic background. Action research allows room for self- and group-reflexivity, questioning the positionality amongst the group and in relation to the topic and research community. Being part of academia might stimulate a less democratic relationship, yet, engaging in a process of knowledge production that includes reflexivity definitely changes the inter-group dynamics towards a more democratic nature that includes each person's narratives of the problems and proposed solutions (Loewenson *et al.* 2014).

The second element of action research is the product itself, i.e. the research. This involves a threefold process: designing actions, planning the schedule for implementing them, and finally implementing those actions. Throughout these processes, there is an ongoing reflection practised by different participants of the research community to question: (1) the research question, (2) the concepts used, (3) the analytical frameworks, (4) the changing dynamics of power between and amongst the researchers and research community, (5) the outcome of the actions, and (6) the conclusions of the research. This helps to produce knowledge that is more participatory, engaging, reality-based, and democratic in its essence (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008: 179–82).

Throughout the project in general, and for the purpose of this article specifically, data were collected using mainly two techniques. First, we conducted six weeks' participatory observation with students and the unit's administration. We were not responsible for developing activities; rather, we reflected with students on them. Second, a number of in-depth interviews

were conducted with students, the administration, and faculty members engaged with the units, to reflect on the unit's mission, the purpose of the activities, and the main challenges facing them. Action research requires an ongoing process of reflection amongst the research community. This process of reflexivity was mainly conducted between the authors of this article, especially in regard to our positionality to the rest of the research community. We affirmed that on certain occasions we felt that the research community viewed us as 'experts coming from the capital'. It was crucial for us to maintain a distance from activities and local dynamics in order not to affect the outcome of students' engagements.

4 Background of the three universities and their local contexts

The three universities (Beni Suef, Alexandria, and Fayoum) were chosen in order to investigate the relationship between collective action, accountability, and empowerment.¹⁰ They officially launched their units in December 2016 (Beni Suef), July 2017 (Fayoum), and September 2017 (Alexandria), respectively. The locality of these universities and their campuses needs attention, because each hosts students predominantly from their respective and neighbouring governorates. According to the admission system of governmental universities, there is a geographical distribution of students corresponding to their original residence. Thus, students of a certain university represent to a great extent the local socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of their governorate.

The Beni Suef governorate is located in Upper Egypt, where much of the population live in rural areas (76.6 per cent).¹¹ The governorate is amongst the poorest in Egypt according to official statistics (Baseera, UNFPA and NPC 2017). The socioeconomic conditions of the governorate and its inhabitants are important for understanding the conservative nature of the society and the university community's reluctance to recognise the problem of sexual harassment as a challenge that needs to be addressed. The Beni Suef campus comprises three separated campuses spread over the city of Beni Suef. Each campus hosts a number of faculties. The distance between the campuses does not facilitate coordination on activities or outreach to the university community, in general. The university administration is very active in formalising relationships with international universities in different countries in an attempt to improve its ranking and educational performance.¹²

In December 2016, Beni Suef University gained approval to establish a unit and adopt an anti-sexual harassment and violence policy in cooperation with the NCW.¹³ Similar to the case of the Cairo University unit, Beni Suef's unit is directly affiliated with the president of the university. It consists of a complaints officer, a psychological support officer, an education and training officer, and a secretariat. In addition, there is an

executive committee to supervise the unit, which is headed by the president of the university. Seventy-five per cent of the executive committee's membership must be women. The committee consists of three faculty deans, three interested or experienced professors in the field of combating sexual harassment and violence, professors from the faculty of law or legal affairs, two representatives of civil society, and the president of the student union or a member of the student union. The role of the unit is to receive sexual harassment and violence complaints, to transfer complaints to the anti-harassment committee (which then investigates the complaints secretly and recommends any punitive measures), to take measures to assist victims of harassment and to protect the complainant, and to implement different activities, such as training and raising awareness.

The Alexandria governorate is located in the north, serving as Egypt's ancient capital during the Greek and Roman periods before the capital was moved to Cairo during the Fatimid rule in the seventh century. The city of Alexandria overlooks the Mediterranean Sea and, along with its inhabitants, is more cosmopolitan in nature. Industry is the main economic activity and it houses Egypt's largest ports. For the last two decades, there has been an increasing influence of religious conservative groups (Salafi and the Muslim Brotherhood), which would have an effect on the social discourse on sensitive issues such as sexual harassment.¹⁴ As in Beni Suef, the campus of Alexandria University is spread over two main locations: one for humanities and the other for natural sciences, whilst other faculties are spread across the city. Campus security generally does not allow students carrying humanities identity cards into the natural science complex and vice versa, though students have their ways of entering the two complexes. The point here is that the campus is not perceived as collectively hosting Alexandria University students, where they learn and practise different activities, but it is treated as having different and separate locations.¹⁵

Alexandria University had been struggling for some time to launch its anti-sexual harassment unit.¹⁶ After a long process of negotiating with the university administration, the unit materialised in September 2017, but with a different group of university professors from the ones already involved with anti-sexual harassment activities. The unit works under the direct supervision of the president of the university and operates under a protocol signed between the university and the NCW. The unit states that it aims to implement the goals of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the NCW, but without giving any specific details. Prior to its launch, a number of the university's professors were engaged at different levels with training and campaigns organised by different non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as well as attending different workshops within the Cairo University anti-sexual harassment unit.

The Fayoum governorate is an oasis at the edge of Egypt's Western Desert and is situated within conservative Upper Egypt. Yet, its proximity to the capital (around 90km) adds traits of Cairo's complexity. This proximity allows for a greater level of interaction between the capital and Fayoum City in terms of population movement and intellectual interaction. Nevertheless, both the governorate and the city of Fayoum suffer from underdevelopment and poverty; accordingly, it is more affected by the socioeconomic conditions of Upper Egypt. The governorate relies on agriculture and tourism as its main source of income and, according to official statistics, has a 12 per cent unemployment rate as of 2017.¹⁷ Like Beni Suef and Alexandria, Fayoum University is located in the capital city of its respective governorate; this gives relative advantage to the campus and its inhabitants. Residing in capital cities gives students, administrators, and faculty members better access to resources and opportunities. The university receives students from across the governorate and from neighbouring ones, thus granting better exposure to different experiences for the university community in general.

Fayoum University was formed as a branch of Cairo University in the mid-1970s. Three decades later, in 2005, it became an independent university, which should be taken into consideration when analysing power relations between the two.¹⁸ Its sexual harassment unit was established with the substantial support of the university administration and its president, who has affirmed that the unit should work as a driving force for training students to play an active part in spreading the unit's values and familiarising the university community with its work. The head of the unit is a member of the NCW and this has helped in securing financial support and conferring a certain legitimacy on the unit. It has also helped in facilitating activities across campuses as compared with other universities. The unit includes two committees: the supreme committee, comprising the president of the university, vice presidents, and deans; and the executive committee, comprising a number of interested faculty members, a faculty member to provide psychological support, a faculty member from the school of law, student union representatives, and a civil society organisation representative from the social initiative, Harassmap.

Islam and Christianity constitute the main religions in Egypt, and religious discourse plays an important role in most issues, especially those related to women's rights, public presence, and sexuality. There is no single governorate where Christians comprise the majority, although there are concentrations of Christian communities in some Upper Egypt governorates such as Assuit, Menia, and Suhag (Mohamoud, Cuadros and Abu-Raddad 2013).

Tribal elements in Egyptian society are relatively understudied.¹⁹ Tribes came to Egypt from the Arabian Peninsula and have

resided in the country since the seventh century. There is no official census of their distribution over different governorates, though unofficial reports locate them mainly in border areas. This includes the East and West Sahara, as well as different governorates in Upper Egypt (Abul-Magd 2013). The intersectionality of gender, religion, and tribal affiliations is important in understanding the social discourse regarding sexual harassment as well as the complexity that comes with allegations of such acts. A male member of the university community harassing a female member of the university community is not just an individual threat to her safety, but is seen as a threat to a greater set of relations where the man's identity, his tribal affiliation, and his religion pose greater challenges to the fragile and complicated context.

5 Discussions of the activities

The activities conducted in the three universities did not differ much in terms of content, conduct, and relationship to the university administrations. The three universities needed to get the approval of their administrations for any activities conducted on campus, whether organised independently or in collaboration with NGOs. The position of the unit head and that person's relationship with the administration facilitated the process of securing permissions and obtaining security clearances for guest speakers. In some cases, the title of activities had to be changed to avoid confrontation with less supportive university staff or local community members. For example, at Beni Suef University most of the workshops and lectures had to be devised with more generic titles in order not to provoke the local community and unit opponents. In an interview with the professor responsible for facilitating the activities of the unit, she had to give a broader title to an event addressing a social problem facing the local society: such as early marriage.

Activities had to manoeuvre and build on the official discourse of state support for women's issues in order to circumvent potential opponents. Beni Suef represents the in-between case, an established unit with a supportive unit head but still operating under a conservative mindset from the university management. What has helped Beni Suef to operate actively is the ability of the unit head to manoeuvre around whatever might stop her from doing different awareness activities, either by choosing context-acceptable titles for those activities or by carrying out work under the umbrella of state support to women issues, which somehow might have very easily pressured the university management into accepting unit work on the topic of violence against women, including sexual harassment.

Activities are good opportunities to reflect on the level of support the units have enjoyed from university administration. Fayoum University, for instance, has had the verbal and physical support of its president, who has attended almost all the

activities conducted on campus. At Alexandria University, the activities have been very limited in number, due to lesser levels of support from university officials who did not participate much in activities conducted by students to raise awareness and increase knowledge about sexual harassment. Moreover, students have always encountered difficulty in getting security permission for their campaigns without the assistance of one of the supportive professors.

The content of most of the activities has revolved around defining sexual harassment and its implications for victims (social, health, psychological, and educational performance), reasons and myths related to sexual harassment, an introduction to the unit and its work, as well as the procedures for filing a complaint. The content has also included information on the responsibility of different actors and parties in the university to make the campus a safe place for all. Most activities/events ended with asking students to fill out applications to join the unit. An evaluation process by the faculty coordinator and the unit follows, and selected students receive training by Harassmap and become active volunteers within the unit in future activities.

Though resources are limited, students have used available materials to develop and deliver their messages. When available, they have used posters provided by NGOs collaborating with the unit and/or the NCW. Yet, mostly it is human capital (students with the help of faculty members) who have done the job. Students have recited poems and designed short theatrical performances, stand-up comedy, and small group discussions. The message delivered during activities does not always balance the human rights discourse with that of the male protective discourse that builds on the responsibility of male students to make the campus safe for their female colleagues. This discourse sits within the patriarchal culture of Egypt which emphasises male duty and responsibility to protect females, whether relatives or strangers. These two discourses are not contradictory by default, but each calls for different arrangements and mindsets. During activities, there is always the dilemma of balancing the two rather than emphasising one of them, and specifically not overemphasising discourses of protection, which unit participants feel reinforces the victimisation of girls and women and situates them as in endless need of protection.

Reporting cases is a very politicised matter; as such, there are no published records of complaints and their outcomes. The administrations of the three universities are constrained by the conservative nature of their local communities and the widespread belief that sexual harassment is very rare, if existent, on campus. For this reason, most of the units' activities have centred on raising awareness about sexual harassment in general, with a special focus on related myths. Beni Suef University conducted more than one event during the first

semester of the 2017 academic year, but none addressed sexual harassment *per se*. As the university administration was reluctant to acknowledge the existence of the problem, student activity in this regard was not permitted. Thus, activities were organised as a series of public lectures in collaboration with the NCW to address more general topics, such as early marriage and its implications, and the role of women in development. The public lectures were good venues for the new unit to ask and respond to questions, yet controls circumscribed their ability to reach out to the student and university community and address directly the issue of sexual harassment.

Alexandria University conducted a one-day awareness campaign on sexual harassment within its Faculty of Arts on 24 October 2017. The campaign was led by four students, three of whom had previous experience with similar campaigns. This activity was conducted in collaboration with Harassmap, who sent team members to assist. The campaign's purpose was to discuss the definition of sexual harassment and to clarify legalities around the act, which was criminalised under Egyptian penal law in 2014. Students distributed posters and visual materials to other students whilst talking with them.

Fayoum University conducted a one-day awareness campaign on 1 November 2017.²⁰ The nature of this campaign was different in that it was conducted in the presence of the president of the university, the anti-sexual harassment unit head, guests from the NCW, and students from different faculties. The campaign covered the definition of sexual harassment, the reasons for sexual harassment, information about the university's anti-sexual harassment unit, and how students could contact the unit. Student participants used poems, theatre, and stand-up comedy, and ended their campaign with an open discussion with students about sexual harassment and myths in relation to the issue. What is noteworthy is that the event was held in a very strategic campus location with heavy official attendance, including the president, official delegates from the NCW Fayoum branch, and most of the unit's members from different faculties.

Interestingly, one of the activities on the Fayoum campus was about electing/choosing a student committee to act as a communication point between the university/unit administration and students. Initial communication was launched between the university administration, unit head, and students active on other issues, to spread the word about the unit and its role and purpose. Later, amongst students who attended the first training session, internal elections were held to choose a female coordinator and male vice-coordinator to coordinate future activities.²¹ The elected students were backed by the administration and were involved in other university initiatives such as 'For Egypt' (Mn Agl Masr)²² and 'Enactus'.²³ These students have been able to build on their previous connections with other

university students to promote the unit. Unit events have been concentrated in the beginning of the academic year, and mainly organised as different rounds of awareness-raising events and orientation sessions. These activities have engaged the students of different faculties about the work of the unit and succeeded in recruiting new volunteers to work with it.

6 Reflections on the activities

As mentioned previously, an important element of action research is practising reflexivity during the planning and implementation process in order to observe the positionality of researchers in group dynamics, as well as in respect to other members of the research community. Coming from the capital (Cairo) and from Cairo University (one of the oldest and largest universities in Egypt) holds a certain amount of power. Students and faculty members from these three universities looked up to the experience of Cairo University (and to us as researchers accordingly), and in numerous cases were expecting to receive aid and advice. On the other hand, as researchers, we were very aware of this power dynamic and its limitations on action research, and tried to maintain a balance between sharing and reflecting on the activities and 'telling' them what to do.

Working on the topic of fighting sexual harassment needs both passion and knowledge. In certain training sessions, passion was overwhelmingly visible compared to knowledge on the topic. Passion could be understood as a personal preference, grievance, and/or commitment to the cause. Yet, lacking the knowledge to address the topic and frame the message can have negative results. Some students were unable to see the problem of sexual harassment as a threat to both women and men. Some students (both female and male) framed the message as a female problem, i.e. only females suffer from it, only they can stop it, and male colleagues can only help partially. Ethnographic observations reveal, however, that whilst females comprise the majority of victims/survivors of sexual harassment, there are males who suffer from the problem, who need to be heard and included in different messages addressing the issue.²⁴

Assumptions about sexual harassment need to be supported by data; myths about sexual harassment (in terms of reasons and motives) need to be differentiated from the real reasons for it. Students with a high level of passion and lacking supporting information were less tolerant in delivering the message to other students. In outreach activities, some students were unable to explain the problem and capitalise on presentations or activities performed for the students, who did not share the same perspectives. For example, one widely held myth is that girls are responsible for inciting the sexual harassment they suffer based on their dress or behaviour. This discourse emerged in most discussions with students or members of the university community. Information and data prove this wrong as women

suffer harassment regardless of their dress code; veiled, unveiled, women wearing the niqab, and/or who dress conservatively all suffer from sexual harassment.

Practices of 'power over' rather than 'power with'²⁵ are prevalent during most of the activities. Power dynamics between the university administrations and the different units are in favour of the university. University administrations, in most cases, have the upper hand in deciding fundamental decisions such as naming and appointing the head of unit, allocating resources, labelling the discourse used, and granting permission to work with specific partners. In cases where the administration and the unit head have close relationships with the NCW, practices of power are more sharing in nature. In other cases, the university does not facilitate the unit's work and forces a particular approach to sexual harassment on the unit.

In university administrations in conservative settings there is no room for units to adopt a human rights-oriented discourse. This reflects a very important point, which is that there will always be hidden compromises whilst working on sensitive social topics in such contexts. For example, units are indirectly compromised in their messages by the need to continue seeking university support, otherwise they might risk losing the support which allows them to operate. The power over is also manifest between the unit and the body of volunteers. The unit planned and chose the themes of activities, though most of these were implemented by the students. Even in cases where students were leading the process, there was an 'unwritten agreement' about the limits of topics, activities and/or discussions.

This 'unwritten agreement' reflects the social dynamics of the respective local community, the power dynamics between the students and the unit in terms of spaces of expression, and it also reflects the political limits of activities on campuses. Discussing sexual harassment as an issue in its entirety would be seen as an attack against social norms, religious discourses, economic arrangements around the public and the private, as well as women's position within the patriarchal system. The sustainability of the existence of the units prevails over their ability to push for better conditions of accountability.

Within the body of volunteers, power is also practised 'over' rather than 'with'. For example, Fayoum has an interesting system for managing volunteers. In order to be accepted, students have to answer a questionnaire reflecting their knowledge and commitment to fighting sexual harassment. Their responses are evaluated by the student coordinator, who has the right to accept or reject a volunteer's application. Once accepted, each student receives 100 points during his/her membership. If the person is not committed to the unit or is accused of wrongdoing, points get deducted from their 'account'. After a reduction of

30 points, the student's membership gets frozen for a period of time and a repeat offence results in the loss of all points and membership. In order to volunteer again, the student has to reapply and go through the same process. Though this practice might appear necessary to show a student's commitment and seriousness, its implementation gives space for power practices and reflects a hierarchal form of power arrangement, i.e. a replica of social, economic, political as well as administrative forms. The body of students, which is supposed to be a body of equals, turns into another space of inequality where decisions are taken without consultation, and criteria for evaluation are unclear or imprecise.

The university community is patriarchal, not only in its male dominance of higher positions but also in terms of power distribution and the existence of a masculine discourse. In Beni Suef, the university administration denies the existence of sexual harassment on campus and accordingly gave the unit a less controversial name: 'fighting violence against women' rather than 'fighting sexual harassment' as a compromise. In Alexandria University, the administration's decision to launch a unit and nominate a coordinator did not consider the professors who had already spent time developing and working on the idea. The decision was made unilaterally, side-lining them and installing another professor with a previous affiliation with the NCW.

Accordingly, we need to reflect on the politics of the relationship between university administrations, the units, and the NCW. The NCW has presented itself as the speaker and the champion for women rights in Egypt in the last couple of years. There is a question about the positionality of the NCW in relation to society and the state. On the one hand, it was established in early 2000 by former president Mubarak in compliance with international obligations. The NCW is affiliated directly with the presidency, which appoints its board and the council reports directly to the president's office.²⁶ On the other hand, the NCW is not an NGO; rather, it could be recognised as a government-organised non-governmental organisation (GONGO).²⁷ This controversial position between state and society representation affects its political positionality. For NGOs, the NCW is representative of state power and competes with them over resources (from donors) and championing the women's cause. On the state level, the NCW is neither a part of the legislative branch nor the executive branch.

The weakened positions of NGOs²⁸ in the last years has opened up space for the NCW to play a greater role on issues such as violence against women in general and sexual harassment in particular. Nevertheless, the discourse adopted by the NCW cannot depart from the one adopted by the state, i.e. the conservative and protective discourse. On another level, the NCW is consolidating its relationship with different universities through the establishment of these anti-sexual harassment units.

It provides some help to them in terms of logistics and resources. More importantly, however, the NCW provides political coverage and protection for the units and their activities from the state; working with the NCW is perceived as collaborating with the state agenda regarding women's issues. The relationship between the NCW and the state (political leadership and different agencies) could be capitalised on in favour of institutionalising the efforts of anti-sexual harassment. In return, however, there is a fear that the NCW might take over the units, resulting in the loss of their independence, thus becoming branches of the NCW on campus. This is especially worrisome in cases where university administrations and/or unit members have strong ties with the NCW.

Gendered power dynamics are also very manifest in student-to-student interactions in the three universities. Though some students treated sexual harassment as a female issue, female students often deferred to their male colleagues in certain cases. When reaching out to new students, especially to male students, some female students were less eager to engage with them and preferred to 'outsource' the task of engaging with them to male colleagues. Female students felt less empowered and less advantaged and needed external support from their male colleagues. Some explained that discussing sexual harassment with male strangers is rather awkward and puts them in a bad position. They would be labelled 'bad girls' for discussing inappropriate topics, whilst male colleagues are more able to discuss this issue. Nevertheless, this situation reinforces the idea that sexual harassment is a taboo subject that cannot be discussed in public, as well as reinforcing the traditional gender power dynamics where women have no voice to speak for themselves and that they need men to give them voice by speaking on their behalf. Though this observation was valid in all three universities in general, in Beni Suef and Fayoum, as more conservative settings, female students felt even less empowered.

The process of justice is at risk of the political will of the university administration. Most of the units have a clear mandate for their work which states awareness, protection, and support as the main areas of functioning, yet there is ambiguity in the procedures to implement this work and in the relationship between the units and the organisational and administrative structure of the university. In terms of existence, units are usually launched by a decision of the university president with or without an MoU with the NCW. However, this decision establishes the unit as customary and not fully official until it gets the approval of the university board and receives financial allocations and personnel, which has not materialised so far for the units analysed in this article. This puts units at risk of being closed if there is not enough support from the administration or if it has failed to secure financial approval.

Termination is not the only thing units fear. There is always concern that they need the approval and assurance of the university president at every step and for every activity and project, which affects the independence of the units and their ability to manoeuvre. Moreover, according to their mandate, units receive sexual harassment complaints, follow the approved procedures for investigating the complaint, reach a conclusion, and suggest punitive actions. Units do not have the legal power to enforce punitive actions; rather, they refer to the university president to make the final decision. In certain cases, and due to certain power dynamics, punitive actions have not been implemented and the results of the investigations remain locked away. The 'political management' of complaints has two major impacts: it questions (a) the commitment of universities in addressing sexual harassment and punishing perpetrators, and (b) the transparency of procedures and holding people to account for their actions and institutions for their policies. Another impact is that students lose faith in the commitment of this institutional effort; units therefore become *de facto* 'social clubs', where students do not work to bring about social change and address a pressing problem, but rather use activities as an opportunity to socialise and mingle with other students. This also questions the idea of the social accountability of the units.

7 Conclusion

This article discusses the differences and similarities between three Egyptian universities (Beni Suef, Alexandria, and Fayoum) in fighting sexual harassment within their respective campuses. We have argued that these differences and similarities affect the outcome of these efforts and are reflective of the local contexts of each university, which raises questions about the ability of collective action to bring about accountability in a fragile context. Relevant to the scope of our article, the Egyptian context responds mainly to the third indicator of the five fragility indicators: lack of effective accountable and inclusive institutions. The discussion of the activities conducted by the three units reveals that collective action is not just the sum of individual actions; it should have a common goal/purpose and an agreed set of actions to reach it. Whilst the goal in our case is relatively clear, i.e. combating sexual harassment on campus, there are discrepancies in terms of defining what sexual harassment is, its existence on campus, its reasons, the methods for fighting it, and the messages used to address the issue. Those differences actually negatively challenge the ability of different parties to develop collective action strategies at the intra-university level: unit/university, unit/students, and students/students.

Different actors had different motives for engaging with the units' activities. Some faculty members and students are true champions of gender justice issues and fighting sexual harassment. Others are inclined to use the issue of sexual harassment as a political opportunity to achieve visibility and

power. Noteworthy in the Egyptian context, where political activism is criminalised and condemned, is that working with the NCW and the units provides a small window of opportunity for youth activism. In the three examples, units fought for their initiation and survival through building alliances with the NCW and university administrations, compromising sometimes the identity of the unit, its message, and a focus on one dimension of work (awareness) at the expense of others (support and protection).

The three units are headed by female professors, as is the case with the majority of other Egyptian universities with similar units.²⁹ The gendered aspect to the administration of these units is interesting to examine. Most units headed by women are more active compared to those headed by male professors. This raises the question about the local perception of sexual harassment as a female problem that concerns only women. How then can we understand gender dynamics between the units and between them and university presidents (all males) and the university community in general? In cases where tribal relations are relatively important, how does the intersectionality of tribe, gender, socioeconomic status, and religion affect the unit and its ability to coordinate collective action and eventually make the university as a body more accountable in regard to fighting sexual harassment?

Official support by the university might have contradictory impacts. It might legitimise student activities and strengthen a unit's position against opponents. This support, however, might also endanger a unit and its activities in two primary ways: it might compromise the independence of the unit and force upon it a certain discourse, and it might expose the unit to more visibility, which would trigger attacks from both inside and outside the university. For instance, the Beni Suef unit was able to manoeuvre around its less supportive administration and managed to conduct a series of activities on campus under different titles. This exposure stimulated a number of 'angry' articles in the local press attacking the unit and its head for propagating 'foreign ideas to the local society'.

Fragile contexts do not only affect the work of different actors, but also the structure of the units. Lacking sustainable support and predictable leadership and policies, different units have had to plan in the short term rather than the medium or long term. A change in university leadership, which has happened in all three cases, means a change in alliances, support, chain of leadership, and space for action available for the units.

It is also worth mentioning the relationship between the larger socio-political context and the university context. In all three cases, the units are mirroring social and political relations, i.e. hierarchal and less democratic forms of authority. Students are at the bottom of power arrangements, with limited room for independent action, unless they have strong political alliances,

such as the group 'Mn Agl Masr' in the case of Fayoum University. This not only affirms the third fragility indicator of 'unaccountable institutions', but also raises questions about the means to change these power arrangements. Some students were very sceptical about the outcome of their work. They stated that, in most cases, especially less famous ones, punitive actions are very limited (transfer of the accused personnel to another department or university faculty or minor administrative penalties). Some focused on their limited ability to suggest activities or invite speakers without facing security restrictions or rejection. Should we start with social accountability which creates pressure leading to political accountability?

Assumptions that accountability and empowerment are interrelated need further investigation. In the case of the three universities, accountability is redefined through actions to mean limited recognition of the problem, existence of the unit, permission to conduct limited student activities, and assigning units to receive complaints. With this comes more visibility of the professors and students active in addressing sexual harassment, who then become easy targets for attacks by opponents. Moreover, resistance to recognising the problem on campus intensified in certain cases. We do not have any documentation, but based on observation and unofficial interviews, defending professors accused of perpetuating sexual harassment became fiercer. In some complaints, informal pressure was applied to protect the professors, and in other cases, even if the investigation ended in condemning a faculty member, no punitive action was taken. Some units – in other universities – did not conduct any activities or perform any awareness campaigns, even though they got all the official permits to form the unit.

There is no hard evidence that the existence of the units and their work has affected the university community in terms of formal accountability, i.e. documentation of cases and punitive actions against perpetrators. Nevertheless, change has happened on the less institutional level as students engaged with the limited activities have been empowered through: (1) acquiring knowledge and skills through training, (2) spaces opening to address the problem and uncover myths related to sexual harassment, and (3) speaking about violations and gender relations in general. Working on different campuses for the purpose of this article, we have seen a gradual and slight change in terms of awareness and students' recognition of the problem and its effect on the university community. Some students are becoming more sensitive and considerate when it comes to interacting with colleagues and an increasing number of students (male and female) are engaging with the cause. Taking into consideration the political context in Egypt in the last decade, efforts to bring about social change are becoming more challenging, yet there are nascent traits especially amongst students even though they are the less powerful group in the hierarchy of university society.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Amal Hamada, assistant professor of political science, Cairo University, Egypt.
 - 2 Ahmed Kheir, independent researcher.
 - 3 Enas Hamdy, independent researcher.
 - 4 Heba Youssif, independent researcher.
 - 5 Discussions about sexual harassment both on and off campus go back prior to 2011. Women activists and feminist movements have been active in addressing the issue and raising awareness about it. One of the early reports on the issue can be traced to 2004, Hassan (2004).
 - 6 The number of universities joining this endeavour is increasing. Private universities are also starting the process, and most of them are seeking the advice and the support of Cairo University (interview with Dr Maha El Said, Director of Cairo University's Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit, 10 October 2017). However, the official status of some of these units is unclear. Some of them have officially started and are active, others are launched with no activity, and others are still in the process of launching.
 - 7 One of the ground-breaking studies in this regard is Mancur Olson from the 1960s. In his article, Olson addressed individual motives to engage in group/collective action. He applied an economic approach to analysing individual motives to engage in such activities. For further details on Olson's argument and a recent critique, see Czech (2016).
 - 8 For further discussion on the logic of collective action, see for example, Udhen (1993).
 - 9 For a further discussion on accountability and its development in terms of concepts and practices, see Sharma (2008: 6–7).
 - 10 We use the term 'empowerment' as a mechanism by which different actors manage to practise their agency in bringing about change. Empowerment in this sense does not only include access to resources and opportunities; rather, it must also include an increase in self-esteem, confidence, and the ability to bring about social transformation for the addressed issues. For more details on meanings and the operationalisation of empowerment, see Luttrell, Quiroz and Bird (2007) and Luttrell *et al.* (2009).
 - 11 Facts about **Beni Suef** [in Arabic].
 - 12 For more information on MoUs signed by the university with different institutions and universities, see [website](#).
 - 13 See Beni Suef University official [website](#).

- 14 For example, see **the results of the last parliamentary elections in Egypt in 2015**, as well as Brown (2011) and Awad (2014).
- 15 Interview online with students and graduates from Alexandria University, 14 September 2018.
- 16 Alexandria University official **website**.
- 17 Fayoum governorate **website** [in Arabic].
- 18 Fayoum University official **website**.
- 19 One of the interesting research studies on tribes in Egypt is Abu-Lughod (2016). In this work, Abu-Lughod spent two years with Awlad Ali (one of the largest tribes in the West Desert in Egypt), conducting an anthropological study on gender dynamics expressed in folk poetry.
- 20 This was the highlight of the unit's activities. A number of other events (around seven activities during the Autumn semester of 2017) were organised with less attention, attendance, and propaganda.
- 21 There was clear direction by the unit head to select a female student for the coordinator post as a tool to promote female participation in the unit.
- 22 **Mn Agl Masr** [in Arabic] is an initiative started outside the university campus by a number of Egyptian parliamentarian supporters of the current political regime. The group on campus is more of a chapter for the group mobilising patriotic activities.
- 23 See **Enactus website** for more information on the group.
- 24 Most of the studies available address male victims of sexual violence within the political context. For example see Tadros (2016).
- 25 For a detailed discussion on the concept of power and its different expressions and manifestations, see the **powercube website**.
- 26 See **NCW website** [in Arabic].
- 27 For more information about the 'GONGO' concept, see Cumming (2010).
- 28 A copy of the new law may be found **here** [in Arabic]. There is a lot of criticism of this law from NGOs, activists, and international and local donors. The executive regulation necessary for implementing the law is not yet finalised (as of December 2018). For more information about the weak position of Egyptian NGOs compared to the state, see Ismail (2018) and Herrold (2015).
- 29 Nine out of the 14 units in Egyptian governmental universities are headed by female professors. All these universities are headed by male professors, except for a short period from 2009 to 2011 when Alexandria University was headed by a female professor.

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Women Politicians Navigating the 'Hostile Environment' in Pakistan*

Ayesha Khan,¹ Zonia Yousuf² and Sana Naqvi³

Abstract Women in Pakistan operate within highly patriarchal contexts that promote their exclusion from public spaces; but those working in politics, the most public of spaces, defy these prevailing gender norms. This article examines women's experience of sexual harassment in the political 'workspace'. It presents data from interviews, press and television coverage, social media, and an online survey, to explore how women's presence in politics is resisted by their male counterparts through the use of sexual harassment. It highlights the sexual harassment men use against women in politics, arguing that key features of political parties' organisational culture function as predictors of harassment. Despite laws and mechanisms for processing complaints, women in politics are unable to push for effective accountability. The article argues for improved accountability mechanisms within political parties and Assemblies to combat sex discrimination and harassment, while acknowledging that the problem may only increase when women achieve more prominence as politicians.

Keywords gender empowerment, sexual harassment, accountability, women in politics, Pakistan, sexism, women's Caucus, quota seats.

1 Introduction

When a woman in Pakistan enters politics, she must be prepared to face public censure, workplace hostility, and risks to her safety. Some of these challenges are shared with all women who enter the workforce in Pakistan where the female labour force participation rate of 25 per cent is the second lowest in South Asia (World Bank 2018). These challenges are partially explained by patriarchy; women's agency is constrained to the private domain and they face social, cultural, and institutional obstacles when they seek to establish their presence in public spaces. Due to local conflicts after September 11th, militants and religious

© 2020 The Authors. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.129

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extremists have targeted women workers, voters, and some politicians for transgressing gender norms and engaging in the public domain.

Despite constitutional protections, women's entry into the political arena is still a subject of religious and ideological debate, encouraged by some male politicians when it works to their advantage. Women's engagement as voters, candidates, and holders of elected office is fiercely contested in some communities and right-wing groups. When they do enter the political space as candidates, their personal credibility and physical safety is subject to attack. If they are elected to local government or legislative bodies, their agency is circumscribed. All these experiences significantly weaken their effectiveness as political actors.

This article examines women's experience as politicians in Pakistan; it finds that they are subject to harassment and intimidation by virtue of their gender and for entering this arena. It also finds that they are subject to sexual harassment if and when they display some of the strengths that make them successful politicians. Like Berdahl's (2007) 'uppity women', who are successful in the workplace and subject to harassment because they violate gender roles and ideals, these politicians are censured for their refusal to be submissive, to shun public attention, and for raising their voices in the public domain. If sexual harassment is a mechanism 'to police the appropriate manner of "doing gender" in the workspace and to penalise non-conformity' (West and Zimmerman 1981, quoted in McLaughlin, Uggen and Blackstone 2012: 626), then politicians in Pakistan must be prepared for the penalties.

With the restoration and enhancement of a women's quota in legislative bodies, a series of progressive laws over the last decade has improved accountability mechanisms and protections in cases of rape, honour killings, domestic violence, and sexual harassment (Khan and Naqvi 2018). However, this article will show that women politicians have yet to see implementation of mandatory guidelines to control sexual harassment in their own workplaces: national and provincial Assemblies, local government, and political parties. Despite Pakistan's own #MeToo movement and media coverage of politicians' allegations, accountability remains an elusive goal.

Our analysis is based on a variety of sources. We conducted 32 key informant interviews, including with women politicians representing a range of parties and with civil society and external agencies who promote women's political participation. We combed through social media content and press sources to establish how women politicians are reported on and to identify specific instances of sexual harassment. Finally, we reviewed proceedings to better understand women politicians' experiences during Assembly sessions. In an online survey conducted just

before the 2018 elections, we asked women elected to all the Assemblies (Provincial, National, and Senate) about their experiences of sexual harassment, along with other questions regarding their empowerment and accountability as politicians.

2 Gender-based discrimination in the political arena

As Schultz (2018) argues, sexual harassment is a type of gender-based discrimination. The political arena as a whole discriminates against women on the basis of gender in Pakistan. For example, suppression of the women's vote is a serious issue. The gender gap in votes polled is 11.1 million (ECP 2018). To vote, women need national identity cards; however, male relatives often deny them this right, arguing that 'it will give them a sense of entitlement' (PODA 2017). Women have traditionally been banned from voting in certain extremely conservative parts of the country, such as districts in the northwest, and some localities in southern Punjab. In 2015, during local government elections in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there were 27,000 registered voters in the district of Upper Dir, but only one woman voted. Tribal and religious leaders, and local representatives of political parties, have a history of making agreements before polling to ban women from voting.

Women activists have filed cases with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), petitioned the higher courts, and lobbied with political parties since the mid-1990s to put an end to this practice.^{4,5} The government eventually responded to this pressure, and under the new 2017 electoral laws, if women's vote is less than 10 per cent of total votes polled in a constituency, the election is declared void (Majlis-e-Shoora 2017). This has somewhat reined in the practice of banning women from voting (Chaudhry 2018; W.A. Shah 2018).

Other factors prevent women from accessing public spaces to cast their vote – such as threats to their security posed in taking public transport or in the polling stations themselves. There is more insidious discouragement within the home against a woman setting aside her domestic responsibilities and going into the male/public sphere to cast her vote. Some women who do not vote, even in more educated urban settings, feel disengaged from politicians who appear unresponsive to their interests and unaccountable for failures to deliver (Cheema *et al.* 2019). Those who make it to the polling booth are also subject to pressure and manipulation by their families, polling agents, security personnel, and political party representatives to vote for certain candidates (Aware Girls 2013).

Women who run for office face persistent social and political barriers. In 1965, Fatima Jinnah, sister of the country's founding leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah, unsuccessfully fought elections against military ruler Ayub Khan. There was furious debate amongst religious scholars about women's right to run, which

undermined the potency of her candidacy (Shaheed, Zia and Warraich 2009: 28). General Zia ul-Haq launched a project of Islamising Pakistani laws and institutions during his military rule from 1977 to 1988. One of his advisory commissions recommended the head of state should only be a male Muslim, and no women should sit in the Assembly without their husbands' permission and unless they were over 50 (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987). It was widely believed that the purpose of this was to prevent Benazir Bhutto, leader of the opposition in exile, from contesting future elections. It led to a lingering doubt in wider society about a woman's fitness to hold office (Shaheed *et al.* 2009: 32).

Since the state began engaging in conflict with militant religious extremists after September 11th, attacks on women politicians have increased. The district of Dir, one of the most remote and conservative places in the conflict-affected northwest, has seen attacks on women local councillors and candidates. In the province of Punjab, a woman minister was shot dead for not wearing 'Muslim clothing' (DAWN 2007).⁶ During the 2018 elections, a woman candidate for a provincial seat in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) used pamphlets to canvas for votes in those areas where her personal appearances were impossible due to the risk to her safety (Khan 2018). A prominent woman member of the new ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI) says, 'The psychology is that good women do not come out, that politics is not for a good woman'.⁷

Until the 2018 elections, historically, very few women have run as candidates on general seats, since they are rarely granted tickets.⁸ Political parties believe a ticket given to women candidates is wasted because they are unable to campaign effectively. In the recent 2018 elections, more women contested for general seats than ever before, due to a new election rule requiring parties to grant them 5 per cent of tickets. Yet out of 464 women contesting, only eight won (Imran 2018; Wasim 2018). Almost the same number of women (six) won in 1999, with no affirmative action measures (Hanif 2009).

3 Elected women in a hostile work environment

After a long campaign to overcome the hurdles of exclusion and lack of political voice, activists succeeded in getting a law passed to provide for a women's quota in all elected bodies.⁹ These women are indirectly elected to each House, i.e. by fellow elected party members. Women on reserved seats are perceived to be male proxies because many are related to men of political influence, some of whom may have lost the elections, died, or been disqualified. This view may even apply to women successfully elected on a general seat, such as former Benazir Bhutto, whose father served as prime minister, and other elected women related to party leaders. But the advantage can sometimes become extreme vulnerability. One woman was elected to a general seat on a Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) ticket after her politician

Table 1 Women parliamentarians (2013–18) reporting silencing

House/Assembly	Yes		Total
	Number	%	
Senate	3	17	18
National	8	16	51
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	13	62	21
Balochistan	2	17	12
Sindh	10	36	28
Punjab	14	22	65
Gilgit-Baltistan	2	40	5
Total	52	26	200

Source Women Parliamentarians Survey (2018), authors' own.

husband was disqualified; when the couple separated, the party overrode her protestations and her husband forced her at gunpoint to relinquish her seat¹⁰ (also see *DAWN* 2014).

Our interviews with women politicians and media tracking of their coverage provided qualitative insight into their experiences whilst engaging in political work, not only on the floor of their House or Assembly, but also in their interaction with voters, the media, and fellow party members. We used a quantitative survey tool, an online Women Parliamentarians Survey (WPS) with all 234 women seat-holders across the country, to explore four types of experiences: silencing, unwelcome messages/posts, direct verbal insults, and physical threats from male politicians. These experiences all contribute to creating an 'intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment'¹¹ that the law seeks to protect women from, as will be discussed later in this article.

3.1 Silencing

Men's silencing and exclusion of women limits their full participation as legislators at the provincial and national levels. Meraj Humayun, a reserved seat member of the KP Assembly, recalls the intimidating environment awaiting the novice legislators after their election in 2013.

At the beginning we went around [the Assembly building] fearfully, men might mind if they see us – how do I draft a resolution, what is a bill? Some of us were semi-literate women who had never stepped out of houses to come to a place full of men. There are only two out of 560 employees in the Assembly [Secretariat] who are women. They are supposed to be our research assistants, but even they are hiding somewhere.¹²

Table 2 Women parliamentarians (2013–18) reporting verbal insults

House/Assembly	Yes		Total
	Number	%	
Senate	0	0	18
National	6	12	51
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	4	19	21
Balochistan	0	0	12
Sindh	1	4	28
Punjab	9	14	65
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	20	5
Total	21	11	200

Source: Women Parliamentarians Survey (2018), authors' own.

It took the women provincial legislators over a year to understand how the Assembly operates. Without support from the bureaucracy and any other functionaries, it was an overwhelming experience. 'It is a totally man's world. It has been so difficult to operate and make men understand.'¹³ Another politician and former chair of the KP Commission on the Status of Women explains, 'We find it difficult to make our presence felt. We find it difficult to assert ourselves and find space for ourselves. Acceptance is a huge mind block in our society'.¹⁴

This hostile environment extends to the National Assembly, even though there is less segregation of the sexes in the capital, Islamabad, than in KP. When the first Parliamentary Caucus was formed in the National Assembly in 2008, there was no women's toilet in the building, and no room available for Caucus meetings (N. Shah 2018). Women 'have to bend over backwards to make their mark... They feel that no matter what we do we may get in trouble'.¹⁵ Another perspective attributes this hostility to men's fear of women in the Assemblies, as a result of which women are not given the space to participate in formulating new laws – even the election laws which underwent substantial reform in 2017 (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2018).

A quarter of women surveyed said that they have experienced silencing by male colleagues (see Table 1), with dramatic variation across provinces. The KP Assembly (62 per cent) and the Sindh Assembly (36 per cent) reported the highest levels, with women from the Balochistan Assembly the lowest (17 per cent) amongst the provinces (this excludes Gilgit-Baltistan due to its small size). Women from the National Assembly (NA) and Senate reported similarly lower levels of silencing. However, 11 women did not respond to this question.

Table 3 Women parliamentarians (2013–18) reporting unwelcome texts/social media posts

House/Assembly	Yes		Total
	Number	%	
Senate	1	6	18
National	6	12	51
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	9	43	21
Balochistan	1	8	12
Sindh	3	11	28
Punjab	25	38	65
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	20	5
Total	46	23	200

Source Women Parliamentarians Survey (2018), authors' own.

Given this context, the WPS findings are further revealing. When asked to identify their most valuable contribution to the House, the two values most cited by the women were regular attendance (72 per cent) and participation in debate (71 per cent). This can be interpreted as an expression of their tenacity in the face of exclusion and silencing.

3.2 Verbal sexual harassment

Verbal insults to women – normalised in everyday exchanges – become amplified when they are reported in the media, in effect presented before the nation as part of its political coverage. Activists noted a disturbing trend after 1997 of the increasing use of derogatory language towards women and retrogressive attitudes from amongst senior cabinet and parliamentary figures, which they said would encourage similar attitudes and language use in the media and by the public in general, as well as the flourishing of discriminatory customary practices (NGOCC 2000). Since then, women's entry into elected bodies has dramatically increased with the restoration of reserved seats in the Assemblies and Senate. With it, the verbal harassment continues.

Meraj Humayun recalls that they formed the Women's Caucus in the KP Assembly to provide women with the strength and confidence to withstand derision:

In the beginning we constantly heard snide remarks from men, who told us we should be happy we found ourselves in the Assembly, we might as well get dressed up nicely and just turn up, nothing else. They tried to discourage us from participating. Even the Speaker was not giving us time, he was prejudiced and anti-women.

Throughout the tenure of that Assembly, the attitude of male colleagues remained unchanged.¹⁶

The highest percentage of women (19 per cent) to report direct verbal insults from male colleagues was in the KP Assembly, followed by the Punjab Assembly (14 per cent) (see Table 2). Half, or six, of the Balochistan Assembly respondents claimed that they had never experienced verbal insults; however, another six did not respond. Women from the KP Assembly also reported the highest rate of unwelcome text messages from male colleagues (43 per cent), followed by 38 per cent in the Punjab Assembly (see Table 3). Overall, ten women chose not to respond to this question.

Women have come to expect insulting and denigrating comments from male politicians, including their own party members, during proceedings and in public encounters with the media. Shireen Mazari, the most senior woman member of PTI and reserved seat-holder in the National Assembly (2013–18) is a senior defence analyst. She protested to the Speaker against the language towards women used by the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML–N) (the then ruling party). The comments made were in reference to PTI rallies, which attract large numbers of young supporters, including women, and often feature live music with dancing. 'The dance moves of these women show which families they belong to', said a PML–N minister, in a reference to the cultural association between dance and prostitution. The Speaker of the National Assembly consistently objected to the wording of a resolution Mazari tried to pass in the House to condemn the language (Anis 2018). He asked her to amend the language used in the resolution three times, removing the name of PML–N leaders and also the party's name (*Pakistan Today* 2018a). The resolution eventually passed without mentioning the party's name (National Assembly of Pakistan 2018).

Slurs against women have been frequent and reported in detail by the electronic and press media. During proceedings and outside the Assemblies, male politicians pass lewd remarks and gender slurs, comment on women's apparel, make sexual passes, and even mock women with disabilities (*AAJ News* 2006; *DAWN* 2018; Chaudhry 2017a). The following press report concerns Mazari again:

The PTI whip was badgering the minister to explain, during Question Hour, what international standards of security were being observed at the Islamabad airport. 'In airports abroad, they also strip-search you. Is that the international standard she wants,' he responded, to peals of approving laughter from the treasury benches (Zaidi 2016).

More notoriously, in an earlier session, a ruling party minister called Mazari a 'tractor trolley'. Nafisa Shah was the only member of the Parliamentary Women's Caucus to demand a direct apology,

which the National Assembly was reluctant to pursue since he was a member of the ruling party (Ghumman 2016).

Even women wielding some power over the floor of the House are not immune to derision. The Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Assembly, although an active Caucus member and a well-regarded politician in the PPP, found her authority challenged and was disrespected by a leader from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement–Pakistan (MQM–P), even during her second tenure in this position (*Pakistan Today* 2018b).

The most renowned case of alleged sexual harassment of a woman politician involved the public allegation in 2017 by the PTI's Member of the National Assembly (MNA) reserved seat-holder Ayesha Gulalai that she received unwelcome text messages from her party leader Imran Khan, as well as at least one other senior male party functionary. She alleged that Khan began to send her inappropriate and obscene text messages in 2013, that other PTI women have received similar messages, and that the overall party culture was corrupt and anti-women (*Dunya News* 2017). Gulalai's allegation drew attention to the cultural hypocrisy which allowed Khan to endure as a public icon, despite having fathered an illegitimate child (*Samaa News* 2017), highlighting the inherent social misogyny which would have destroyed the career of a woman with the same history.

The backlash was harsh. Shireen Mazari claimed Gulalai's allegation arose because she was refused a ticket (Hayat 2017). Both the PTI women's wing and the Chief Minister of KP's aide threatened to send a *jirga*, or tribal council, to Gulalai's home if she did not apologise (*The Nation* 2017; *The Express Tribune* 2017). The PTI tried to force her to resign her seat, which she would not, then appealed to the Election Commission of Pakistan to remove her, which was denied as well.^{17,18} PTI supporters dubbed Gulalai a 'hypocrite' for talking about women's dignity while her sister – a national squash champion – dressed like a boy and played a sport meant solely for men (Nasir 2017). They even pelted Gulalai with eggs and tomatoes many months after the allegation (*Dunya News* 2018). Although Imran Khan called upon his supporters to stop targeting Gulalai's sister, he refused to comply with a bipartisan NA Committee hastily set up to investigate the allegations, as called for under the law, and filed a defamation suit against her instead (Chaudhry 2017b).

A media frenzy erupted. The press questioned the timing of her allegation, four years after the alleged behaviour began (Mir 2017). She was accused of dishonouring her 'roots, tradition, culture... and every *Pakhtun* woman of Pakistan' (Khan 2017). Speculation that she made the accusation at the behest of the (then) ruling party (PML–N) grew (*Global Village Space* 2018). The only women politicians who spoke in her defence belonged to other parties, voicing their suspicions that women in the PTI

were badly treated (Rehman 2017). Gulalai herself appeared in countless television news shows, during which anchormen mockingly inquired if she made the allegations in order to get Imran Khan, then single, to marry her (Nasir 2017).

Over one year later, Gulalai's career was in tatters. She stood as an independent in the 2018 elections, winning only 138 votes. The man she accused of harassing her became the new prime minister. Meanwhile, no due process, within either Parliament or Khan's party, has been followed. There is no inquiry committee in place in Parliament to handle complaints involving elected legislators. The Women's Parliamentary Caucus gave statements against sexual harassment to the media during this episode, but did not raise the issue formally within the House (*Daily Times* 2017). Prominent women politicians urged Gulalai to follow due process and submit evidence of her harassment; however, she did not publicly release the messages.

In her final parliamentary appearance before the end of her tenure, Gulalai came to the House dressed like a traditional *Pashtun* man, wearing a turban on her head. She addressed the media in English, possibly to appeal to a foreign audience, explaining that her garb was to convey that as a member of the Waziri tribe she refused to compromise on her honour. She added that her tribe had the panther's quality of preying alone, just as she and her family were standing alone in a fight against a 'mafia group', i.e. the PTI.

3.3 Threats of violence

Our interviews suggest that threats of violence have been used to prevent women Caucus members from departing from party positions, and the Gulalai case demonstrates how threats were used to intimidate her when she complained of harassment. One key informant recounted an incident in KP when a woman Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) said that the Caucus would not support the government on an issue. A senior provincial minister is alleged to have called the women from his party into a meeting and threatened to break their legs if they did not comply. This is cited as a reason for the subsequent silence of some woman MPAs for the rest of their tenure. Threats by some mainstream male politicians to transgender persons standing for election have been reported; the candidates were told to sell their tickets or be killed (Heinrich Böll Stiftung 2018; Haider 2018).

Thirteen women in our WPS did not answer when asked if they had ever experienced physical harassment from male colleagues (see Table 4). A full 11 women out of 200 (6 per cent) reported actual or threatened physical harassment from male colleagues. One Senator and four MNAs reported that they had been subject to this form of harassment, followed by three (5 per cent) of women in the KP Assembly. One woman from the Gilgit-Baltistan Assembly also reported that she had experienced it, with another member refraining from answering the question.

Table 4 Women parliamentarians (2013–18) reporting physical harassment or threats

House/Assembly	Yes		Total
	Number	%	
Senate	1	6	18
National	4	8	51
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	3	5	21
Balochistan	0	0	12
Sindh	1	3	28
Punjab	1	2	65
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	20	5
Total	11	6	200

Source Women Parliamentarians Survey (2018), authors' own.

4 Accountability

Experiences of exclusion and silencing in the political environment are, for some women, normalised as an inevitable part of public life. In fact, women politicians often do their best to adhere to gender norms while in public or in the workplace to demonstrate that they pose no threat to men and thereby hope to avoid sexual harassment; thus many cover their heads in public who otherwise would not. Unfortunately, too much gender conforming only increases men's derision towards them for occupying 'charity' seats and appearing incompetent.

The first laws against sexual harassment in 2010 (National Assembly of Pakistan 2010a, 2010b) were the result of a carefully targeted activist campaign to build support amongst civil society, corporations, and politicians. The law defines the offence as 'insulting modesty' of a woman intentionally (through words, gestures, sounds, or exhibit of an object); making sexual advances or the demand for sexual favours intended to annoy, insult, intimidate, or threaten a person at the workplace; and creating 'an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment'. It is now punishable with imprisonment and a fine. Every workplace is required to establish its own committee to hear grievances, and the law details an inquiry procedure.

The complainant also has the option to turn to a federal and/or provincial ombudsman to hear complaints, conduct inquiries, and issue penalties. The Federal Ombudsman's office has heard 898 cases between 2011 and 2019;¹⁹ but none of them were complaints from women politicians or party workers. The two functional provincial counterparts (Sindh and Punjab) also hear cases, but none from the political arena. Balochistan has not even

nominated an ombudsman for sexual harassment yet. KP, with possibly the most hostile work environment for women politicians, only nominated an ombudsman in 2019; thus no figures were available from that office.

The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (National Assembly of Pakistan 2016) penalises the unauthorised transmission of private data and hate speech, but no data are available about politicians' use of this new law. The legislative Assemblies have grievance committees for their staff employees, but legislators do not fall within their ambit. The only signs of accountability for harassment within the Assemblies, as discussed above, have been in the form of a resolution condemning the incident, or the establishment of an inquiry committee that was rendered ineffectual. Thus, it is difficult, but not impossible, for women politicians to demand accountability for harassment within the existing legal framework.

Most politicians, but not all, belong to political parties; however, the parties are not legally bound to establish committees, as they are not technically 'workplaces'. (However, politicians' 'workplace' notionally extends into the public domain, where women face sexual harassment and physical attacks that would be covered by the penal code.) Parties use their own internal disciplinary or ethics committees to address any charges of sexual harassment, but do not share their data. Representatives told us that such cases are rare since 'men are courteous and hold women in high esteem, treating them like sisters'.²⁰

The political party, as the *de facto* 'employer' of a woman politician, is dysfunctional like many other organisations in Pakistan. Parties lack internal accountability mechanisms, the concentration of power rests with the individual at the highest level, and most have undemocratic internal decision-making processes. Political parties in Pakistan, with few exceptions, are dominated by an (often) unelected single male leader who exercises decision-making authority subject to minimal input from all but a close committee of advisors, in which women's input is mainly to galvanise public votes and attend rallies.

Political parties in Pakistan have certain organisational features that enable a hostile work environment and a culture of sexual harassment (Sundaresh and Hemalatha 2013; Berdahl 2007). Almost all the decision makers in each party are men. Despite the existence of women's wings in most parties, they are not empowered at the highest decision-making levels. Party leaders, barring a few exceptions, are self-appointed or selected by the consensus of a few decision makers, not elected by their party members.²¹ Their charisma (combined with a history of political victimisation) and the ability to attract votes are often their most valuable selling points. The distribution of tickets to stand for elections is decided through a non-transparent process, usually

in the domain of the party leader or a small group of decision makers. Loyalty to party leaders is highly valued, and betrayal or disloyalty is punished with expulsion. Senior women with an influence on decision-making enjoy a close personal relationship with the party leader/s. Finally, parties lack sound internal accountability procedures for the redressal of grievances.

This leaves the media as the most open terrain in which a complainant can make her case for accountability, but it renders her vulnerable to defamation suits and opprobrium if she does not provide evidence and/or follow-up using the legal remedies at her disposal.

5 Discussion

The above findings demonstrate that women's reported sexual harassment in the political workspace continues with impunity. In Pakistan, where the consequence of sexually inappropriate behaviour is to bring disgrace to women and their families, and a collectivist cultural environment is linked with high avoidance/denial of harassment to protect norms of 'sexual silence' (Wasti and Cortina 2002), the problem is likely to be under-reported. Our qualitative findings reveal that women resent the exclusion, silencing, and verbal harassment endemic to their lives in politics. This includes the obstacles to their agency as voters and candidates which at times threaten their lives. Their coping strategies vary from avoidance of the arena altogether, acceptance, a mixed experience of Caucus support, and rare instances of confrontation.

The organisational culture of political parties described above has many features which serve as predictors of sexual harassment (Sundaresh and Hemalatha 2013). The field (of politics) is traditionally male-dominated, with most women present as representatives of their sex. The power differential between the sexes not only within Assemblies but within political parties is high, another predictor of harassment. As male politicians have little experience of working with women, they tend to rely on inappropriate and preconceived notions of gender roles within the Assemblies. The exclusion women experience reflects sociocultural norms, which encourage gender segregation and perpetrate their separate and unequal status. The verbal harassment women politicians report includes frequent urging to adhere to their traditional gender roles. Women experience the harassing behaviour, particularly the exclusion and verbal comments, as a normal consequence of entering this hostile environment.

Elevated power, such as that exercised by employers or political leaders, is associated with numerous traits including dominance, increased social skills, and charisma. Research demonstrates that individual power is also associated with disinhibited behaviour and those individuals with lower power, such as a woman in an organisation, tend to be more vigilant and sensitive to

threatening behaviour (Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson 2003). As Schultz (2018) argues, the structure of an organisation and women's lack of power within it makes possible a wide range of behaviours that discriminate against them on the basis of their gender, including sexual harassment.

Shireen Mazari's experience of being mocked in the National Assembly, even by members of her own party, and her struggle to have a resolution passed to condemn the rival party's use of derogatory language against her, highlighted male efforts to maintain the dominant work culture. Mazari herself is an example of Berdahl's (2007) 'uppity woman', who violates feminine ideals by exhibiting masculine personality characteristics and rising in the organisational hierarchy. Her success, in effect, leads to more frequent harassment. As an assertive defence analyst, she poses a threat to the male-dominated culture within her party, which explains both why they participate in her harassment and, after PTI won the 2018 election, why she was not sufficiently rewarded for her loyalty or capability. She was given charge of the Human Rights Ministry (considered a soft, unimportant area of governmental work) despite exhibiting little interest in this area and her obvious credentials in a more 'masculine' area of work.

The Ayesha Gulalai episode unfolded in a manner predicted by Sundaresh and Hemalatha's (2013) characterisation of organisational culture with high levels of sexual harassment. When Gulalai usurped gender role expectations by speaking out publicly against her harasser, she faced potential danger to her safety and that of her family. The power status of her harasser, a charismatic political leader, made legal or organisational accountability impossible, even before the elections.

The party and its followers gave little importance to the complaint, reinforcing the notion of women politicians as a minority 'out' group whose status is deeply conditioned by the male 'in' group which uses sexually harassing behaviour to intimidate women into remaining within their gender roles or forcing them to resign. The lack of support from party women, too, was key to maintaining the dominant work culture. In short, she faced the social opprobrium most feared by women who speak out about harassment (Wasti and Cortina 2002).

The organisational culture of political parties needs to change dramatically to enable the current hostile work environment for women politicians to transform into one which empowers them and implements accountability for harassment. Without this accountability, affirmative action measures run the risk of reinforcing gender inequality and sex roles, circumscribing women's agency in this most crucial of workplaces. As Schultz (2018) has argued, by addressing the structural conditions in the workplace that reinforce gender segregation and arbitrary authority, both of which persist in political parties, it will become

possible to remove the underlying causes of harassment and encourage more women to venture into this challenging arena.

Activists and women politicians from mainstream parties have articulated their demands to change the structural conditions of the political arena. They are lobbying for more affirmative action measures to increase women's voice at decision-making levels in political parties. They also want increased party resources to support the campaigns of women who run on general seats (Women's Parliamentary Caucus 2018). The long-standing demand by the women's movement, to change the mode of election to reserved seats from indirect to a direct, constituency-based vote, is also being discussed as a way to break the dependency of reserved seat-holders on their male colleagues.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Ayesha Khan, Director, Collective for Social Science Research, Pakistan.
- 2 Zonia Yousuf, Research Officer, Collective for Social Science Research, Pakistan.
- 3 Sana Naqvi, Research Assistant, Collective for Social Science Research, Pakistan.
- 4 S. Ayaz and S. Munir interviewed by Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi, 10 May 2018, Peshawar.
- 5 Interview through correspondence with T. Abdullah, 10 August 2018.
- 6 That year, Taliban militants assassinated Benazir Bhutto, although she was not targeted primarily because of her gender.
- 7 N. Toru, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 1 June 2018, Islamabad.
- 8 The 2018 national and provincial elections returned only 19 women out of a total of 1,207 on general seats.
- 9 Local bodies reserve 33 per cent of seats for women, although provinces have subsequently varied their own laws and in some cases reduced the quota. The Provincial Assemblies, the National Assembly, and the Senate have a 17 per cent quota for women.
- 10 F. Babar, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 29 March 2018, Islamabad.
- 11 Protection Against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act 2010 and Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2010.
- 12 M. Humayun, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 30 May 2018, Islamabad.
- 13 M. Humayun, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 30 May 2018, Islamabad.
- 14 N. Toru, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 1 June 2018, Islamabad.

- 15 F. Babar, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 29 March 2018, Islamabad.
- 16 M. Humayun, interviewed by Ayesha Khan, 30 May 2018, Islamabad.
- 17 S. Ayaz and S. Munir interviewed by Ayesha Khan and Sana Naqvi, 10 May 2018, Peshawar.
- 18 This helped to set a legal precedent that a party leader does not have the right to expel a member.
- 19 R. Shahzad, interviewed by Zonia Yousuf, 8 March 2019, Karachi.
- 20 S. Agha interviewed by Sana Naqvi, 5 March 2019, Karachi.
- 21 One exception is Jamaat-i-Islami, whose leader is elected by all party members, including women. The PTI Constitution states that leaders may be elected through members voting by way of SMS or other technologies.

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'Me Too' and the 'List' – Power Dynamics, Shame, and Accountability in Indian Academia*

Adrija Dey¹

Abstract In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a law student of Indian descent, posted a crowdsourced list on Facebook of male academics who allegedly harassed women. India's academic world splintered and the #MeToo movement became a student movement emerging from campuses resisting a culture of widespread sexism, abuse, and violence which is rife in Indian academia. Some academics criticised the List for leaving out the names of accusers and specific details of the alleged incidents, raising questions about anonymity and accountability. However, the List also received extensive support as for decades survivors have tried unsuccessfully to get justice through the system following informal and formal complaint mechanisms, and it became a manifestation of years of frustration against institutions. Keeping the List at its core, this article explores ideas of due process, the need for intersectional approaches to fight sexual and gender-based violence in academia, and finally the ideas of institutional accountability.

Keywords #MeToo, digital activism, student movement, sexual harassment in academia, sexual and gender-based violence, India.

1 Introduction

Through the lens of the #MeToo movement in India and Raya Sarkar's 'List', this article explores power dynamics and accountability failures in relation to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Indian academia. In October 2017, Raya Sarkar, a 24-year-old law student of Indian descent, posted on Facebook a crowdsourced list of male academics in Indian higher education (HE) institutions who allegedly harassed women. India's academic world splintered and the #MeToo movement emerged as a student movement from within campuses where many students and staff finally had the opportunity to resist a culture of

© 2020 The Author. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.130

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widespread sexism, abuse, and violence rife in Indian academia. Some academics and critics viewed the List as challenging as it left out the names of accusers and specific details of incidents, raising questions about anonymity and accountability. However, the List also received extensive support as for decades survivors have tried unsuccessfully to get justice through the system following informal and formal complaint mechanisms, and the List became a manifestation of years of brewing frustration.

Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) in writing about SGBV against women of colour coined the term 'intersectionality', arguing that we cannot fully understand experiences of women of colour in isolation and their experiences of violence and discrimination are often a result of intersecting patterns of sexism and racism. In the Indian context, it is difficult to speak about SGBV as a unified category of violence and an intersectional lens must be used to understand the violence that exists at the margins of different identities. For example, a *dalit*² woman or a Muslim woman, just by virtue of their caste or religion, may be more subject to violence than an upper-caste, upper-class Hindu woman (Chakravarti 1993). Patriarchal practices in India can also become extremely complex around notions of *izzat* (honour), leading to securitisation of the female body in the form of physical restrictions and boundaries. Since women's bodies are considered to hold the key to family pride, any harm to the female body is seen to have direct repercussions on a family's reputation. This leads to cases of SGBV going largely unreported or being hushed up (Kandiyoti 1988). This plays a big role in shaping the nature of violence on campuses. It is important to recognise the deep-seated misogyny and patriarchy that exist in Indian HE campuses which, on the one hand, propagate a culture of silence around SGBV through mechanisms such as victim blaming and shaming, and on the other, practise patriarchal protectionism by caging women within hostels,³ completely undermining their agency as adult women.

The 16 December 2012 gang-rape⁴ of a young university student in New Delhi started a new phase of feminist activism in India (Dey 2019a, 2019b). Thousands of people came out on the streets across India to not only demand justice, but also to raise their collective voices for women's safety in public spaces and legal reforms around SGBV. The protests that followed also demonstrated the significance of using digital technologies for gender activism, developing solidarity, creating shared identities, and raising consciousness (Dey 2019a). What followed for the next few years was a series of campaigns emanating from the gender politics of university campuses. Campaigns such as Pinjra Tod (Breaking the Cage) have used catchy hashtags to spread awareness and conversations about important issues such as women's right to public spaces and demanding the abolishment of curfew times for women's hostels within campuses. The feminist movement in India has used the public discourse around the

'breaking of silence' in cases of SGBV since the 1980s (Sen 2017). However, after 16 December 2012, this narrative was reinvented when young women across India started sharing their stories of abuse to create communities of solidarity (Dey 2019c). Hence, when the #MeToo movement started, Indian academic campuses were prepared and many of these communities of solidarity had already been formed. The anger that was already brewing found its perfect moment of political opportunity.

Beginning with the online debates post-Sarkar's List, this article explores three specific arguments: (1) the idea of due process, (2) the need for intersectional approaches to fight SGBV in academia, and (3) the ideas of institutional accountability. The article proposes that while the #MeToo movement may have had its drawbacks, it provided the opportunity to question the persistent silence in relation to power dynamics and SGBV in Indian academia. As many academics have pointed out, it must be treated as a moment of self-reflection by both HE institutions and the feminist community to reconsider what 'due process' and institutional accountability mean and how that can be addressed, keeping survivor interests at its core (Chadha 2017).

2 Methodology

The primary data for this research were collected from 40 semi-structured interviews conducted by the author between January 2018 and April 2019 with academics, students, and student activists in colleges and universities across New Delhi. The participants identified themselves as belonging to a diverse range of class, caste, gender, and sexualities. Participants also included survivors and women who came out with #MeToo allegations following the publication of the List. Many of the interviews were conducted through personal contacts and networks with students, academics, and activists. Following this, the snowball sampling method was used to identify and interview other participants.

Harding strongly urges researchers to be mindful of the importance of the experiences of women and states that these experiences can provide access to a social reality not otherwise available, providing 'a more complete and less distorting kind of social experience' (1987: 184). To gain insight into the social and lived reality of campuses, I conducted many of my interviews in an informal manner, spending time with the participants to establish trust and create a safe space for them to speak, often about very intimate experiences. Further, following the work of Clisby (2001), I used the term 'participant' instead of 'interviewees', 'the researched' or 'respondents' to establish a more equal and non-hierarchical relationship between myself and the people with whom the research was conducted. The idea of development of knowledge through meaningful discussions and collaborations with the participants was at the heart of this research and all aspects of data collection and analysis was conducted following a feminist approach.

3 #MeToo and the 'List'

When Sarkar's List was released in October 2017, potentially triggered by a letter published in the *Huffington Post* from Christine Fair listing academics who had abused her (Fair 2017), it led to instant controversy as the names included world-reputed Indian academics, including many well-known left-liberal Indian professors from academic institutions across India (Sanyal 2017). Some said that the List, as it came to be popularly known, was the product of a broken academic system that had failed survivors by not holding powerful sexual predators to account. However, many, including a group of Indian feminists, voraciously disagreed with the List and said that it devalued 'due process'. In an open letter in a blog called *Kafila*, known for its radical politics, feminist perspective, and critical analysis of contemporary events, and read widely by the academic and activist community, noted academic and feminist Nivedita Menon wrote,

As feminists, we have been part of a long struggle to make visible sexual harassment at the workplace, and have worked with the movement to put in place systems of transparent and just procedures of accountability. We are dismayed by the initiative on Facebook, in which men are being listed and named as sexual harassers with no context or explanation (Menon 2017).

The letter was signed by over a dozen acclaimed feminists.

Unlike #MeToo movements in other countries, the List in India did not attract the attention of the state or many of the named institutions. Some universities did address it by urging students and faculty to register formal complaints. However, as stated by a participant, none of the institutions carried out investigations against the named professors. Further, instead of this being a moment of shock and self-reflection, what ensued was what has been called a 'civil war in Indian feminism' causing major ideological rifts in the feminist community (Ghosh 2017).

Debates raged on social media. Many academics came out openly criticising the letter written by Menon (2017) for its tone and positioning. When young feminists needed support, they were confronted with a wall of bureaucracy with 'due process' thrown at their faces – a system that many had tried to access but failed. Young feminists interviewed for this research seemed specifically disgruntled about the fact that their feminist heroes, who always spoke about challenging the system, seemed to have 'changed their tone when it came to their comrades'.⁵

The call for 'due process' from older feminists follows the Justice Verma Committee report (Verma, Seth and Subramaniam 2013)⁶ and the Saksham report (UGC 2013)⁷, which contained detailed recommendations for tackling SGBV within HE. Many of these older feminists were involved in these committees and spent their

lives helping survivors through both their research and activism. However, instead of the List building solidarities across divides, it showed the world the cracks in the Indian feminist movement.

Section 4 will explore the three most important debates highlighted by the List. To dismantle power dynamics in academia and develop a survivor-centred approach to dealing with SGBV that results in larger cultural changes, it is vital to understand the nuances of due process and accountability and that can only be achieved through an intersectional approach. These debates are not only specific to India but were also raised by the global #MeToo movement and are questions which academics, activists, and policymakers in HE across the world are grappling with.

4 Analysis of the #MeToo movement in India

4.1 'Due process' versus 'naming and shaming'

I want to start this argument by addressing the question of 'due process' – the words which tore the feminist community apart. Following the Vishaka judgement⁸ in 1997, the University Grants Commission (UGC) advised all universities to establish permanent gender committees to develop guidelines to combat SGBV within their institutions. The UGC (*Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women Employees and Students in Higher Educational Institutions*) regulation was brought into force by an official gazette on 2 May 2016. This regulation mandated every university to have an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) with elected student representatives for the prevention, prohibition, and redressal of SGBV on campus. It also strongly advocated for all HE institutions to put in place support structures, infrastructural development (e.g. better lighting, transportation, toilets) and sensitisation mechanisms to ensure safety and accessibility for all students on campus. However, interviews conducted for this research across campuses in New Delhi show that few have working ICCs in place. Even if committees exist on paper, in many cases, they remain inactive.

During interviews, many students spoke of victim blaming, slut shaming, threats, and social stigma propagated by institutional authorities such as wardens, security staff, academic staff, and management when it came to reporting cases of SGBV. Some students explained how they had been advised by professors and members of the ICC not to file complaints.⁹ Some others had been blamed by hostel wardens, professors, and members of management for their own harassment or in some cases told blatantly that what they faced 'cannot be termed as harassment'.¹⁰ In other cases, parents were informed by wardens and management of their daughters' 'misconduct' when they tried to file formal complaints.¹¹ Pujari (2017) talks about similar experiences in her work with students and staff in universities across Mumbai. A petition issued by a women's collective called Pinjra Tod¹² in 2017 to the UGC, said:

Unfortunately, even nearly a year since its coming into force, the Regulation remains barely recognized by most universities and colleges across the country and almost nowhere implemented in its full scope... We are extremely dismayed to see that the UGC, having notified the regulation, seems to have taken no initiative to implement it, despite it being binding in nature and including a long list of actions to be taken by the UGC in case of non-compliance (Pinjra Tod 2017).

It is important to keep in mind that Menon's (2017) letter perhaps spoke of a specific kind of institutional mechanism. Menon herself and most other academics and activists who signed the letter are a part of the faculty at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), a public university and a premier centre of learning in India. In JNU, an independent, elected sexual harassment committee, the Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment (GSCASH), has existed since the Vishaka judgement, with both student and teacher representatives. People from across campus communities – students, and administrative and academic staff and workers – can file complaints to GSCASH if they face any form of SGBV. To maintain autonomy from the institution, the committee also consists of an external expert to oversee the enquiry process. GSCASH, being independent of the institution, also ensures that hierarchies in the university cannot influence its outcome or tamper with proceedings, even if the complaints are against someone in a position of power (Priyadarshini 2018). Once the enquiry is completed, the recommendations are passed on to the university administration. Apart from this, the committee also carries out sensitisation activities throughout the year. Many of the feminists who signed the letter have tirelessly fought to establish and maintain GSCASH for more than two decades.

It is not only academics and the feminist community in JNU; students across the board have shown immense faith in GSCASH. This was evident in 2017 when GSCASH was dismantled overnight by the university administration (Priyadarshini 2018). Both the students' and teachers' associations, across political parties and disciplines, rose in protest against the university's decision.¹³ Despite being dismantled, GSCASH elections were still held and student representatives were nominated. GSCASH continues to function as a body that, regardless of being divested of all its powers, has been dealing with student complaints, supporting students, and conducting sensitisation workshops.¹⁴

However, many of the students who fought for GSCASH also supported the List.¹⁵ These were not young feminists who devalued due process but were students who acknowledged that it did not always work the way it should because of power dynamics, hierarchies, and ideas of shame attached to any form of SGBV. While Menon's letter did acknowledge this – 'We too know the process is harsh and often tilted against the complainant. We remain committed to strengthening these processes' (Menon 2017)

– it largely did not address the power relations in academia that the List specifically highlighted. Even the Verma Committee (Verma *et al.* 2013) and the Saksham (UGC 2013) reports largely failed to acknowledge this issue, focusing mainly on student-on-student violence rather than staff-on-student violence.

While GSCASH as a sexual harassment committee and redressal mechanism may work, the letter failed to acknowledge that most universities across India do not have existing committees to address sexual harassment. Further, while most students from JNU who were interviewed spoke generously about GSCASH, there were others who spoke about their insecurity about registering a formal complaint due to fear of being victim blamed and lack of support from their peers. This fear was amplified in participants who came from a *dalit* background. An interview participant who identified as *dalit*, queer, and disabled spoke about her horrific experience of harassment in JNU. After she had spoken out about her experiences, she was completely ostracised by her peers. Others also blamed her harassment on her disability. She confided in her supervisor who, without her consent, 'gossiped' about her experience with colleagues in JNU and she came to be known in the department as the 'girl who was harassed'. Unable to cope with the social isolation and humiliation, she was forced to quit her PhD.¹⁶ The presence of due process does not ensure that students and staff feel comfortable filing formal complaints.

Many academics also disagree about pitting 'due process' against 'naming and shaming' as both mechanisms are necessary and can work alongside one another (John 2019; Roy 2019). As Roy (2017) states, 'Indian feminism has always been more than simply seeking "due process" – it has been street plays, naked protest, acts of mindless loitering, and even a panty¹⁷'. The feminist movement has used both or more such mechanisms together to fight for justice and change. A good example of this is the activism against dowry deaths in the 1970s and 1980s. While some women's groups demanded a complete overhaul of existing laws on dowry, which at the time were immensely inadequate, others mobilised around tactics of humiliating the in-laws and husbands by shouting slogans and demanding punishment outside their homes (Gandhi and Shah 1992).

4.2 The question of caste

Perhaps one of the most important debates raised by the List is the urgent need for the feminist movement to be more intersectional and look at HE spaces not only through a gendered lens but also through the lens of caste. Discrimination and violence related to caste, which is central to the experiences of *dalit* Bahujan Adivasi (DBA) women, even in relation to SGBV, are often ignored in the HE context. DBA students are not only absent from many of the spaces of critical debate in academia, but they are considered imposters only there because of reservation/affirmative action rather than their own merit. Hence, according

to Bargi, in the HE space, DBA bodies are marked twice, 'once as special bodies that are different from the general castes. Secondly, as illegitimate bodies with "undue privilege"' (2017: 3). Deshpande (2013) writes that upper-caste identity can be overwritten by professional identities of choice, but lower caste identity overwrites all other identities and becomes more indelibly engraved over time. These dynamics shape academic spaces and hence a DBA student's experience needs careful unravelling.

John (2019) describes the relationships between students and academics as more feudal than capitalist within institutions which are structurally patriarchal, sexist, casteist, and queerphobic, with the social composition of faculty being overwhelmingly upper-class, upper-caste, and male. In this context, the notion that DBA women have equal access and support to reporting mechanisms, is what Chadha (2017: 5) calls 'misplaced optimism', with DBA women often trapped between gender and a sense of loyalty to the caste group. DBA women are often forced to choose either one of their identities: seeking solidarity in the feminist movement which is largely dominated by upper-caste women, or in male-dominated *dalit* spaces where the gender question is trivialised (Ayyar 2017).

Children grow up in India in specific class- and caste-segregated social circles. Their options of schools and preliminary education are often a result of their social backgrounds. Hence, HE institutions and campuses are the first, and perhaps the only time, that people get the opportunity to break these social norms and coexist in the same social spaces. This makes universities the perfect space to challenge and critically engage with questions of caste, class, and gender. In the introduction to an edited collection called *The Idea of a University*, Apoorvanand (2018) states that in a highly stratified society such as India, where people are bound by various social norms, universities are perhaps the only space where young men and women can find the opportunity and the confidence to break social barriers. However, many of the participants interviewed for the research pointed out that discussions and intermingling seldom happen as students from different class, caste, and religious backgrounds often adhere to their own social circles. Hence, instead of challenging existing norms, many students end up propagating them.

Student activists from a DBA background interviewed for this research also point out that most feminist campaigns and movements on campuses are led by 'upper-class, upper-caste, anglicised women', who pay little attention to women from marginalised communities or rural backgrounds.¹⁸ Historically, DBA women have been denied even the most basic human rights. However, their lived realities and oppression seldom forms part of the larger feminist agenda (Dhanaraj 2018). The lack of DBA women in leadership positions and their mostly complete absence in decision-making spaces has led to a lot of conversation around caste.¹⁹ In these circumstances, the concerns raised by the List and

the urgent need for intersectional feminist politics in HE become ever so important. According to Roy,

With the List, *dalit* Bahujan Adivasi feminists decentered Savarna feminists, and disrupted, perhaps for the first time, nationalist framings of Indian feminism by revealing a vast terrain of multiple contestations and power relations. Rejecting their description as 'millennial feminists', minority activists framed the controversy around the List in terms of the power imbalances between Savarna and *dalit*, Bahujan and Adivasi feminists (Roy 2019: 7).

The List helped to bring to people's attention some of these stagnant and often hidden debates, making the feminist movement perhaps more intersectional than ever before.

4.3 Institutional accountability

Apart from 'due process', the other term that has been much debated following publication of the List is 'accountability'. However, in order to fully unpack this, there is a need to understand the current socio-political situation of universities which have been described as 'battlefields' (Apoorvanand 2018: 7). Since 2014, university campuses have witnessed continuous repression from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Indian government in the form of violence (Thapar 2016), charges of sedition (Mehta 2016), cancellation of scholarships for minority students (Pisharoty 2015), securitisation of campuses (e.g. CCTV cameras, extra guards) (Kidwai 2015a, 2015b), the banning of particular books (Jacob 2018), charges against faculty for dissent (PTI 2019), the banning of unions/elections (Mani 2019), along with an accelerated push towards privatisation (Apoorvanand 2018; Dutta 2016). This has been part of the government's agenda of stifling dissent on campuses as some of the loudest voices of critique against the government's Hindu, right-wing, nationalist agenda have come from academic spaces. Students involved in activism have been portrayed, both by the government and large sections of mainstream media, as 'wasting taxpayers' money' based on the education and food subsidies they receive (Farooqi 2018). The notion that since public universities receive state funding, they are accountable to state bodies, has been heavily critiqued (Collini 2017; Jayal 2018). However, the government continues to demand this accountability from public university students as a test of their love for their nation.

Dutta, describing the current Indian HE sector, states:

The neoliberal university is less a space for critical engagement, debate and inquiry, and more a skills factory for the technocratic workplaces owned by transnational capital. In the neoliberal university the student is a product, packaged for the marketplace in marketing slogans and brand identities. Professors are measured in economic terms of productivity and efficiency and cast in the branding race (Dutta 2016).

We must also understand HE as a neoliberal space that fosters violence. In their research, Phipps and Young (2015) speak about the relations between neoliberalism and sexual violence in HE in the UK. They state that in the marketised university, education is reduced to a transactional exchange. Many of their research participants described violence such as 'casual groping' as part and parcel of academic life. The most cruel and shocking aspects capture the media and public consciousness, while the normal everyday violence gets lost. These points were reiterated by many of the participants interviewed for this research. Phipps further states,

In the neoliberal university though, it's all about the bottom line. Supporting students costs money. Complaining students cost reputation (and threaten income streams). There is a cost/benefit equation here. But whose cost counts?... Sexual harassment and violence in higher education are situated within cost/benefit frameworks which prioritise the welfare of the institution. Incidents must be hushed up lest they jeopardise our recruitment. Incidents must be hushed up lest they damage our reputation (Phipps 2015).

Every HE institution has a duty of care towards its students and staff. However, while Indian institutions demand continuous accountability from their students and staff, they provide little in return.²⁰ When neoliberal institutions actively try to cover up cases of SGBV, and 'due process' either does not exist or fails to serve its purpose, students and staff are left with very few options. Due to fear, stigma, and lack of support, it is rare for students to file police complaints. In that case, the question that many academics and activists are grappling with is: 'How do we hold academic institutions accountable for SGBV?'. I asked this question to every participant I interviewed for this research and most advocated two measures: sensitisation and activism.

Most participants point towards a serious lack of education around gender issues on campus. There is an urgent need for HE institutions to conduct sensitisation initiatives for not only students but also for members of faculty, workers, and administration aimed towards addressing a change of culture. Some of the activities used by universities in New Delhi are film screenings, panel discussions, open meetings, reading groups, and workshops. But there is a lack of evidence-based research to show how these initiatives have changed the culture. Pujari (2017) talks about the certificate course in gender studies run by her college in Mumbai to build a critical feminist perspective among students. This two-month course is led by students and allows them to talk openly about gender issues and think of ways they can challenge existing perceptions and structural violence. Pujari states that since the start of the course in 2014 they have noticed 'significant shifts in perceptions among students, openness to ideas, and greater conversation on gender and sexuality on campus' (*ibid.*: 3).

For those universities with existing ICCs, committee members are not always sensitised or trained to deal with complaints. Many of them have indulged in victim blaming,²¹ and cases have been leaked and anonymity compromised.²² As a student points out, 'the first step of accountability is to make them understand they are accountable'.²³ Participants also emphasised the urgent need for training and sensitisation of security staff who are often the first point of contact for students in relation to violence on campus.²⁴ HE spaces must ensure safety from the perspective of guaranteeing students their freedom, autonomy, and privacy without resorting to patriarchal protectionism (Kidwai 2015b). Sen (2017) points out that sensitisations cannot be the sole responsibility of the gender committees and need to involve all community stakeholders by crafting an ongoing process of conversations and continuous engendering of academic disciplines.

However, sensitisation alone is insufficient, and it must go hand-in-hand with activism and dissent. As an academic said, 'It is the job of not just the sexual harassment committees but each one of us to hold the institutions accountable through our activism'.²⁵ There is a need to understand sexual violence as a political issue and not an individual issue. In her 1970 essay, Carol Hanisch used the term 'the personal is political' to justify the significance of the personal experiences of women and to establish that personal experiences are a result of larger societal and political structures and inequalities. She emphasised the importance of raising awareness to inform women and to understand the different layers of oppression that exist in society.

Another participant states that the List started the conversation and made people more receptive.²⁶ Hence, at this critical junction, there needs to be more support and solidarity than ever before from different stakeholders through meaningful conversations and action, to fill the hole left behind by the #MeToo movement. Page, Bull and Chapman state in their most recent research that to fully implement cultural change, different forms of activism need to operate at different temporalities with a combination of both long-term and short-term approaches:

Cultural change takes time and, therefore, in conjunction with developing long-term, sustainable cultural change within an institution, other forms of activism including naming, departmental, and sector-led activism, and feminist direct action are also needed to bring urgent and sustained attention to this issue (Page *et al.* 2019: 1324).

So, at every stage there is a need for teachers' unions, student unions, feminist collectives, and others to step in and force institutions to be accountable through research, lobbying, mobilisation, and collective action. It is the responsibility of the institution to be accountable, and the responsibility of community

members to hold institutions to account through discussions, debates, and dissent. Only then can we create a 'powerful space where one's individual and collective intellectual energies are sharpened and multiplied so that injustices can be named and shamed, and alternatives may be imagined and thought through' (Orsini 2018: 213).

5 Conclusion

The #MeToo movement and List have finally challenged a system that has silently oppressed and harassed women across generations. Along with that, it has torn apart the feminist community in India. As Chadha states, 'sadly, the lack of care, trust, and most importantly, restraint on both sides has led us to damage which might take a long time to be repaired' (2017: 3). Further, since 2014, Indian students and academics have been under constant threat from a Hindu right-wing nationalist government which has actively propagated a culture of hate towards minorities along with the 'saffronisation' of the education system. Its patriarchal ideas on gender has been reflected in recent HE policies and practices that have promoted securitisation and patriarchal protectionism rather than freedom. This makes the fight of making institutions accountable even more difficult as the feminist community now not only has to fight institutions but also the state, which has shown little support for progressive gender policies (Roy 2016; Chaudhry 2016; Biswas 2020).²⁷

The findings of this article highlight three important debates that emerged from the List and #MeToo movement in India: the politics of 'naming and shaming' as opposed to due process, the urgent need for the feminist collective and organisations to be more intersectional, and the meaning of 'institutional accountability'.

One of the participants, speaking about the List, stated that it was important and timely to have these discussions around power dynamics in academia as many students and staff from minority backgrounds or working on short-term precarious contracts are unable to file formal complaints. Further, a patriarchal culture of shame and stigma around issues of SGBV exists on most campuses and becomes another barrier. This is amplified by lack of support from peers, institutions, and families.²⁸ Hence, even when formal mechanisms exist, they remain largely inaccessible. So, the ways in which larger cultural changes can be implemented in Indian HE by making power structures visible and questioning existing structures and mechanisms, require further research.

Large numbers of participants spoke about the urgent need to develop an intersectional feminist understanding and practice where the voices of marginalised women are central. As the anti-caste feminist collective Dalit Women Fight stated post publication of the List,

To those that may reprimand us for speaking of gender justice before the battle against caste is won, we say that structural violence cannot be separated; neither for analysis nor for action. The intersectional impact of caste and gender is manifold, the appropriate response multi-pronged. Always... Dismantling institutions that reek of patriarchy and caste is a long haul for anti-caste feminism and all women – from the margins to the centre, from the poorest to the most empowered. We all will get to live in a better world if it's done (Dalit Women Fight 2018).

Accountability is not only the responsibility of institutions but it is also the responsibility of the academic communities to hold institutions accountable for their actions. Such negotiations and debates are integral to academic freedom (Farooqi 2018; Jayal 2018; Orsini 2018). In neoliberal academic institutions where the idea of duty of care is seldom practised, it is only through a combination of both short-term actions such as naming and shaming, and direct action, along with long-term mechanisms such as lobbying and research, that larger cultural change can be truly implemented (Page *et al.* 2019).

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Adrija Dey, British Academy Research Fellow and Teaching Fellow, SOAS University of London, UK.
- 2 *Dalits* (or formerly 'untouchables') are at the bottom of the Hindu caste system in India and despite laws to protect them, they still face widespread discrimination and abuse.
- 3 Most women's hostels in Indian HE have curfew times which are specifically implemented in the name of protecting women, leading to severe curtailment of their freedom and mobility.
- 4 On 16 December 2012, Jyoti Singh, a female physiotherapy student from New Delhi, was repeatedly raped by six men on a bus while making her way home with a male friend after watching a movie. Her male companion, who tried to protest, was also gagged and beaten. After they lost consciousness, the beaten and half-naked bodies of both victims were thrown from the bus into the street. They were discovered by a passer-by and were immediately taken to hospital. After 13 days spent fighting for her life, Jyoti Singh passed away. Abiding by Indian law, the actual name of the victim was never used by the media and pseudonyms such as '*Nirbhaya*' (fearless) were used. The case came to be known as the *Nirbhaya* case.

- 5 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 6 After the 16 December 2012 rape case, a three-member committee was set up by the government headed by former Chief Justice J.S. Verma to review sex crime law. The committee submitted the Verma Committee report which suggested amendments to the Criminal Law related to rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, child sexual abuse, medical examination of victims, police, and electoral and educational reforms.
- 7 The Saksham report was submitted by a task force appointed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in India to review measures for ensuring the safety of women on campuses and programmes for gender sensitisation. It was the first of its kind and engaged in a broad process of dialogue with policymakers, administrators, faculty, staff, and students to develop a set of recommendations.
- 8 Vishaka versus State of Rajasthan was the landmark case where the Supreme Court dealt with the question of safety of women from any kind of sexual harassment at the workplace and laid down detailed guidelines for the same. See Vishaka & Others vs State of Rajasthan & Others (AIR 1997 SC 3011).
- 9 Participant 5, 3 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 10 Participant 9, 20 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 11 Participant 14, 17 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 12 With the idea of reclaiming public places, in 2015 an autonomous women's collective of students and alumni of colleges from across New Delhi called Pinjra Tod was formed to make hostel and paying guest accommodation regulations less regressive and restrictive for women students. Pinjra Tod work towards countering the 'security narrative' which is structured around securitisation of the bodies of women and patriarchal protectionism.
- 13 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 14 Participant 4, 2 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 15 Participant 3, 1 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 4, 2 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 11, 31 July 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 16 Participant 16, 11 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 17 This is in reference to the pink panty campaign in India in 2009; see *Feminism in India*.
- 18 Participant 17, 3 April 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 19 Participant 17, 3 April 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 20 Participant 6, 4 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 21 Participant 5, 3 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 22 Participant 7, 16 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 23 Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 24 Participant 9, 20 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 25 Participant 15, 11 August 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 26 Participant 16, 1 March 2019, interview, New Delhi.
- 27 Also mentioned by Participant 7, 6 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 6, 4 February 2018, interview, New Delhi; Participant 10, 21 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.
- 28 Participant 8, 16 February 2018, interview, New Delhi.

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Multilevel Responses to Sexual Violence in Schools in West Africa^{*†}

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Abstract With growing recognition of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) occurring in schools, the governments of Burkina Faso and Benin, partnered with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have attempted to implement systems of response within the school environment. This empirical study applied the socioecological framework to highlight the intersecting relationship of multiple contexts within society including the interpersonal, family, community, school, and national identities. The findings revealed inadequacies and possibilities for holistic action and accountability in both countries. Data were analysed from qualitative interviews with Beninese and Burkinabe government ministries, international and local NGOs, and community organisations. Barriers exposed complex difficulties in holding perpetrators accountable and sustainably moving towards collective action as a result of entrenched gender dynamics and social norms. However, there are pockets of action to protect victims and hold perpetrators responsible through considering communitarian ideals in addition to official policies. This study offers insight into two nations struggling to develop contextual responses of possibility.

Keywords sub-Saharan Africa, Burkina Faso, Benin, sexual and gender-based violence, schools, multilevel response.

1 Introduction

Victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are starting to be recognised in educational institutions and are now seeing their perpetrators held accountable for their crimes in many places around the world. Sexual violence in this context can include unwanted sexual comments, touching, harassment, forced sex, rape, coercive behaviours such as pressure for sexual favours, and transactional sex. Perpetrators of this violence can include teachers, students, administrators, and community members (Dunne, Humphreys and Leach 2006; Lee *et al.* 1996; UNGEI 2018). However, in Benin and Burkina Faso, victims are often not heard

© 2020 The Authors. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.131

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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020 'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.



in relation to SGBV (Antonowicz 2010; Diawara *et al.* 2013). This article explores why the silence remains around SGBV in schools in these two countries and how different levels of society are responding to the violence.

The stigmatised phenomenon, while documented in both Benin and Burkina Faso (Devers *et al.* 2012; Zare, Yaro and Dan-Koma 2008), continues to be covered in veils of silence, perpetuating a culture of lack of accountability. For example, studies in Benin found that three quarters of adolescent girls report some form of sexual violation from teachers, and that 80 per cent of girls knew of students approached by teachers for sex (Akpo 2008; *La Nouvelle Tribune* 2018a; Wible 2004). In Burkina Faso, physical and sexual violence and harassment against girls and women were found to be commonplace, and accepted as normal, in every aspect of society (Forsyth-Queen, Gonzalez and Meehan 2015; Zare *et al.* 2008). From a study of pregnant schoolgirls, 10 per cent reported getting pregnant by their teachers (Diawara *et al.* 2013). Despite being a common phenomenon in both countries, there is a dearth of sufficient, peer-reviewed research on this subject.

Both Benin and Burkina Faso have worked with the international community, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and Plan International to incorporate policies and laws aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to increase girls' enrolment and completion of secondary school education, provide safe schooling, and decrease unwanted teenage pregnancy. However, this article highlights how the current response is inadequate for the nature of the phenomenon in West Africa and does not fully consider social norms that create barriers to enforcement of laws and implementation of policies, or consider a holistic, communitarian response.

2 Current responses

Collective action, often found in social movements, generates success in implementing policy change when movements are able to raise awareness among the masses towards the social problem, develop links to privileged networks to influence key decision makers, and organise a critical mass of people to take committed and sustained action (Novelli 2010). With past feminist mobilisation globally, collective action has occurred out of state capacity and institutional legacies (Weldon and Htun 2013). In Benin and Burkina Faso, past mobilisation against sexual violence in schools within the last decade lacked a critical mass, while small-scale grass-roots efforts were often assisted and defined by transnational agencies. International policy agendas, such as the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UN General Assembly 1993), and most recently SDG 5, focusing on the elimination of violence against girls and women (Hughes 2017) have driven many of the government programmes and law reform, but have not led to social movements in which a large organised group of citizens demand change.

Rather than an authentic social movement organised at the grass-roots level, government action such as policies and laws has often come after international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) have given funds to pressure the government into addressing the social issues. In Benin, the beginnings of collective action came out of conferences and workshops with young girls across the country organised by Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) Benin and the National Network for the Promotion of Girls' Education. This led to 2006 legislation addressing sexual harassment in schools, punishing perpetrators with fines and imprisonment (République du Bénin Assemblée Nationale 2006; Séné 2010). Moreover, aided by USAID and WiLDAF advocacy (Arnoff *et al.* 2013), in 2012, a more comprehensive law was passed bringing a multidisciplinary response to violence against women, including prevention, protection, and punishment in education, work, and family life (Hughes 2017; République du Bénin Assemblée Nationale 2012). In the absence of sufficient government funding, INGOs and UN agencies have supported the implementation of laws and policies including school-based prevention programmes, and service provision, such as One Stop Centres, that still remain severely underfunded (Hughes 2017).

Similar limited actions have occurred in Burkina Faso. Policies have emerged from the traditional pressure applied by INGOs and NGOs within the country. For example, in 2018, the National Assembly passed a law that prohibits teachers from having sexual relationships with students under the age of 18. While this new law that directly named teachers is known in the education sector, most policies around combating SGBV in schools are unknown. For example, the National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education (SNAEF) 2012–2021 (Government of Burkina Faso 2012), targeted to reduce violence against girls in schools by 50 per cent by 2021, is not widely known, nor is there any visible evidence that the systems proposed in the action plan have been implemented (*ibid.*). This indicates an absence of pressure from local, organised groups to hold the government accountable for following through on policies, strategies, and laws.

Although there are recent policies and laws responding to the violence, the lack of enforcement demonstrates a lack of commitment to addressing SGBV. Research has found that social norms appear to trump international pressure in Benin and Burkina Faso, and are perpetuated by a systematic oppression of women through barriers to implementation, by men responsible for implementing the law, corruption related to familial ties, and traditional, religious, and ancestral leaders who may in part encourage gender inequality and inhibit state-led implementation (Hughes 2017; Spear 2018).

3 The nature of collective action at different levels of society

This article highlights the intersecting relationship of multiple contexts within society using a multi-tiered socioecological theory of the World Health Organization (WHO) model on violence (WHO 2002). This framework offers a unique lens to understand the pervasiveness of gender oppression that creates an environment for SGBV as well as obstacles to stopping such violence at multiple levels (Cowie and Dawn 2007a). This framework has also recently been applied to minimum standards to prevent SGBV globally (UNGEI 2018). The results of this study are presented at different levels to demonstrate the rooted complexity of social norms that include gender inequalities entrenched at each level. In examining the data using the ecological theory, hidden pockets of collective action, resistance, or responses to combating the violence are explored, with a call for engaging key stakeholders and various audiences, while exploring, through a different lens, the obstacles to collective movements. This allows for an analysis that acknowledges the interactive spheres of influence (Meinck *et al.* 2015) between the individual, interpersonal community, and societal levels, and the possibilities of holistic response.

4 Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to gather and analyse data from interviews with key stakeholders. Data for this study were generated from 38 semi-structured interviews (24 in Benin and 14 in Burkina Faso) with participants from government ministries, INGOs, local NGOs, and community organisations in July 2016. The interviews in Benin were conducted in the commercial capital of Cotonou, as well as semi-urban environments in the north and west of the country. In Burkina Faso, interviews took place in Ouagadougou, as well as in the north and east regions of the country. Interview questions included themes related to the nature of relationships between male teachers and adolescent girls, the nature of consent, the impacts of these relationships, and challenges and successes in response and prevention. Participants were recruited and enrolled to the study through purposive and snowball sampling. All interviews were conducted in French by the authors and then translated into English. Data analysis involved developing codes into families and overarching themes.

5 Findings

5.1 Individual

The individual level demonstrates intrapersonal understandings and individual attitudes embedded within larger constructs (Cowie and Dawn 2007a) that can increase the likelihood of becoming a victim of violence through these risk factors (CDC 2015). This is embedded within gendered norms that impose stigma and shame upon survivors (McCleary-Sills *et al.* 2016). In the analysis at the individual level within this framework, this is not in order to place responsibility or blame, but rather

to demonstrate harmful victim blaming or placing undue responsibility on the victim to pursue justice. In this section, we explore the theme of individual responsibility of the victim to hold their attacker accountable.

Victim's disclosure: Participants hinted at students' fear of breaking the social code of silence in order to protect themselves from being ostracised. For example, the head of a commune-level social service centre in Benin explained that 'girls do not complain... during awareness raisings, we educate students to denounce... but they think the teachers have a lot of power... or it is in the family... people have fear... in the schools, there are no statistics.' In Burkina Faso, the president of a local community association similarly articulated that 'if you do not want to have problems, you'll be silent. So, the idea of denouncing them is all well and good, but usually she does not dare to do it.'

Both countries demonstrate examples of victims' ongoing fear of disclosure of sexual violence, which may hinder the ability to hold predators accountable as well as to develop local movements to combat such violence. INGO programmes focus heavily on training individual bystanders and victims to go to the authorities to report SGBV. Policies offer protection for victims and have systems of reporting; however, these policies are not enforced. Rather, social norms that adhere to fear and stigma continue to be an obstacle for reporting cases of sexual violence and harassment.

5.2 Interpersonal

This level considers the manner in which adults and young people communicate, and how these interactions may lead to parents and other adults aiding victims in denouncing perpetrators (Cowie and Dawn 2007a). It is at this level that social movements in both countries have focused their work. For example, the female high school teachers who formed the local association Association for the Promotion of Girls and Women (Association Pour le Promotion de les Filles et les Femmes – APEFF) in Burkina Faso often disregard the systems of reporting set up through official policies, but rather combat violence at the interpersonal level. This is in line with social and cultural norms of West African societies, where resolutions are found through informal systems at the intrapersonal level, preserving relationships.

Parents: Parents appear to enforce social norms of silence and shame victims by refusing to report violence or support the child. For example, a representative at the Ministry of Youth and Adolescents in Benin articulated,

The family is more reticent of reacting to incidents of violence... They choose and like to deal with issues at home... for the case of rape... it is shameful for the family... therefore, there is often an exchange of money between the family.

In Burkina Faso, a female INGO employee added: 'Parents are often complicit. They themselves do not believe the girl or want to report [sexual violence].' However, parent associations provide an opportunity for possible collective action. The role of women and mothers are noted as key to supporting their children, assuming they would be more willing to combat the silence and stigma against victims. A representative of an INGO in Benin articulates:

The parents' associations are dominated by men... women's opinions were not considered by the men... Parents' associations in the past were more important... but Association des Mères Éducatrices [AME] [mothers' associations] have become more important... but only Association des Peres Éducatrices [fathers' associations] gets money from the government.

An NGO representative in Burkina Faso further explains this possibility: 'When mothers have the means they will choose to educate all their children. So, we support the income-generating activities of the AME.' The role of parents does not appear to be helpful in reporting violence that occurs; however, mothers do continue to be thought of as a potential protective factor.

Teachers: Teachers are often tasked with preventing and responding to violence in schools. However, the normalisation of predatory behaviour and abuse of power is present. In Benin, a National Inspector of Schools described: 'For teachers, a girl should not refuse... it's a shame for them... it becomes a challenge that you have to take.' A government official working on gender issues in the Ministry of Education in Burkina Faso further explains:

It can be cases of sexual harassment, by teachers, not all though, who abuse or influence girls; something like, if you want to better understand the course, come to my place. Once there, he abuses the student. This teacher can give the student these explanations as promised or not but gives her good grades. We call it sexually transmitted grades.

The difficulties girls encounter in rejecting sexual advances are often due to the transactional nature of sexual interactions in the Benin and Burkinabe context, resulting from unequal power dynamics. Teachers are acknowledged as sexual predators in both Benin and Burkina Faso. However, what is not directly mentioned is that school colleagues may know what occurs and stay silent, as noted within several interviews with teachers, where colleagues do not report the behaviour, citing fear for their jobs and wellbeing.

The role of boys: Several participants spoke of the culpability of male students and their entrenchment in sexual practices between teachers and girls. A Beninese NGO representative explained: 'It is difficult for the teacher if there is not an

intermediary. They must create a situation for exchange... it is the teacher who profits... it is the boys who look for good notes.' In Burkina Faso, the role of boys was discussed not as intermediary for male teachers but as predators themselves. Participants acknowledged the destructive masculinity that boys are socialised to enact. The president of a local association stated:

In the family, the boy must be turbulent, he must be aggressive... So then, for no reason at all he wants to fight and perhaps he encounters a girl on the route to school... there is nothing she can do to avoid it. If you take a class with a girl and she refuses you, you must beat her.

Boys in both countries, although manifesting differently in each context, are discussed as either assisting possibilities of sexual violence and exploitation or partaking in the normalisation of their role as predators themselves. The role and complexities of parents, teachers, and boys contribute to the lack of collective action illustrated by the normalisation of violence, oppression, and silence.

5.3 Community

At this level, systematic influences (Cowie and Dawn 2007a) are critical in understanding the role of violence in a society, based on how community networks respond. Benin and Burkina Faso have worked to develop the infrastructure that supports combating SGBV and allows for the implementation of laws. However, participants in this study stated that reporting and response does not happen at the community level.

Social services: Disinvestment in social services provides an example of the lack of sufficient state commitment to responding to incidences of violence and to the implementation of legislation, therefore hindering action by eliminating a space for victims and advocates to report violence. A representative at a Beninese Social Service Centre at the department level illustrates that:

The director is not always free to listen... and there are only two social workers at the department level of social service... I, myself do all the awareness raising for the department... there are not enough therapists to listen... there is not enough money.

Furthermore, in Burkina Faso, a government official, tasked with implementing trainings, reiterated: 'As I told you, we do not have the resources to carry out our actions plan [sic].' In both Benin and Burkina Faso, community support is weakened by lack of state capacity and resources to social services, where justice could be preserved, perpetrators held accountable, and victims protected.

Impunity: In both countries, cultural and societal norms related to shame, male privilege, and preference for handling things

privately in the home or between families allows for a lack of accountability and legal enforcement. For example, a local Beninese NGO representative stated: 'Without punishment, people continue... there are certain situations that there is compliance, but also not... there is the situation where the police are very close to the teacher...'. In Burkina Faso, the female president of a local Burkinabe association articulated: 'It is really quite serious and while we have to go to the police about it, often it is the police who bring these girls to be married.' Additionally, a regional minister from the Ministry of Education in Burkina Faso, stated: 'All these [types of violence] exist but it is not reported. The culture of accountability is not present in our minds.' According to the participants, those responsible for enforcing accountability at the local and regional levels often are complicit or do not take action, illustrating impunity.

5.4 Societal

This level relates to the wider society including social and cultural norms that might support violence through economic and social policies and inequalities (Cowie and Dawn 2007a). This helps maintain a climate in which violence is either encouraged or inhibited, and in maintaining economic or social inequalities between groups (CDC 2015). It is at this level that national laws and policies are created and where enforcement is centred.

Laws: The laws responding to sexual violence in each country are often vague and not implemented or enforced, as mentioned earlier. For example, a former Beninese secondary school teacher and NGO worker explained, in response to the 2012 law against violence: 'The law is not applied. The people do not know the law. The NGOs do not raise awareness. It exists, but they do not know it.' Moreover, in Burkina Faso, a Burkinabe INGO representative illustrated that:

The law forbids [forced marriage and rape] because the Family Law is very clear. There is no right to marry a minor child, that is clear. We do not have the right to force because you must ask for consent. So, these acts are condemned [by law], but as it is cultural, people do not want to denounce violations.

Both Benin and Burkina Faso provide evidence of laws, often that emerged from the beginnings of collective action, that are completely stymied by lack of enforcement and cultural shame. National stakeholders did not demonstrate critical reflection on the limitation of the laws, or what is needed to challenge and ultimately alter the social norms of silence with their deeply entrenched marginalisation of girls and women that encourages impunity. All reported the existence of the violence, talked of the phenomenon, and affirmed the ill consequences endured by victims. Nevertheless, despite much proposed action, few responses are occurring. Thus, impunity continues to be the norm at the community and societal levels.

6 Accountability

While there may be pockets of resistance via actions towards policies, national studies, and small-scale awareness campaigns, this research shows that there was an inability or unwillingness to take effective action to combat sexual violence across all levels. At the national level, there was no evidence provided by participants in either country that existing policies were effectively implemented by individuals, groups such as teachers or parents, or at the community level. There was also no systematic mechanism for reporting, almost guaranteeing that denouncing crimes of a sexual nature will not happen. Lawmakers and organisational influencers themselves admit that laws are not enforced, perhaps partly due to the lack of structured reporting mechanisms, which despite being written into policies and action plans, have not yet been implemented. This major shortcoming renders laws ineffective at combating sexual violence, supports the social norms of silence, and helps avoid accountability.

When national responses are absent or lack the strength to protect citizens, grass-roots organisations can mobilise to apply pressure for systematic change (Weldon and Htun 2013). However, at the local and regional levels in both countries, collective action is lacking to place substantial pressure on government agencies, schools, or other community institutions to protect victims or potential victims. Sustainable accountability is avoided as a result of entrenched gender oppression, and an inability to effectively hold perpetrators accountable as a result of social norms and a culture of shame related to disclosure, which in turn leads to impunity. Participants passively pointed to the culture of silence and stigmatisation of victims as explanations for the lack of reporting.

Participants spoke of gender inequality through statements on forced marriage, lack of consent, the socialisation of girls to be passive and meek, and the culture of aggressive masculinity. Several participants noted that there is really no such thing as girls or women being able to decline sexual advances; thus denouncing sexual acts as violent or of having an outside court determine violence becomes difficult and complex.

Although marginalised groups such as women often have pockets of agency that can lead to organised social movements, important factors must be in place to allow for collective action (Novelli 2010; Weldon and Htun 2013). For example, the recent global #MeToo campaign involves breaking silence and denouncing perpetrators to hold them responsible. However, this has elements which are yet to be seen in Burkina Faso and Benin: a privileged class willing to continually and sustainably speak out (Novelli 2010), long-term activists and legacies of women's movements (Weldon and Htun 2013), building steps toward collective action with an increased critical mass of opposition, and friendly international media sources that support the movement (Jaffe 2018).

This suggests that these two countries may not yet be ready for a movement that mirrors exactly what has been seen from #MeToo globally (loussouf 2018). Thus far, grass-roots elements have not been able to build sustained action nor have individuals in positions of power broken the veil of silence around SGBV in schools, likely due to fear of retaliation. This is supported by recent research that demonstrates that familial, social, and political pressure often prevents perpetrators from being held accountable, as a result of bribes to implementing actors responsible for accountability, within the country contexts of Benin and Burkina Faso (Hughes 2017). As a result, the phenomenon is likely to continue, along with maintaining the strict code of collective silence in order to preserve cultural norms of saving face and prioritising relationships, and thereby avoiding 'conflict'. This in turn leads to a lack of political will and along with this, financial resources (*ibid.*) to implement policies against sexual violence or respond to the violence within schools and other institutions.

Furthermore, a crucial part of combating sexual violence is speaking out against it. At all levels of society, participants reported that it is unsafe to disclose information about sexual violence in schools to any type of authority, and so girls and women are expected to learn how to silently build resilience to the trauma so it does not negatively affect her life further. The lack of disclosure, as seen in this study, steeped in cultural shame and stigmatisation, limits what actors feel they can do to assist victims and to hold perpetrators accountable. This results not in collective support against the violence, but a division, created by blame. This blame, deflecting responsibility, allows each person to follow the social norms of silence. A culture of silence stigmatises and shames victims of violence and does not allow a flow of knowledge nor the ability to organise. Thus, there is a cyclical obstacle to allowing a critical mass to form that would create some protection for those denouncing perpetrators, and instead allowing impunity for those complicit in the violence.

7 Pockets of resistance

Despite the lack of elements needed for breaking down norms around SGBV, there are pockets of organisation and resistance that are demanding general accountability and transparency in both countries. For example, in Burkina Faso, a few grass-roots associations created by women, such as APEFF, have started to confront the silence around violence and the stigma against victims. The women have been subjected to death threats for their courage to speak out against violence against women and for maintaining attention to this issue within their community. However, their impact has been limited to their local community. They speak of using social norms to protect victims and shame perpetrators. Rather than promote accountability using official state systems such as the police, justice system, or social services, APEFF works with the schools and families to negotiate

compromises. However, this action, in itself, should be seen as a pocket of resistance, as the women are confronting acts that are often silently ignored. Larger NGOs and INGOs could work with APEFF in order to implement a response in a more formal way as well as to help other local communities organise in a similar way in order to respond to violence at the school level.

In Benin, the emergence of the 2006 anti-sexual harassment legislation was the beginning of collective action, with the support of INGOs and NGOs. Moreover, steeped in Beninese revolutionary history of the 1970s, committed female activists have continued to spread awareness about preventing pregnancy, preventing school dropouts, and sharing information on sexual violence through women's organisations such as WiLDAF and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) (*La Nouvelle Tribune* 2018a). There has also been the emergence of sanctions against teachers responsible for getting female students pregnant, including ending their contracts (Houngbadji 2018). Moreover, university students have begun to organise protests against violence within schools and unfair practices (*La Nouvelle Tribune* 2018b).

Although there are currently limits to achieving accountability due to entrenched oppression, norms of silence, and the lack of a powerful grass-roots women's movement to address sexual harassment in schools, the collective action presents emerging possibilities. Participants exhibit hope and confidence in these actions when discussing ways to mitigate sexual violence in schools. The emergence and sustained work of women-led grass-roots organisations and other forms of collaborative resistance is encouraging, though thus far their ability to disrupt the norms around sexual violence in schools and demand accountability has been limited in both countries. This could, however, be the starting place for a movement to grow in the future.

8 Learning beyond context

It is clear that existing policies and responses are not having the desired impact on stymieing SGBV or holding perpetrators accountable. International development and INGO pressure is limited, and as a result, social norms in local contexts remain powerful. This demonstrates the importance of investing in institutions of response, building knowledge and understandings related to social norms, involving multiple levels of society in responding to sexual violence, and sustaining grass-roots movements.

Building on current global movements against sexual violence, revolutionary tendencies towards improving democracy, and organising for change provides a baseline that suggests the possibility of honouring communitarian African society with a focus on collective wellbeing (Cobbah 1987; Phillips 2006). An integrated approach from multiple sectors of society could

be applied to respond to and prevent sexual harassment and violence against girls in schools and enforce accountability through checks and balances. This would embrace collective and holistic action, targeting violence and response in homes, schools, and neighbourhoods; shifting the level of analysis from individuals to collectives and directing more effective research to prevention efforts (Chan *et al.* 2016; Cowie and Dawn 2007b). This is also aligned with the recognition that an ecological approach to violence prevention is needed in order to create system-wide change, which contributes to both individual and collective wellbeing in reducing violence, targeting shame and stigma, and going beyond law and policy change (Chan *et al.* 2016). This approach also suggests that it is not one single level of stakeholders which will be responsible for responding to sexual violence or holding perpetrators accountable, but rather a coherent system of programmes and interventions that complement, instead of duplicate one another, and push towards a long-term paradigm shift (Burton 2008). This could apply to other contexts outside of Benin and Burkina Faso, particularly in the Francophone West African context, which may have similar dynamics.

9 Conclusions

This article highlights the intersecting relationship of multiple contexts within society, such as family, community, school leadership, educators, and institutions, when responding to sexual violence and harassment in schools. It illustrates obstacles hindering collective responsibility, the beginnings of collective action, and the possibilities for more sustainable collective action and accountability through combating oppression and working towards interdependent responsibility and collective work. The limited attention to entrenched gender dynamics, obstacles with disclosure, shame, and stigma, along with lack of enforcement of reporting mechanisms, have meant these layers are ignored when holding perpetrators accountable. A whole-school, multi-sector, communitarian approach raises possibilities for a contextually specific response that is holistic in its intention towards community and survivor wellbeing.

At a policy level, this research raises questions about the ability of law or policy to be implemented in an environment that often ignores the societal culture that creates barriers for the compliance of laws. Laws in place to hold perpetrators accountable are often vague or not enforced. There are no laws that tackle the norms of handling things privately, which are upheld by cultural and social norms and the lack of structured reporting mechanisms. The suggested collective approach may provide the opportunity to create checks and balances to ensure accountability is placed at the forefront, and that collective action is possible.

Moving forward, there is a need to better incorporate the voices of students, teachers, and parents, of which the government, INGO, and NGO representatives spoke about within this study. Additionally, a deeper analysis is needed to investigate the limited resources and levels of poverty that may encourage sexual violence and exploitation in schools and prevent response.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
 - † Ms Steiner would like to thank the Center for African Studies at Rutgers University for their Graduate Enrichment Grant and the Rutgers University Graduate School Pre-Dissertation Award for their generous funding towards this research. Ms Spear would like to thank the West African Research Association (WARA) Pre-Doctoral Fellowship programme for support of her research.
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Uniting Against the Tides: Filipino 'Shefarers' Organising Against Sexual Harassment*

Lucia Tangi¹

Abstract In the Philippines, seafaring has been associated with men since the sixteenth century. However, in the 1990s, Filipino women started to enter this male-dominated world. But it has not been smooth sailing. Based on interviews with Filipino women seafarers, this article shows how they have experienced various forms of sexual harassment from their male colleagues and senior officers. Women seafarers who have been victims of sexual harassment have been unable to file complaints against their aggressor/s because of technical difficulties in pursuing a case, especially when the incidents happen on board international ships and the perpetrators are foreign nationals. This article discusses how a group of Filipino women seafarers have decided to organise to fight sexual harassment. With the setting up of a women's committee of the male-dominated seafarers' union, women 'shefarers' have started talking about verbal and physical sexual harassment in order to raise awareness of the problem.

Keywords Filipino female seafarers, gender and seafaring, promoting anti-sexual harassment, accountability and sexual harassment.

1 Introduction

On 8 March 2019, a crowd of around 200 seafarers, journalists, and maritime students attended an International Women's Day event for the Association of Marine Officers and Seafarers' Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP), the biggest seafarers' union in the Philippines, with around 130,000 members. The Philippines' first female merchant marine captain, Jasmine,² 36, disclosed to this gathering,

When I first boarded a ship as a cadet, my father advised me to befriend the cook so I will never go hungry on board. So I did follow his advice. But one night while I was asleep, the cook whom I trusted, tried to insert his finger between my legs,

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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020 'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.



but I just kept quiet because I didn't know what to do since I was only 17 years old then. (Captain Jasmine, 8 March 2019)

Captain Jasmine had not told anyone, not even her closest friends and family members, about the sexual assault. It took her 19 years after the incident took place to finally open up to the president and vice president of AMOSUP. At that time, she was deeply involved in setting up AMOSUP's women's committee and had heard about other forms of harassment.

At the International Women's Day event, Captain Jasmine encouraged her fellow 'shefarers', or female seafarers, to open up and seek advice if they experience sexual harassment and bullying. 'I belong to the first batch of women cadets and there was no one that I could go to for advice on a woman's life on board', Captain Jasmine explained.

The experience of Captain Jasmine shows the vulnerability of Filipino female seafarers to sexual harassment. In the ten years I have been doing research on women seafarers, I have heard of different types of sexual harassment; namely, verbal, physical, and sexual in nature. Every 'shefarer', regardless of rank or position in the ship's hierarchy, is vulnerable to sexual harassment. How can these women be protected from sexual harassment, especially when they have to work on board a ship with an all-men crew for at least six months at a time? This article describes the types of sexual harassment that Filipino women face while working on board international ships. It also aims to trace how female seafarers have started to organise in order to address the problem.

2 Methodology

Data and narratives on female seafarers have been absent in the media and maritime literature in the Philippines for a long time. Although women began joining the industry from the 1990s, they were invisible and unrecognised by society. The term 'seaman' is used more often than the term 'seafarers' because most people equate seafaring with men. The empirical data and narratives cited in this article are based on my research from July 2008 to March 2019. Almost 100 female seafarers and cadets were either interviewed or invited to participate in focus group discussions. Around 50 male key informants from crewing agencies, government agencies, trade unions, and maritime schools were interviewed and invited to focus group discussions. Secondary data were based on recent literature on Filipino seafarers, policies on the deployment of seafarers, and the law on anti-sexual harassment.

Most of the narratives on sexual harassment are from face-to-face interviews with female seafarers. In a number of cases, the interviews turned out to be an opportunity for the female seafarers to speak about their experiences for the first time. Getting Filipino female seafarers to talk about their experiences

of sexual harassment is a challenging task. First, Philippine culture has constructed women to value their honour and they prefer to remain silent on anything that may be seen to tarnish or defame this. Second, since female seafarers spend a large amount of their time at sea, it is quite difficult to communicate with them especially when there is not a stable internet connection on board. When they are on shore it is also a challenge to schedule an interview because they are often busy meeting family members and friends, attending trainings, and preparing for their next shipboard employment.

3 Context: women working in a sea of men

During the Spanish colonial period in the Philippines, women did not attend school and worked inside the home. So, when the Philippines' first maritime school, the Escuela Nautica de Manila was founded on 15 April 1820 through Spanish Royal Decree (Abutal 2000), only male students were accepted. The maritime school provided seafarers for ships involved in the galleon trade between Spain, Mexico, and the Philippines (*ibid.*). The school has changed its name and location several times over the past 200 years. In 1963, it was renamed the Philippine Merchant Marine Academy (PMMA) by virtue of Republic Act No. 3680 (*ibid.*). In response to calls for gender equality and women's empowerment in military schools, the PMMA finally opened its doors to women cadets in 1993.³ In 1998, another elite maritime school, the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific (MAAP) was established and started welcoming women from day one.⁴ The country's first female captain and first female chief engineer both come from MAAP.

Female seafarers work in three roles: as officers, as ratings (the maritime term for skilled personnel), and as non-marines who usually work on passenger vessels as cabin stewards, waiters, and launderers. Female seafarers in non-marine jobs started working on board passenger vessels in the Philippines in the 1980s (Tangi 2016). Female officers and ratings started to join the seafaring industry from 1997. This long absence of women has resulted in the social construction of the seafaring industry as 'man's turf'. Although more and more Filipino women are joining the seafaring profession, they remain a minority in the industry. In 2017, there were 17,101 female seafarers – 3.8 per cent of the total 449,463 Filipino seafarers deployed during that year.

4 Types of sexual harassment

Over the ten years of my research, I have held face-to-face and online interviews with approximately 100 female seafarers and maritime students, and most of them have experienced some form of sexual harassment. The different types of sexual harassment encountered/experienced by seafarers include verbal, non-verbal, and physical.

Verbal forms of sexual harassment are perhaps the most common. Female seafarers experience comments about their

bodies, usually their legs or breasts. Some female seafarers complained of supervisors who either repeatedly asked them out or invited them to their cabins, even though they made it clear they were not interested. For instance, marine Engineer Monique, who was then 22 years old, was invited by a cargo ship captain to his office. Instead of talking about engineering matters, the captain bluntly told Engineer Monique: 'There is something in you. I really like you.' But Engineer Monique replied: 'Sir, I came on board to work and not to look for a boyfriend' (Tangi 2016).

The Philippines' first female chief engineer, Nina, also experienced verbal sexual harassment. A chief engineer invited her to watch television in his cabin. Engineer Nina, who was then a junior engineer, turned down the invitation. 'I warned him he would get nowhere with me', she told this author in an interview in 2016 (Tangi 2016). Engineer Nina also received an indecent proposal from a chief mate – the officer next in line to the captain – who directly asked Engineer Nina how much she wanted in exchange for paid sex. 'This [officer] thought that all Filipino women are cheap', she said in the same interview (*ibid.*).

Female seafarers also experience non-verbal forms of sexual harassment. A female captain told me in an interview in 2015 (Tangi 2016) that a fellow female crew member had complained that a male crew member had stolen her underwear.

Physical forms of sexual harassment also happen on board, and Captain Jasmine's experience is an example of this. At the 8 March 2019 International Women's Day event, Captain Jasmine said that she recently learned about a female engineer who complained about a colleague who had masturbated in front of her. The female engineer reported the incident to her immediate supervisor, the chief engineer, who replied: 'What can you do? It's a man's world.'

Based on interviews and focus group discussions, Filipino female seafarers either directly experience or come across incidents of sexual harassment on board regardless of their rank. A female chief engineer said in an interview that female students in maritime schools often get a briefing from their male supervisors on what to expect on board and what clothes to pack in order to ensure a safe shipboard journey.

Sexual harassment on ships is all about power. In a number of cases, the perpetrators are senior officers such as the captain, chief mate, chief engineers, and department supervisors who target junior officers and rank-and-file crew such as waiters, cabin stewards, and utility personnel. There have been cases where married Filipino men have preyed on lower-ranked female Filipino colleagues, especially single women. The intersection of race, gender, and class is also apparent in a number of cases. The cases of Engineer Monique and Engineer Nina are clear

examples of how higher ranking male officers would impose their power through sexual harassment.

Male seafarers also experience sexual harassment. During focus group discussions conducted in 2015 at the PMMA, a male cadet shared that he had been sexually harassed by an officer serving as his supervisor during his year-long cadetship. The cadet, who was graduating at the time of the focus group discussion, said that the supervisor had rubbed his body onto his. Although the PMMA cadet felt that he had been sexually harassed, he had decided not to file a complaint with the ship's captain.

When I started my research voyage on women seafarers in July 2008, I met April, a young female cadet from MAAP. She had just returned from a year-long shipboard training on board an international ship. She was the only woman out of the 23-member crew and for 12 months she had to devise a number of strategies in order to avoid being sexually harassed or molested by her male colleagues. Being surrounded by male seafarers and cadets who were raised in a patriarchal society and educated in maritime schools that reinforce and recreate that patriarchy was perhaps one of the major challenges that April had to face. In order to protect herself, she had to conform with the masculine culture of seafarers in both dress and how she acted. She had to sacrifice her hygiene in not taking a bath for several days, and not brushing her teeth regularly. When asked what tips she could give to fellow female cadets and seafarers to avoid harassment, she said:

- 1 *Never drink alcoholic beverages. Once you drink, the other party... might take advantage of you.*
- 2 *Don't accept drinks that have been opened. They might put sleeping tablets in your drinks.*
- 3 *Disguise. When I boarded, I had short hair. My clothes were crumpled. They would tell me to take a bath.*
- 4 *I seldom brushed my teeth to turn them off.*
- 5 *I did not shave my underarms. Every time I changed my shirt, they see my unshaved underarms and tell me that I was disgusting. Sometimes they even volunteered to pluck my armpit hair.*
- 6 *I always wore loose shirts.*
- 7 *Be one of the boys. If they have green jokes, I just ride with their jokes.*
- 8 *Don't report to seniors when you are off duty because they might have another agenda. Report to your seniors the following day.*

9 *Learn to say NO to the sexual advances of your male colleagues.* (April, interview, 1 August 2008, as cited in Tangi 2012: 121)

Some women also try to isolate themselves from the rest of the crew and become antisocial.

I have heard about how married men usually prey on single women on board from my brother so I totally became anti-social. After my work, I just stayed inside my cabin and did not attend parties or socialisation activities with other Filipinos. That was the best way to prevent getting involved in sexual affairs (Utility woman, as cited in Tangi 2012: 122).

Giana, 51, who had worked as a photographer on board cruise ships for 11 years, said the company she worked for delivered briefings on sexual harassment on board and that it imposed disciplinary measures against perpetrators. Despite the company's zero tolerance for sexual harassment, Giana recalled that she was aware of some cases while she was on board.

Yes there are cases [of sexual harassment] committed by those in position. Women who are new are vulnerable. There is no particular nationality targeted. All women who are new on board are equally vulnerable to sexual harassment. (Giana, interview, 2 February 2018)

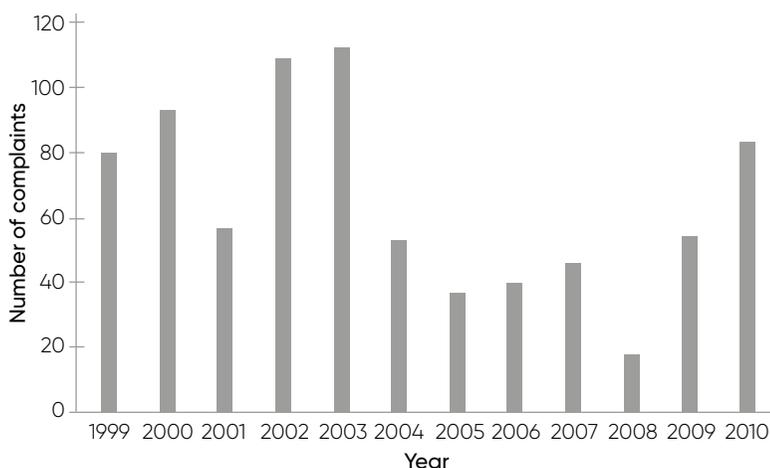
Giana recalled that the cruise line did not tolerate sexual harassment and there had been instances when perpetrators' employment was terminated.⁵

5 Nature of collective action: AMOSUP forms women's committee

The enactment of Republic Act 7877: Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 (RA 7877) was celebrated by women's groups as a landmark legislation (Philippine Commission on Women 2009). 'The enactment of this law is, by itself a positive development for Filipino women who had long advocated for the recognition of sexual harassment as a serious problem and the adoption of legal and other measures to address it' (Ursua 2001: 4). The law declared unlawful all forms of sexual harassment in the employment, education, or training environments, both in the public and private sectors. The policy emphasises:

The State shall value the dignity of every individual, enhance the development of its human resources, guarantee full respect for human rights, and uphold the dignity of workers, employees, applicants for employment, students or those undergoing training, instruction or education (Section 2 RA 7877 Philippine Commission on Women 2009)

The law proscribes sexual harassment committed at work, education, or training-related institutions by an employer, employee, manager, supervisor, agent of the employer, instructor,

Figure 1 Number of sexual harassment complaints filed with police (1999–2010)

Source Author's own.

professor, coach, trainer, or any other person who has authority, influence, or moral ascendancy over another. RA 7877 identifies the various forms of sexual harassment as: (1) physical, including malicious touching, overt sexual advances, gestures, and lewd insinuations; (2) verbal, such as requests or demands for sexual favours and lurid remarks; and (3) use of objects such as pictures or graphics, letters, written notes, texts via cellular phones with sexual underpinnings. The penalty is imprisonment from one to six months and fines between P10,000 and P20,000 (£141.36–£282.75).

Despite the existence of the law, the number of people filing criminal complaints with the police has remained low. Victims of sexual harassment in the Philippines do not often report the incident. Aquino (1990: 308) explained: 'Women victims are often hesitant to come out. They are often traumatised by their experience and end up suffering in silence.' Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority show that from 1999 to 2010, the average number of complaints filed with police nationwide was only 65 (see Figure 1). The highest number of complaints received by police during the 12-year period was 112 in 2003 while the lowest recorded was 18 in 2008. Even in recent years, the average number of complaints received by the police during 2013–16 was 107 annually. Statistics clearly show that the law has not addressed the culture of silence among the Filipino women who are victims of sexual harassment.

Although seafarers often get a briefing on sexual harassment when they begin work on board, many women are reluctant to file a criminal complaint. Since most of the victims are young cadets, junior officers, and rank-and-file personnel, most of those interviewed said that they were unaware of the proper steps or procedures in filing a complaint while they are on board. Women

seafarers were also worried that they would be ridiculed by the male crew.

Chief Engineer Nina said that women seafarers were also worried about possible retaliation from their harassers who are usually higher in rank. She related that when she was a junior engineer, her chief engineer gave her a poor evaluation when she declined an invitation to his cabin.

Listening to stories of Chief Engineer Nina and other women seafarers made Captain Jasmine realise that sexual harassment was a common problem among women seafarers. This prompted her and other women officers, including Chief Engineer Nina and Captain Maria, to form the core group of AMOSUP Women. The creation of this women's group is a milestone in the male-dominated Philippine seafaring industry. AMOSUP was founded on 11 November 1960 by Captain Gregorio S. Oca who originally set up the Associated Marine Officers' Union of the Philippines, which was composed mostly of licensed crew members from prominent shipping companies. Although the union has accepted female members since the late 1990s, it was only in 2018 that AMOSUP decided to formally set up a women's committee to address women's issues. The union has more than 100,000 members and 5,000 of them are women.

AMOSUP Women has been conducting forums to discuss issues affecting women seafarers and how these problems can be addressed. It has also served as a network which women seafarers can contact if they are victims of sexual harassment. Captain Jasmine said that when she was harassed, she had no 'big sister' in the industry in whom she could confide about her experience. 'We were among the first group of women in the maritime school so we had no women mentors or older sisters to look up to', Captain Jasmine said.⁶

Through the 'sisterhood' formed among the members of AMOSUP Women, Captain Jasmine is hoping that women seafarers who are victims of sexual harassment will break the culture of silence and seek help from other members. Aside from moral support, AMOSUP Women is also willing to provide legal assistance to victims.

6 Accountability: stakeholders in the seafaring industry must be held accountable

Female seafarers, regardless of race and position on board, are vulnerable to sexual harassment. This has prompted a global approach to the problem. The International Labour Organization (ILO) initiated the first comprehensive research on global policies and employment on women seafarers (ILO 2003a). 'Women have to face not only constant scrutiny of their work, but unwarranted levels of sexual harassment and innuendo. This applies to women in both the marine and hotel sectors, and the report contains

some harrowing first-hand accounts' (ILO 2003b). Attempts to introduce an industry-wide anti-sexual harassment policy occurred in 2016 when the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS) and International Transport Workers' Federation (ICS and ITF 2016) issued *Guidance on Eliminating Shipboard Harassment and Bullying*. In the foreword, ILO Director-General Guy Rider said:

Harassment and bullying on board ships can have serious consequences for the physical and emotional health of seafarers, lead to decreased motivation and increased sickness and can compromise cohesive and effective team work. It can also have negative effects for companies, resulting in a deterioration of working conditions and potential organisational, economic and legal consequences (*ibid.*: 4).

The ICS and ITF guidance defines sexual harassment as 'a form of discrimination which has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person and of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment' (2016: 7). The examples of harassment listed in the guidance are very comprehensive and include displaying or circulating offensive or suggestive material; innuendo, mockery, lewd or sexist/racist/homophobic jokes or remarks; unwelcome attention such as spying, stalking, pestering, overly familiar behaviour or unwelcome verbal or physical attention; and unwelcome sexual advances or repeated requests for dates or threats (*ibid.*: 7). The guidance, however, does not recommend sanctions to seafarers found guilty of sexual harassment nor suggest imposing sanctions on member shipping companies. The provisions in the guidance are merely recommendatory and not legally binding.

This article is proposing a more realistic way to increase the accountability of various stakeholders in the Philippine seafaring industry in order to eliminate or minimise incidents of sexual harassment. The *Revised POEA Rules and Regulations Governing the Recruitment and Employment of Seafarers* (POEA 2016), also referred to as the standard contract, is an 88-page document that provides comprehensive detail on the role and responsibilities of various stakeholders, including the principal or ship owner who is usually based overseas, the crewing agency who acts as the *de facto* representative in the Philippines, and the seafarers. Its statement of policy says: 'To provide an effective gender-sensitive mechanism that can adequately protect and safeguard the rights and interests of Filipino seafarers' (*ibid.*: 2).

In the 36-year history of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), the agency in charge of processing the deployment of Filipinos who want to work overseas, it has only received one formal complaint of sexual harassment from a seafarer. According to an agency official, the female seafarer filed a complaint of sexual harassment against a fellow seafarer who stole her underwear while they were on board the same ship.

The case, however, was eventually dismissed because the female seafarer left for overseas employment. Sexual harassment is not among the 26 types of offences punishable under the seafarers' standard contract. However, victims of sexual harassment can still file a complaint 'for gross misbehaviour prejudicial to good order and discipline' or 'abuse of authority' if the perpetrator is an officer or supervisor of the victim (POEA 2010: 36). Both offences carry a minimum penalty of one year's suspension from overseas employment for the first offence and permanent disqualification from overseas employment for a third offence. The impact of a one-year suspension from overseas work can be very harsh especially if the perpetrator is the family breadwinner and also considering the high unemployment rate in the Philippines.

I propose the inclusion of sexual harassment as a punishable offence within the standard contract. Although there may be existing 'related offences' such as 'gross misbehaviour' and 'abuse of power', neither adequately captures the gender aspect and the sexual nature of the offence. Sexual harassment must be defined in the standard contract using the legal definition under the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 (RA 7877). This is not at all revolutionary, but it is just a matter of implementing an existing law to apply to seafarers. Including sexual harassment in the standard contract will not only protect seafarers, especially female seafarers, but also increase stakeholder accountability.

Under Section 3 of RA 7877, sexual harassment is committed in an employment environment when:

- 1 The sexual favor is made as a condition in the hiring or in the employment, re-employment or continued employment of said individual, or in granting said individual favorable compensation, terms of conditions, promotions, or privileges; or the refusal to grant the sexual favor results in limiting, segregating or classifying the employee which in any way would discriminate, deprive or diminish employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect said employee;
- 2 The above acts would impair the employee's rights or privileges under existing labour laws; or
- 3 The above acts would result in an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for the employee (Section 3 RA 7877, Philippine Commission on Women 2009).

The law also states that sexual harassment is committed by

Any person who directs or induces another to commit any act of sexual harassment as herein defined, or who cooperates in the commission thereof by another without which it would not have been committed, shall also be held liable under this Act (Section 3 RA 7877, Philippine Commission on Women 2009).

Table 1 Requirements for renewal of licence for crewing agencies and principals

Requirements/penalties	Crewing agencies	Principal/ship owner
Required escrow account with Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (Central Bank of the Philippines)	P1,000,000	US\$10,000
Additional escrow for 1–5 cases	P50,000 per case	US\$3,000 per case
Additional escrow for 6–10 cases	P75,000 per case	US\$4,000 per case
Additional escrow for 11 or more cases	P100,000 per case	US\$5,000 per case

Source POEA (2016).

This provision in the law will encourage accountability among seafarers. Onboard, seafarers often brag about their 'sexual adventures', even those involving their female colleagues. Sometimes, seafarers also taunt their colleagues to make sexist comments or do something to annoy or harass a female colleague. However, if the sexual harassment law is included in the POEA standard contract, seafarers may be discouraged from taking part in this bragging and taunting. The standard contract should also encourage seafarers to report to their supervisor if they have heard or witnessed an act of sexual harassment. The government should also introduce gender-sensitivity training to all seafarers and educate them about the anti-sexual harassment law.

Another important provision of RA 7877 is the duty of the employer or head of office in eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace. It states:

It shall be the duty of the employer or the head of the work-related, educational or training environment or institution, to prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment and to provide the procedures for the resolution, settlement or prosecution of acts of sexual harassment (Section 4 RA 7877, Philippine Commission on Women 2009).

If this provision is adopted in the POEA standard contract, it will encourage accountability among ship owners and crewing managers. Section 4 of RA 7877 requires employers to prevent or deter the commission of acts of sexual harassment and this includes the introduction of an anti-sexual harassment policy. Organising gender-sensitivity trainings for seafarers and staff of crewing agencies would also be helpful in preventing sexual harassment. Section 4(a) also requires employers, in consultation with other staff or employees, to promulgate rules and regulations 'prescribing the procedure for the investigation of sexual harassment cases and the administrative sanctions' (Philippine Commission on Women 2009).

Section 5 of the law states that the employer or head of office 'shall be solidarily [*sic*] liable for damages arising from the acts of sexual harassment committed in the employment' (Philippine Commission on Women 2009). This provision would mean that a sexual harassment victim could file for damages against the ship owner and a crewing agency. Accountability on the part of management is enhanced in this provision and could speed up resolution of cases involving multi-racial sexual harassment, if integrated in the seafaring industry. The law is clear that the employer is liable for damages if it fails to prevent or fails to act on a sexual harassment case. Usually, the crew of international ships are multiracial and include Filipinos. In such a case, if a Filipina junior officer filed a complaint of sexual harassment against a foreign national and the ship owner and crewing agency failed to act on her complaint, the former could sue the latter for damages.

A crewing agency's failure to act on sexual harassment complaints would not be cheap. Under the existing POEA standard contract, crewing companies would be required to pay an additional escrow from P50,000 (£714.28) up to a maximum of P100,000 (£1,428.57) per case filed with the POEA. This is on top of the P1 million escrow fund that crewing managers have to deposit with the Central Bank of the Philippines. For instance, if a crewing agency has five cases pending with the POEA for failure to act on a sexual harassment case, it would have to deposit an additional P250,000 (£3,571.43). Ship owners would also not be spared from accountability. For each pending case against a ship owner for its failure to act, it pays an additional escrow of US\$3,000 (see Table 1).

If found guilty of inaction or non-compliance of the anti-sexual harassment law, the crewing agencies and ship owners registered with the POEA could face administrative sanctions such as suspension of their licence or suspension of accreditation for one to two years for the first offence. A female seafarer who is a victim of sexual harassment could also pursue a separate criminal case in the regular court, according to RA 7877.

7 Conclusion: sexual harassment-free ships, worldwide!

The employment structure and working conditions in the seafaring industry in the Philippines are complex. The employment structure is multi-layered because ship owners are not allowed to hire seafarers directly. Under the Philippine Labour Law, ship owners must hire a crewing agency based and registered in the Philippines that serves as their *de facto* representative. Filipino seafarers are hired on a contractual basis from six to nine months. This means that the employment relationship between the ship owner/crewing agency and the seafarer ends at the end of every contract. Therefore, pursuing a previous employer or ship owner over a complaint can be challenging. These complexities in employment structure should not, however, serve as an excuse for the industry's inaction or non-compliance to the anti-sexual harassment law. Based on this research, it is clear that such

complexities can be addressed by enforcing accountability among stakeholders in the seafaring industry.

There is a good chance that anti-sexual harassment provision will be included in the POEA standard contract in the future. Jose A. Kato, director of the Joint Manning Group, an alliance composed of almost 300 crewing agencies in the Philippines, said that the POEA contract is currently under review by stakeholders.

We are periodically meeting in tripartite for discussions on this. In the latest amendment of MLC 2006 (2016 amendments), there is an inclusion for the prevention and elimination of 'shipboard harassment and bullying', guidelines which have been agreed in tripartite at an international level. This we believe, is all encompassing. I believe it will be included in the new POEA contract. (Kato, pers. comm. 2018)

Andy Dalisay, editor of AMOSUP's in-house publication, welcomes the proposed inclusion of sexual harassment in the POEA standard contract. He said the union does not have figures on cases of sexual harassment involving members. Dalisay also proposed that anti-bullying should be included in the POEA standard contract because it is a common concern especially on board multi-racial ships (pers. comm. 2018).

The Philippines deployed an average of 12,000 female seafarers in the last three years. They are more vulnerable to sexual harassment because of the prevalence of patriarchy and sexist beliefs in the maritime industry in general. However, some moves are being undertaken by various sectors, including the introduction of an anti-sexual harassment and anti-bullying guide by a group of international shipping companies. Enforcing accountability is just part of the strategies to eliminate sexual harassment on international ships. Half of the struggle must focus on educating stakeholders to respect women and recognise women's rights as human rights. This can be achieved through intensive information campaigns and gender-sensitivity trainings.

A ship free from sexual harassment should be the aim for every seafarer, ship owner, and crewing manager worldwide. The industry, through the International Maritime Organization and the ILO must explore the possibility of requiring all signatories to the 2006 Maritime Labour Convention to enforce accountability (ILO 2006). If the Philippine model is successful, the strategy could be introduced in other countries, especially in those that are major suppliers of seafarers such as China, Russia, and India.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Lucia Tangi, Assistant Professor of Journalism, University of the Philippines, the Philippines.
 - 2 All names have been anonymised.
 - 3 Interview with PMMA officials, 2015.
 - 4 Interview with MAAP officials, 2015.
 - 5 Interview, 2 February 2018.
 - 6 At the International Women's Day event, 8 March, 2019.

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Disruption and Design: Crowdmapping Young Women's Experience in Cities*†

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Abstract The history of women's exclusion and invisibility in cities is well charted, yet young women's experience of sexual harassment and assault has been difficult to quantify. This article discusses the Free to Be project initiated by Plan International in 2018. In partnership with Monash University's XYX Lab and CrowdSpot, the crowdmapping web app enabled young women in Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid, and Sydney to identify and share their experiences of public spaces. It is believed to be the most ambitious global crowdsourced data collection project on street harassment ever undertaken. By using coding and visual data techniques, the data demonstrated the scale of the problem and the urgent need for city-level decision makers, as well as other members of society, to take action. This article outlines the findings from Free to Be, and explores the ways data and activism led by girls and young women are a powerful method for creating change.

Keywords crowdmapping, crowdsourcing, data, sexual harassment, cities, safety, girls, global, violence, social inclusion.

1 Introduction

There is a lengthy history of female exclusion and invisibility in cities, and girls' and young women's experience of sexual harassment and assault is difficult to chart. This article examines the findings of the Free to Be project initiated by Plan International (Goulds 2018) and its importance as a tool for holding public bodies and individuals in society to account. A public participatory geographic information system (Sieber 2006), or crowdmap (hereafter referred to as the 'Free to Be Map'), was developed in partnership with Monash University's XYX Lab and CrowdSpot, which enabled young women in Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid, and Sydney to identify and share their perceptions of, and experiences in, urban public spaces (Goulds 2018).

© 2020 The Authors. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2020.133

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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020 'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.



Believed to be the most ambitious global crowdsourced data collection project on street harassment ever undertaken, the coding and visual data techniques surfaced the tendencies, tensions, and trends of sexual harassment in cities.

Across the complex and often conflicting cultures of this diverse set of cities, the platform allowed girls and young women to share stories, generating a vast bank of data that can hold stakeholders to account for their inaction and acceptance of harassment of girls and young women, which has a direct negative effect on their freedom of movement and ability to participate in city life. The data and the stories from the girls and young women challenge the perspectives of the police, public transport operators, and local government authorities, as well as generating awareness about the levels of harassment and violence that go unnoticed, in order to initiate behaviour change. This article outlines the findings from Free to Be, and explores the ways data and activism led by girls and young women are a powerful method for creating change.

2 Methodology

The Free to Be Map was developed by Plan International in collaboration with XYX Lab and CrowdSpot. It was piloted in Melbourne in 2016 (Kalms *et al.* 2018), and rolled out in Sydney, Lima, Madrid, Kampala, and Delhi in 2018. The tool comprises an interactive map and survey which allows girls and women to drop 'good pins' or 'bad pins' on the map of their city, answer a small number of questions about the location, and leave free text comments. Given the risk that such tools can highlight the vulnerability of girls and young women, and frighten them off entering certain areas, participants were asked to identify not just bad experiences of the city but also the good ones. The inclusion of 'good pins' also allowed the research to identify the characteristics that made places feel safe and welcoming, in order to help drive solutions.

Young women from Plan International activist programmes in each of the cities helped refine the tool and the interface to engage girls and young women from diverse communities, focusing on ease of use, adaptations for appropriate language, and navigation options. The tools and text on the website were translated into relevant languages prior to the start of data collection. Reflection workshops were also held with young women at the end of data collection. These workshops assembled small groups of young women to reflect on the emerging trends and findings. The reflection workshops were recorded and transcribed and some of the findings from those discussions are included in this article.

Methods of participant recruitment varied by city, but included social media campaigns, news media reports, and television and radio exposure. In order to collect data from those who might

Table 1 Number of valid pins and comments in each city, by ratio of good pins to bad pins or comments

	Number of pins*	Good to bad ratio	Number of comments	Good to bad ratio
Delhi	14,876	37:63	4,602	30:70
Kampala	1,253	20:80	1,251	20:80
Lima	2,037	11:89	1,290	6:94
Madrid	951	16:84	670	12:88
Sydney	2,083	25:75	1,479	21:79
Total	21,200	22:78**	9,292	18:82**

Notes * Total number of pins excluding men, trolls/false pins, and people over the age of 30 years.

** Average across cities.

Source Data from Free to Be, Plan International Australia.

otherwise not have access to the digital and online facilities required, in Delhi and Kampala, and to a lesser extent in Lima and Madrid, girls and young women were also directly recruited on the street. Women and girls and those identifying as other genders who reported themselves to be aged 30 or younger were included in the analysis (see Table 1). In total, 21,200 valid pins and 9,292 comments were included in the analysis. Note that participants were able to submit more than one pin.

Pins deemed as inappropriate or false were made invisible to other users during the data collection and removed from analysis. Excluded pins included those exhibiting nonsense, homophobia, sexism, or racism, or where there was an error in placement.

Survey results were assessed by country, and comments attached to pins were translated into English and coded. Some coding categories are common from city to city (such as sexual harassment); other categories arose from the data for the specific city. For example, the frequency of comments around public masturbation in Madrid led to that becoming a coding category. Some comments triggered more than one coding. For example, a comment might include notes about the physical conditions of the place and details about the particular incident that occurred. Some pins record historic events or incidents and some describe the ongoing 'feel' of a place.

With the exception of Kampala, girls and young women mostly shared stories about their experiences of sexual harassment, especially non-physical harassment. For this analysis, sexual harassment was divided into that involving physical contact and non-physical contact. Where the type of harassment was unclear, both comments were coded with both categories. Sexual harassment not involving physical contact ranged from unwanted so-called 'compliments' ('*piropos*' in Madrid) and

catcalling, intense staring/leering, surreptitious photography, and propositioning, to being verbally threatened with rape, stalked, chased, followed, and blocked. Sexual harassment involving physical contact ranged from a 'pat on the bottom' through to groping. Incidents of rape were not commonly reported by the participants; the few that were reported are included under sexual harassment with physical contact. Any incident involving physical contact is technically sexual assault, but many young women are inured to some forms of physical contact and would not categorise them as assault. This division between touch and no touch is to some extent arbitrary and not necessarily indicative of the level of fear it might induce: being chased, while not involving physical contact, could reasonably be construed as being more disturbing than a pat on the rear (CASA 2014).

3 Context

The five cities included in the study are spread across five continents, and reflect a range of population size, income groups, crime rates, and levels of inclusion of girls and young women.

- **Delhi:** capital of India, population 16 million (Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi 2016). Delhi reported 33 per cent of total crimes against women and also has a higher rate of kidnapping and abduction compared to other cities in India (Government of India 2016).
- **Kampala:** capital of Uganda, population 1.5 million (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016). In Uganda, 22 per cent of women aged 15–49 have experienced some form of sexual violence (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2018).
- **Lima:** capital of Peru, population over 8 million (INEI 2017). In 2017, more than 1,200 cases of sexual violence were reported in Lima, and 70 per cent of the victims were girls under 18 years old (MIMP 2017).
- **Madrid:** capital of Spain, population 3.2 million (INE 2017). There was a 7.8 per cent rise in reports of sexual crimes in 2017, compared with 2016 (Ministerio del Interior 2017).
- **Sydney:** population 5 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017). In the 12 months to March 2018, the majority of New South Wales criminal incidents for major offences decreased, but sexual assault and other sexual offences increased (Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2018).

Plan International operates in all of these cities, including through its Safer Cities for Girls programme in Delhi, Kampala, and Lima.⁶

4 Generating data to inform action

The nature of the Free to Be Map allows girls and young women to enter their own experiences, revealing 'not only the locations of safe spaces as well as the unsafe areas in the city, but also the

Table 2 Coded participant comments on bad pins

	Delhi		Kampala		Lima		Madrid		Sydney	
Total no. of filtered bad pins*	2,675		968		1,169		560		1,170	
	No.	%**	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
All sexual harassment cases	1,734	65	231	24	987	84	467	85	836	72
Sexual harassment – no physical contact	1,082	40	84	9	624	53	402	72	663	57
Sexual harassment – physical contact only	78	3	140	15	189	16	62	11	93	8
Sexual harassment – both	574	22	7	0.7	174	15	12	2	80	7
Flashing	10	0.4	-	-	19	2	7	1	17	1
Masturbation	3	0.1	-	-	20	2	59	11	20	2
Under the influence – drugs and alcohol	383	14	87	7	58	5	81	14	152	13
Group of offenders/ attackers	239	9	148	15	104	9	96	17	50	4
Theft/robbery	204	8	448	46	140	12	22	4	18	2
Second-hand accounts	-	-	348	36	102	9	-	-	28	2
Unpredictable people/ loitering	-	-	102	11	71	5	44	8	203	17
Physical and verbal assault (non-sexual)	111	4	135	14	41	4	32	6	52	4
Kidnapping	16	1	28	3	9	1	-	-	4	0.3
Murder/death	8	0.3	68	7	2	0.2	1	0.2	3	0.3
Lack of security/police	110	4	524	54	95	8	14	3	63	5
Dark/lack of lighting	54	2	226	23	29	2	36	6	120	10
Public transportation	145	5	-	-	178	15	-	-	132	11
Infrastructure	361	13	58	6			20	4	63	5
Secluded/deserted area	146	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Road congestion	-	-	82	8	-	-	-	-	-	-

Notes * Number of bad pins with valid comments attached to them. **Percentages as total of all comments included in analysis.

Source Data from Free to Be, Plan International Australia.

perception of these spaces as described by women themselves' (Kalms 2017). Girls and women choose which stories to tell, using their own words, with the knowledge that their stories will be immediately visible to others to create a shared narrative. Creating the tool with young female activists ensured relevance and ownership, as well as clear strategies for using the data from the outset. Data were made public immediately, allowing them to be viewed and used in real time by anyone, generating evidence for activism and advocacy.

The Free to Be Map asked girls and young women to identify good or bad places by dropping relevant 'pins' on parts of their city. The tool itself did not ask them to talk specifically about harassment, abuse, or gender discrimination, though some recruitment methods used this language. However, girls and young women across all sites overwhelmingly shared how harassment and abuse shaped their experiences of moving around their cities. In all five locations, girls and young women were much more likely to drop 'bad' pins than good, with the highest proportion of bad pins dropped in Lima (89 per cent) and the lowest in Delhi (63 per cent). Participants were able to add a free text comment to their pin, and where they did, these comments were coded by the type of incident they described; see the results in Table 2.

Results show that in Madrid, 85 per cent of comments on bad pins were about sexual harassment, and in Lima 84 per cent. Non-physical sexual harassment mentioned in comments ranged from unwanted so-called 'compliments' and catcalling, intense staring/leering, surreptitious photography, and propositioning, to being verbally threatened with rape, stalked, chased, followed, and blocked.

There was variation between the cities on the types of incidents and the types of discrimination recorded by participants. In Kampala, for example, girls and young women were more likely to highlight risks of theft (46 per cent of comments on bad pins) than sexual harassment (24 per cent), despite existing evidence of high levels of gender-based violence throughout the country (see Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2018). Meanwhile in Sydney, some participants highlighted specific risks faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex+ (LGBTQI+) girls and women:

There's always groups of creepy drunk guys that loiter around there and make me feel very uncomfortable in the evenings/night. Lots of catcalling and guys occasionally follow me to places that I am going (bus stop/bar/club). This especially happens when I'm with my girlfriend (I'm gay). (age 21, Sydney)

Race was also an important factor raised by girls and young women in Madrid and Sydney, with participants identifying

discrimination based on ethnicity in 10 per cent of bad pins in Sydney. In Madrid, this was only 4 per cent, but when young women discussed this finding in the reflection workshop, they suggested that unwelcome comments are often focused first on a girl's or woman's appearance, but can also include elements of racial stereotypes or particularly target females of certain ethnicities. In all these examples, girls and women prioritised what they considered to be the main factor making them feel unsafe, and what they wanted to share and highlight to others.

Women and girls, by and large, identified perpetrators as men and boys, often in groups. The influence of drugs or alcohol was also frequently reported to be a factor: 14 per cent of the bad pins reported in Delhi and Madrid involved drugs or alcohol, and 13 per cent in Sydney. In Sydney, the discrepancy between when the public transport stops running and when the bars close was commented upon. In addition, the impact of the city's 'lock-out laws'⁷ was repeatedly noted as an issue exacerbating the congregation of drunk men and enabling verbal harassment against girls and young women. As the comments below demonstrate, group mentality combined with the influence of drugs and alcohol create a very intimidating environment.

There are always drunk men or in a group, annoying the women who pass by. It is very uncomfortable because they are in a group and it is impossible not to bother. (age 25, Lima)

Walking back to the station after a night out with my bestie (female) and a group of men walking behind us started talking about 'gangbanging'. (age 19, Sydney)

This street, during day or night, is very secluded and some men abuse alcohol and smack, and then verbally harass us. (age 24, Delhi)

In comments from girls and young women there was a frustration at the lack of accountability for perpetrators of these types of actions. In particular, the presence of other men in a group seemed to legitimise discriminatory behaviour. Participants shared how they were changing their behaviour because no one was ensuring that the men and boys would: nearly half of participants in Sydney (47 per cent) said they would not go back to a place alone because of what had happened to them. Across all the cities, more than 10 per cent never went back at all. This creates a complex personal geography of 'no-go' and 'take-extreme-care' zones that girls and young women must negotiate every day, something found in other studies on street harassment (Osmond and Woodcock 2015).

The majority of girls and young women did not tell anyone about a negative event that happened to them. Only 30–40 per cent

of respondents in each city said they told family or friends, but across the cities just 10 per cent reported incidents to authorities. In most cases, where incidents were reported, authorities apparently did not act (authorities acted in 16 per cent of reported cases in Kampala, 18 per cent in Lima, 27 per cent in Madrid, and 31 per cent in Sydney, according to participant responses). The processes for girls and young women to hold perpetrators to account are currently so few – they fear lack of action or not being taken seriously, or worse. Participants talked about the risk of stigma, blame, or further harassment, including from the authorities themselves.

The Free to Be Map, as similar online crowd-based mobilisation movements have demonstrated, shows that there is an appetite for ordinary girls and young women to talk about their everyday experiences of harassment and violence, but there are few viable options to do so (Kalms 2019). Participants used this tool to express their anger at the unfairness and discrimination, and how they are constantly paying the price.

5 Accountability

Free to Be, like all online map-based social surveys, is an excellent collector of stories and impressions of a city from those whose voices are not often heard or recorded. All users were anonymous on the Free to Be Map, with no option to submit a name. This was largely to ensure the safety of participants, so there was no chance of them being identified, but the anonymity proved particularly advantageous for girls and young women outlining experiences of sexual harassment or abuse in their city. Many recorded their reluctance to formally detail or report incidents, and the anonymity of Free to Be overcame this barrier, allowing multiple stories that indicate the type and prevalence of harassment and other concerns to be collected. Without these stories, the negative everyday experiences of girls and young women as they move around their city is invisible and easy to ignore. The survey's data enable girls, women, and others to hold city authorities, bystanders, and the perpetrators themselves to account for harassment and its negative impacts.

The generation of data informed a wider strategic intention by Plan International; advocacy reports and actions planned from the outset to honour stories and bring about change, with findings launched on the International Day of the Girl (IDG) on 11 October 2019 (Goulds 2018). At the city level and to varying degrees, Plan International offices included the authorities in the discussion about the tool design or in the launch of Free to Be, thereby ensuring that through the whole process those with power paid attention to the experiences of girls and young women. In discussions on the findings, one young woman said:

For us there isn't anything new [in this research]. The most important finding isn't for us but for the world that you can

see how insecure we feel. They harass us, they touch us, they do everything to us. There is finally somewhere where it is written down. (age 21, reflection workshop, Madrid)

The involvement of young women in the design of the Free to Be Map was a crucial factor in its usability and high levels of participation. Plan International's ongoing work with groups of girls and young women also provided a platform to empower them to use the data and make space for them to discuss findings directly with decision makers. Data alone are powerful, but incorporating modes for use and fora for advocating with those in power are essential to providing opportunities for real change.

The themes gathered from the many stories submitted on the Free to Be Maps across the five cities demonstrated clearly both the ubiquity of sexual harassment and the impunity with which men and boys perpetrate it against girls and young women. Those participating understood that street harassment is firmly founded in the structural inequality between the genders. Gender discrimination was the dominant form of discrimination identified by participants in Madrid, Lima, Delhi, and Sydney, with more than half of all instances of street harassment identified as being gender-based. Even in Kampala, where only 41 per cent of participants noted that their experience was based on any form of discrimination, the majority of these participants noted gender as the basis of that discrimination. Despite the differing cultural and legal frameworks in each of the countries, the universal lack of accountability for male actions was very clear. However, directly holding each individual perpetrator to account is beyond the reach of this project, of the young people involved, or of civil society organisations. The goal is, therefore, to provide data that will push society at large to ensure systems, processes, and environments are safe and empowering for girls and young women.

Many of the respondents in all the cities noted that sexual harassment of some kind was so frequent that they were simply used to it: it was 'normal'. This was strongest in Madrid, where nearly half signalled such resignation, and weakest in Delhi. With that resignation, and normalisation, comes the expectation that women themselves take on responsibility for male actions. Despite their limited (if any) ability to control the actions of men, in the absence of any other constraining mechanisms, girls and women are forced to take on this responsibility – and wider society expects this of them (Graham *et al.* 2017). Consequently, some of the girls and young women never returned to particular areas of their city, or avoided them when they were on their own. Restricting their own mobility in the city and taking precautions (such as changing what they wear) gives girls and young women a sense of agency within the limited or adapted scope of opportunity in which they are allowed to operate (Nussbaum 2001). However, there is no guarantee that these precautions will have any effect on preventing either the violence or the victim blaming.

I have just left Sydney after five years living and studying here. Both love and hate for the city. As a female, I never felt safe in this city. I get sexual harassment (catcalling, swearing, perverted stares) almost everywhere I go in Sydney. No matter how much I cover myself with hideous clothes, this never stops. (age 23, Sydney)

You have to [be] quite covered in ethnic clothes otherwise even if anything wrong happens to you when you are wearing Western or you arrived late at home only you are supposed to be the responsible person. (age 23, Delhi)

Reporting to authorities was rare because it was assumed that, at best, they would not take the matter seriously, or at worst, complaining would have further negative consequences. There is very often a power imbalance between perpetrators and their targets, which grants an assumed impunity to the perpetrator. Given that many forms of harassment are not illegal, are difficult to report or document when they do meet criminal thresholds of behaviour, and that sexual offences more broadly face low levels of reporting and successful convictions, this assumed impunity is likely accurate (Daly and Bohours 2010). In addition, there were reports of bystander inaction and accusations that the young woman had invited harassment by her clothing, her manner, or simply by being there. All this reinforces the impunity that men and boys operate under, as well as the lack of accountability by authorities.

Sexual harassment occurs on a spectrum ranging from catcalling to rape. However, even incidents on the 'milder' end of the spectrum have the power to cause girls and young women to change their behaviour in the city. More broadly, such harassment serves as a reminder of the social and physical vulnerability of women, and therefore has a significant role in increasing the fear of more serious violent attacks (Pain 1997; Cook, David and Grant 2001; Whitzman 2013). The power differentials of gender inequity produce a dynamic that results in lessened accountability for men and heightened responsibility for girls and young women. Wider society – from those with decision-making power to bystanders to family members – supports this status quo by ignoring, endorsing, trivialising, or accepting these inequalities. Ensuring girls and young women's experiences are visible is vital to pushing all members of society to take responsibility for holding perpetrators to account and challenging harassment wherever they see it.

With more than 30,000 pins dropped on the maps in just six weeks, the project provides clear evidence that girls and young women are willing to share their experiences of street harassment when they believe they will be heard and it will lead to change. This points to the need for a universal shift in discourse: chronic rates of underreporting can no longer be blamed on girls

and young women being unwilling to share their experiences. Accountability for improving rates of reporting does not lie with the young women who are experiencing harassment; this accountability lies with authorities to make reporting systems, laws, and culture more accessible and welcoming to these young women. Given the relatively low proportion of reporting to authorities (and the lack of meaningful response from them), Free to Be demonstrates the need for alternative forms of recording the lived experiences of girls and young women that would otherwise remain silent.

Free to Be provides the data and evidence on sexual harassment to challenge local public transport and other authorities. While the mindset that permits unimpeded harassment to occur is perhaps beyond the control of these authorities, they do have the power to make the environments that they control safer; they can become accountable. Zero tolerance, belief in and support for those who lodge complaints, advertising and awareness campaigns, and technological, natural, and formal surveillance are all measures that can be implemented (Gekoski *et al.* 2015). Further, such actions can promote the accountability of individuals to change their behaviours and hold each other to account.

6 Learning beyond context

Across each of the five cities, despite their distinct cultural, economic, and geographical differences, parallels can be drawn. We can begin to understand some universal truths about the harassment girls and young women are experiencing and where accountability lies for addressing this. Free to Be was deliberately promoted as an opportunity for action through gathering stories and data, and the level of engagement with Free to Be highlights that when girls and young women are invited to share experiences to create change, they do so actively. Girls' and young women's stories are rarely heard on this issue, but when thousands of data points are collected and made available to decision makers, girls and young women start to become visible in policy and planning. This highlights the important role that crowdsourced data can play in creating change, by bridging the gap between girls' and young women's everyday experiences and the decision makers who have the power to change this reality.

Indeed, Free to Be highlights a number of opportunities that crowdmapping provides for those wishing to understand lived experience. Firstly, crowdmapping can improve data accuracy through allowing participants to associate submissions with a specific geographic coordinate, especially in contexts where people associate a variety of names (landmarks, natural features, etc.) with locations. Further, people increasingly understand their connection to cities and places in a spatial context – Google Maps has consistently been ranked as one of the top five most popular apps on smartphones (Hartmans 2017).

Crowdmapping can also generate greater levels of participation as people are attracted to visually enticing images and interfaces, generating greater levels of public participation than text-based surveys. With the increasing prominence of social media, enabling users to view and comment on other submissions creates a powerful dynamic where people can share similar stories, deliberate, and feel connected with one another. Finally, crowdmapping offers powerful communication tools, in real time/spatial dataset outputs, which, when visualised, can communicate large datasets using easily digestible powerful methods.

However, the project also highlighted some of the challenges of crowdmapping, which should be taken into account by those wishing to use this approach in diverse international contexts. In under-resourced or remote settings, there may be people and whole communities who lack skills in reading and navigating a mapping system, struggle with a lack of WiFi or data connectivity, or have older hardware which is not compatible with the latest or emerging software. In both Kampala and Delhi, promoting the website via social and traditional media proved ineffective, generating very few responses. Further, the most vulnerable girls and young women in some of the poorest parts of the city simply could not access this platform, due to lack of access to the internet, digital literacy, or exposure to the promotion and information about the site on mainstream media. It was therefore imperative to find alternative methods to include those voices, specifically through individual direct recruitment and community outreach. This proved effective in getting high numbers of target participants, but such recruitment methods work against anonymity and may have affected the willingness of young women to be candid.

In some locations the level of detail contained on the base map does not necessarily reflect the situation on the ground. While there is a global drive to collaboratively map locations, this challenge has the potential to be a cause for discontent, low participation, or inaccurate responses. Some parts of the Delhi map, particularly on the outskirts of the city, were not visible, and participants therefore had to drop a pin as close to the area as they could.

Anonymity can be an advantage of crowdmapping, but also has the limitation of not being able to control who is dropping pins and leaving comments. The nature and extent of malicious targeting is likely to vary by context. The Free to Be Maps for all five cities were affected by 'trolls', but Madrid was particularly targeted over a period of about 48 hours. It was listed on websites inviting other saboteurs to go onto the site and drop false and offensive pins. In total, over the data collection period, 1,200 of the total 3,000 pins for Madrid were deemed as offensive or false, made invisible to other participants, and removed from the data analysis – a considerably higher proportion than the

other cities. This action demonstrates a level of determination to stop girls and young women sharing their stories, suggesting the collective action posed a threat to the patriarchal status quo. The open nature of crowdmapping makes it extremely difficult to prevent such action, so structures need to be in place to moderate and respond.

7 Conclusions

The Free to Be project demonstrated the power of crowdmapping in collecting stories from girls and young women in diverse global cities. The scale of sexual harassment recorded by these participants demonstrated the need for better systems to collect this information – systems which involve girls and women from the outset, and are designed to meet their needs and deal with these difficult and sometimes dangerous topics. Participants highlighted the extent to which *they* are the ones changing *their* behaviours, reducing their participation in activities and limiting their movement around the city, i.e. they are the ones being held to account for the violence enacted against them. Currently, members of society can ignore or accept the ongoing, everyday harassment experienced by girls and young women, and the ways in which it limits their participation: these data provide a powerful tool highlighting the scale of the problem, and thereby generating a clear argument for urgent action. Authorities and decision makers in cities must be held to account in making city spaces safer and responding more effectively, and in turn supporting the behaviour change of individual men and boys.

Overall, crowdmapping offers a unique platform for collective action – generating a safe, anonymous space with a large number of stories, enabling trends to emerge, and patterns to be identified across voices and experiences. However, careful planning and consideration of the limitations is required in low-resource settings. Further, crowdmapping should be complemented with ongoing actions to ensure a participatory and relevant design, and a clear plan of action for data use in terms of advocating for and achieving change.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- † This research was commissioned and funded by Plan International with research design and analysis led by Monash University XYX Lab and technical development by CrowdSpot. We acknowledge the huge effort by country office and national organisation teams for their implementation of

research, including staff, partner organisations, and youth activists. With thanks to all the research participants from Delhi, Kampala, Lima, Madrid, and Sydney who took the time to drop their pins and share their stories.

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- 2 Nicole Kalms, Associate Professor and founding director, Monash University XYX Lab, Australia.
- 3 Hayley Cull, Director of Advocacy and Community Engagement, Plan International, Australia.
- 4 Gill Matthewson, Lecturer, Monash University XYX Lab, Australia.
- 5 Anthony Aisenberg, consultant and founder, CrowdSpot, Australia.
- 6 The Safer Cities for Girls programme is a joint programme developed in partnership between Plan International, UN-Habitat, and Women in Cities International. The programme's goal is to build safe, accountable, and inclusive cities with and for adolescent girls (aged 13–18). The expected outcomes of the programme include: (1) increased safety and access to public spaces; (2) increased active and meaningful participation in urban development and governance; and (3) increased autonomous mobility in the city. The programme is currently being implemented in ten cities: Delhi, India; Hanoi, Vietnam; Cairo, Alexandria, and Assiut, Egypt; Kampala, Uganda; Nairobi, Kenya; Lima, Peru; Asunción, Paraguay; and Honiara, Solomon Islands. See **Plan International** website.
- 7 'Lock-outs' refer to a policy introduced by the New South Wales government, where patrons are not permitted to enter licensed venues in certain areas of Sydney after a designated time.

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Collective Silence and Accountability for Sexual Harassment in Lebanon*

Menaal Munshey¹

Abstract This article aims to analyse law and policy on sexual harassment in Lebanon, particularly how meaningful change can be achieved for women living there who face increased vulnerability due to their status as refugees and migrant domestic workers. Drawing on qualitative methods and documentary analysis, the article argues that sexual harassment legislation and a multisectoral change in attitudes is required for sexual harassment accountability to become a reality in Lebanon. While acknowledging Lebanese civil society's significant efforts on collectively pushing legislation and awareness-building, predating the global #MeToo movement, increased efforts must be made on the prevention side, particularly for isolated, marginalised groups such as refugees and migrant domestic workers.

Keywords Lebanon, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, awareness, civil society, accountability, gender equality, refugees, Syria, Palestine.

1 Introduction

This article aims to analyse law and policy on sexual harassment in Lebanon, particularly how meaningful change can be achieved for women who face increased vulnerability due to their status as refugees and migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Lebanon.

The article draws on qualitative methods and documentary analysis. Thematic analysis was used through (1) expert interviews conducted specifically for this article in September 2018, and (2) the author's recordings of a policy dialogue on sexual harassment bringing together key stakeholders organised by the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut (AUB IFI) in March 2018.² In addition, documentary analysis involved primary sources such as draft legislation and secondary sources such as previous literature and newspaper articles. The author's understanding is shaped by her contextual field-based knowledge on the broader subject of gender-based violence in Lebanon.

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The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 51 No. 2 September 2020 'Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives'; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

Table 1 Sexual harassment against women in public – male respondents

	Percentage of men who have ever committed specific acts of sexual harassment			Percentage of men who have committed specific acts of harassment in the past three months
	Once	More than once	At least once*	
Ogling**	2.0	23.6	25.6	20.1
Catcalls or sexual comments	3.5	11.3	14.9	11.3
Stalking or following	2.2	2.3	4.5	2.8
Online harassment such as sending obscene photos or messages	2.1	1.0	3.1	1.1
Touching a woman on intimate parts of her body when she didn't want you to	0.8	0.4	1.1	0.3
Exposing private parts	0.4	0.5	0.9	0.3
Forcing a woman or girl to have sex	1.0	1.0	1.9	0.5
Any of the above-mentioned acts of harassment			31.1	24.2
Number of men respondents			1,050	

Notes * 'At least once' is the sum of 'once' and 'more than once'; ** Statistically more Syrians than Lebanese perpetrated the sexual harassment.
 Source UN Women, Promundo and CRD (2016: 92).

Lebanese civil society's collective push for legislation and awareness-building on the subject of sexual harassment is formidable. This article argues that for sexual harassment law and policy to take shape in Lebanon, increased efforts must be made on the prevention side, particularly for isolated, marginalised groups such as refugees and MDWs. These groups must be brought within the legal system through changes to the existing labour code and trust-building measures with state institutions. Previous domestic violence legislation enacted in 2014 provides an example of the power and pitfalls of gender-based violence legislation in Lebanon. The article therefore argues that sexual harassment legislation and a multisectoral change in attitudes is required for sexual harassment accountability to become a reality in Lebanon.

2 Sexual harassment in Lebanon

There is a lack of data on incidents of sexual harassment and attitudes towards sexual harassment in Lebanon. The International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES), as shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3, revealed that two-thirds of women have experienced sexual harassment in public places including

Table 2 Percentage of women who have experienced specific acts of sexual harassment by men in public spaces

	Percentage of women who have ever experienced specific acts of sexual harassment			Percentage of women who have experienced acts of sexual harassment in the past three months
	Once	More than once	At least once*	
Ogling**	7.3	38.5	45.8	38.6
Catcalls or sexual comments	9.2	42.3	51.4	43.2
Stalking or following	9.1	16.5	25.6	18.3
Online harassment such as sending obscene photos or messages	7.7	6.1	13.8	7.1
Being touched on intimate parts of your body when you didn't want it	1.3	1.1	2.4	0.2
Exposure of private parts	3.6	2.0	5.6	2.1
Being forced to have sex	2.6	0.5	3.1	0.4
Any of the above-mentioned acts of harassment			57.0	
Number of women respondents			1,136	

Notes * 'At least once' is the sum of 'once' and 'more than once'; ** Statistically fewer Syrians than Lebanese experienced the sexual harassment.

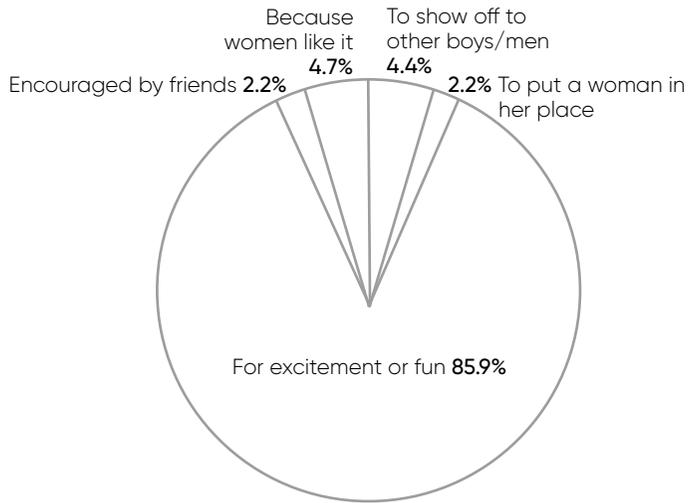
Source UN Women, Promundo and CRD (2016: 93).

Table 3 Participants that have perpetrated or experienced any act of sexual harassment or violence in public spaces

	Lebanese				Syrians			
	Men		Women		Men		Women	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Sexual harassment in a public space ever	29.7	239	60.6	513	37.0	85	47.3	121
Sexual harassment in a public space in the last three months	22.3	180	52.1	441	30.9	71	43.8	112

Source UN Women, Promundo and CRD (2016: 151).

Figure 1 Reasons for sexual harassment



Source © UN Women, Promundo and CRD (2016: 94), reproduced with permission.

catcalls, sexual comments, or ogling (UN Women, Promundo and CRD 2016).

A recent study exploring public attitudes towards sexual harassment found that people hesitate to use the term when talking about their own experiences or experiences of those around them (Hassan, El Mir and El Rahi 2017). Men accepted being labelled as 'harassers' only when explicit sexual terminology was used. Women only call it verbal sexual harassment if loaded with explicit sexual terms, even though they report feeling humiliated, bothered, and insecure from comments that are not explicitly sexual (*ibid.*). In all interactions in public spaces, male desire outweighs women's feelings of discomfort and insecurity (*ibid.*). There is also a sense of 'othering' the problem: women blame Syrians for the harassment of women, even though the majority of the sample of Lebanese men living in Beirut admitted to engaging in sexually harassing behaviour.

An exploratory workplace study found that sexual harassment is largely recognised as physical interference, sexual favours, and exposing sexual material, and less so as sexual jokes and prolonged staring (Hejase 2015). In the study, 8 per cent (12 per cent of men and 16 per cent of women) reported being sexually harassed. Only 7 per cent had taken action; of the majority who had not taken action, this was reportedly due to fear of not being taken seriously, fear of not being promoted, fear of receiving a warning and it being kept on record, fear of being fired from their job, and out of shame (only females) (*ibid.*).

Table 4 Perceptions of sexual harassment

	Men	Women
Women who dress provocatively deserve to be harassed	56.5*	29.2*
Women who are in public places at night are asking to be harassed	39.3	17.6*
A woman who is out alone is asking to be harassed	27.7	9.2*
A woman likes the attention when men harass them	51.4*	13.0*

Note * Statistically more Syrians than Lebanese agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Source UN Women, Promundo and CRD (2016: 95).

Media reports suggest that women who have experienced sexual harassment on public transportation testify to having to endure it on a daily basis, without the ability for recourse to justice due to a justice system that does not record such complaints against a stranger (Janoubia 2013). One article quotes a source from local Internal Security Forces (ISF) asserting that the reporting of such incidents is a rarity, with only one instance per year (Saida Online 2014).

A survey conducted with 1,000 people in Lebanon found that one in four women in the country is a victim of sexual harassment (LBCI Lebanon 2017). The survey suggests that 24 per cent of victims report the assault to the police. According to the ISF, at least 13 women per month reported sexual assaults from January to November 2017 (*ibid.*).

Based on limited previous literature (e.g. Hassan *et al.* 2017; Hejase 2015), it is clear that there is a general absence of specific grievance procedures and sanctions for sexual harassment. In addition, on the prevention side, there are a lack of anti-harassment activities and education programmes, whether it be within organisations or aimed at the general public.

3 Sexual harassment in refugee communities

Sexual harassment incidents and the lack of remedies contribute to further marginalising vulnerable groups in profound and multiple ways. An exploratory study conducted in a Palestinian camp in Lebanon, Burj Barajneh,³ indicates that women and children are the most vulnerable to physical sexual harassment (Khalidi 2015). The study showed that sexual harassment incidents were most frequent in the daytime/afternoon, in alley ways (*ibid.*). This causes a feeling of insecurity for women in moving around most of the neighbourhoods, including their own, within the camp. Palestinian camps are home to Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and are among the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country, with a general lack of adequate

basic services and pre-existing issues of legality, housing, and social integration (Munshey 2018a). Young girls living in the Palestinian camps and the Bekaa Valley complain about verbal and physical sexual harassment (Charles and Denman 2013). This causes women to alter their behaviour, shrink from public space, and self-police. Citing fear as a reason, parents often do not permit their daughters to leave the house (*ibid.*). This results in the disempowerment of women who are already disadvantaged due to their refugee status.

Amnesty International's study of 77 Syrian refugee women living in different areas of Lebanon found that almost all the women were constantly harassed in public – by neighbours, bus and taxi drivers, strangers, ISF personnel, and government employees (Amnesty International 2016). One woman said:

Harassment [of refugee women] is a very big problem in Lebanon, whether I'm single or married, I'm always harassed. It's why we're afraid for our children. I have a daughter who is 16 and I'm afraid to send her even to the closest shop. It's the suffering of all Syrians. (Amnesty International 2016: 45)

Human Rights Watch has also found that Syrian refugee women have been sexually harassed by employers, landlords, local faith-based aid distributors, and community members in Beirut, the Bekaa, and North and South Lebanon (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Refugee women are at risk of sexual harassment in public places and the workplace, which contributes to a lack of economic empowerment (Munshey 2018a). One refugee told Human Rights Watch (2013) that she suffered sexual harassment at nine of the ten households where she had worked. Highlighting a lack of trust, she said she did not report the incidents to Lebanese authorities or the United Nations because she did not believe they would help her as a refugee. As a result, she has stopped working and is now depending on charity to survive. Another woman told Human Rights Watch that her employer at a clothing store grabbed her from behind, touched her breasts, and pressured her to have sex. This happened at multiple workplaces, after which she became depressed and stopped working. She had reported one of the incidents to a United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) caseworker, who offered comfort but said there was nothing more she could do. She could not report the incidents to local authorities because she and her relatives lack valid residency permits. This is a common reason for the lack of reporting, remedies, and accountability for refugees (*ibid.*). There have also been reports of sexual harassment being faced by refugees who turned to local faith-based aid organisations (*ibid.*). When 'safe' institutions misuse their power in this way, fear leaves refugee women with no place to turn to in cases of sexual harassment.

4 Migrant domestic workers' experience

Every domestic worker has experiences with sexual harassment and sexual violence living in Lebanon, to different degrees. (Interview with a Migrant Community Centre (MCC) representative, September 2018)

An estimated 200,000 documented MDWs live in Lebanon. MDWs regularly endure sexual harassment in their place of employment (Hall 2018a). For example, 11 per cent of Sri Lankan housemaids reported being sexually harassed (Moukarbel 2009). The overwhelming majority of cases go unreported due to the fear of repercussions. If an MDW leaves their employer, they are breaking the law the moment they run away (Hall 2018a); this means they risk detention and deportation if they seek official support. For example, in July 2018, a Kenyan woman was brutally assaulted in a racially motivated mob attack, caught on CCTV, and deported before her case was resolved (Hall 2018b). Such institutionalised racism in Lebanon continues largely unchecked, with grave consequences (De Stone and Suber 2018). According to the General Security's official figures, the dead bodies of MDWs were repatriated to their home countries at a rate of two per week between January 2016 and April 2017 (Hall 2018b).

Due to the Kafala sponsorship system, an MDW's legal status in Lebanon is tied to their employer. The Kafala system was introduced in Lebanon in 1991 at the end of the Lebanese civil war. According to the system, migrant workers are explicitly excluded from all existing labour laws in Lebanon (Human Rights Watch 2010). Currently, standard protections of the labour law do not apply to MDWs and there is not much impetus for change at an institutional level:

On the national level, there has not been any kind of change or any real will for change, which is very disappointing but also expected when it comes to Lebanese politics and how the system functions in Lebanon. Especially that there is a big reliance on the labour done by MDWs and others that are in the same care labour category (Category 4). So doing changes in that would entail doing a more comprehensive strategy and economic policy for the country that takes into consideration domestic work and care labour as a valuable and paid labour that we need in the country. They are seen as people who are doing work that isn't really necessary or isn't really important, whereas without that work people wouldn't really be able to do other forms of work. (Interview with an MCC representative, September 2018)

An MDW's only legal protection is a standard contract, developed in 2009 by the Lebanese Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Labour Organization (ILO), which outlines basic rights such as monthly salary payments, and the maximum

number of daily working hours (OHCHR 2009).⁴ The contract does not address salient issues⁵ such as withholding passports and being locked in employers' houses, and is only offered in Arabic, which most MDWs cannot understand.

According to Article 17, a domestic worker can break the employment contract 'if the First Party (employer) or a family member of his/hers or any resident in his/her house beats, assaults, sexually abuses or harasses the Second Party (MDW), after such has been established through medical reports given by a forensic physician and investigation records provided by the Judicial Police or the Ministry of Labour' (ILO 2010: 4). Most domestic workers who are victims of violence or sexual harassment are isolated and rarely have timely access to a forensic doctor or the police due to a lack of requisite knowledge or resources. In addition, the contract does not allow a domestic worker to break the contract in the event of other types of mistreatment by her employer (ILO 2010). In contrast, Article 16 allows an employer wide autonomy to break the contract; this exemplifies the unequal Kafala system (Human Rights Watch 2010). Without reform of the Kafala system, it is unlikely that MDWs will be able to benefit from sexual harassment legislation. Yet reform alone would not mean the end to bad practices and attitudes, as these discriminatory, abusive practices have become internalised (El Helou 2015).

In 2010, the Minister of Labour announced a new hotline to receive complaints from MDWs and other workers (Human Rights Watch 2010). In addition, the Directorate General of General Security has a helpline where workers who have been subjected to physical or emotional abuse or sexual harassment can call in. However, they have to do so within 48 hours of the incident (ILO 2012). The success of these has not yet been measured. Even if they do complain, however, MDWs often face official inaction on the part of police and judicial authorities. For the most part, MDWs face a lengthy legal system without either adequate legal representation or translation (Human Rights Watch 2010). Although thus far the judicial system has remained largely inaccessible and unresponsive, it is the judiciary that has both the potential and obligation to play an important role in protecting the basic rights of MDWs.

Talking about sexual harassment accountability, an MCC representative said:

It really depends on if the MDW can prove it legally [...] the contract can be broken in cases of sexual harassment or physical violence. It should be proven in the court. She should have evidence. Either that she should record it via camera or audio or have physical marks that are assessed by a doctor and upheld in the court. So there are mechanisms that happen after things escalate to a level that the hurt is very visible and very acknowledgeable by the court. In reality, MDWs do not have the privilege of documentation. (Interview, September 2018)

The multiple exclusions of migrant workers along class, gender, and racial lines, associated with an absence of legal protection, is propitious for their exploitation in Lebanon (ILO 2010). The UN Special Rapporteur has urged Lebanese authorities to ensure that domestic workers obtain legal protection and have prompt and immediate access to remedies and justice, and that employers are aware of their obligations when recruiting domestic workers (OHCHR 2011). Without this, a culture of silence persists, and systematic abuse is endemic. Within this restrictive environment, MDW movements have emerged to provide support and solidarity.

5 Migrant domestic worker movements

'[Sexual harassment] has always been part of campaigns for better labour laws and women's rights, so it's inseparable from them', said an MCC representative in an interview with the author in September 2018. In 2016, a group of female domestic workers formed the Alliance of Migrant Domestic Workers, with the aim of representing and building their own narrative (De Stone and Suber 2018). These activists use their only day off a week to create safe spaces for each other under significant environmental constraints: 'We cannot be aggressive. We cannot confront authorities directly or else we will always be the ones to lose' (*ibid.*).

Throughout the years, there has been a growing number of groups that are self-led by MDWs. Like we see in the last three years, less dependency on NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and more groups trying to help each other and trying to form their advocacy and also their community work so that's a great positive change because they're the ones who are more aware of their needs and know what are the better strategies that can really help themselves in similar situations. (Interview with an MCC representative, September 2018)

Increasingly, MDWs turn to a limited underground network for support (Hall 2018a). For example, the Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) was launched in 2010 by young Lebanese feminist activists in collaboration with MDWs and created three MCCs which provide safe spaces for MDWs to advance their rights (ARM-Lebanon 2018). These movements for collective action serve an important purpose:

At least at the very minimum it results in more allies, and more alliances between MDWs and local groups and local movements and activists who can then have a bigger change even within our local communities. When there are cases of abuse, before it was normalised and now there is more and more awareness that this is not acceptable. Even if people hear about it in their neighbourhoods, even if that level of small change is happening, that is still very important to happen, within a system that doesn't allow us very easily to change the bigger institution. (Interview with an MCC representative, September 2018)

Migrant-led movements like these work towards countering sexual harassment and the delimitation of women's rights with bravery and localised knowledge. With legislative accountability being a distant dream, MDW movements often provide the only hope for women in abusive situations.

6 Legislative accountability

There is currently no specific sexual harassment legislation in Lebanon. In 2014, former parliamentarian Ghassan Moukheiber submitted a law proposing to criminalise sexual assault and racial discrimination. Due to protracted political deadlock, this was finally presented to Parliament as an 'urgent law proposal' in 2017. However, it was then detracted due to concerns raised by several MPs such as its potential misuse against employers (Namour 2017). Jean Ogasapian, the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, also expressed his interest in collaborating on the subject given his efforts to draft a similar law. A legislative committee was formed to consider both texts (Khneisser 2018). Moukheiber worked on partially amending the law in an attempt to combine it with Ogasapian's draft law (*ibid.*). Ogasapian's draft law was approved by the cabinet on 8 March 2017 and has remained awaiting approval from Parliament ever since (*ibid.*). Due to frequent political gridlock in Lebanon, it is difficult to determine when the law will come into force.

As Lebanon's draft laws remain in limbo, it is important to analyse the strengths and shortcomings of both laws. The discussion presented here centres around three themes: (1) definitions, (2) intersectionality, and (3) holistic change.

6.1 Definitions

The Lebanese Labour Law and Penal Code do not address sexual harassment, and there is no legal definition of sexual harassment. Moukheiber's law defines sexual harassment as an act that is 'shocking, insisting, or repetitive in any speech, action, or insinuation of a sexual or racist nature, directed to a person without consent, leading to aggression on dignity because of the nature, context, profession, pressure, or embarrassment caused' (Khneisser 2018).

Ogasapian's draft law proposes incorporating sexual harassment policies at the levels of the labour law and the penal law. The law proscribes sexual harassment at the level of the labour law as follows:

Any person, whether an employer or a wage earner, is prohibited from resorting to harassment, whether by means of a written confirmation or by any means of communication, pressure, or intimidation or issue orders aiming at receiving services of a sexual nature both for his own benefit or for the benefit of others.

The draft law provides a second definition of sexual harassment in Article 535 of the penal law under 'public morals and ethics'. The definition is: 'To speak or to write, by any means of communication, by using anything that has a sexual connotation that compromises the honour and dignity of the victim, or if overlooked creates hostile or degrading situations' (Khneisser 2018).

During the roundtable policy dialogue on sexual harassment organised by the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut (AUB IFI) in March 2018, lawyer Manar Zeitar said, 'What is meant by protection? This is a trap. From 1943, protecting the community versus protecting the individual is given importance. In the laws there is no acknowledgement that sexual abuse is sexual violence. It is... not calling it what it is'.⁶

Judge Arlette Tabet reportedly noted that 'the law is formed to protect society and to protect society's morals before it protects individuals, and it is this that is the basis of injustice in many damning cases heard before the courts' (Dandan 2017). However, she hoped that judicial discretion would be used positively and to the benefit of victims (*ibid.*). The number of female judges in Lebanese civil courts has reached half the total number of judges, a huge step forward, which has the potential of making the civil justice system more gender equitable; and the judiciary may be the institutional hope for women seeking justice (Ghamroun 2015).

Sexual harassment is defined by the United Nations as

any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another (United Nations 2008: 1).

Premised on gender equality and fundamental rights, the European Union defines sexual harassment as 'where any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment' (European Union 2017: 3). The current definitions in Lebanon fall short of the international standard and instead shift emphasis away from harm faced by the individual and remain detached from the systemic nature of gender-based violence.

6.2 Intersectionality

Sexual harassment intersects with other forms of disadvantages, vulnerabilities, and marginalisation within society. The draft law presented by Moukheiber considers unequal relations such that they constitute an annulment of the 'consent' conditionality within sexual harassment. However, Ogasapian's draft law overlooks

the inherent unequal power relations that predicate exploitative workplace relationships (Namour 2017).

The draft laws do not address systemic disadvantages that exclude marginalised and vulnerable groups, such as MDWs and refugees, from legal protection. Racial discrimination intersects with gender discrimination against these groups, and this should be legally recognised. Moukheiber's draft law took racial violence into account yet fell short of elaborating on it further and ensuring provisions for foreign domestic workers who fall outside the protection of the labour law (Khneisser 2018).

Charlotte Karam, Director of the Knowledge Is Power (KIP) Project, highlighted legal gaps at AUB IFI's roundtable which included the "relational aspects of power", "restrictive formulation of law and code of conduct", and failure to create "responsibilities which include (1) prevention obligations [...] (2) focus on redress mechanisms and processes, and (3) monitoring post-decision".⁷ In terms of remedies, both laws proposed resorting directly to criminal justice and the penal law to punish sexual harassment (Namour 2017). Given the intersectional nature of sexual harassment, these remedies are likely to be largely inaccessible for women. Based on the experience with the domestic violence legislation, which was promulgated in 2014, women face significant barriers in accessing justice including limited knowledge of their rights, limited financial means, and traditional patriarchal social norms which limit them from claiming their rights (Barakat 2018). The public's trust in Lebanese institutions is low, and this is deeper in refugee communities (Munshey 2018a). There is no adequate legal aid system. A gender perspective is almost systematically absent from the judicial process (Barakat 2018).

6.3 Holistic change

Both draft laws present a strong step forward. However, both have been criticised for not holistically addressing sexual harassment, as that requires amendments to the underlying Penal Code and Labour Law. This particularly affects MDWs and refugees.

Speaking of the difficulties for MDWs in demanding accountability within the current Kafala system, an MCC representative said:

From our experience in legal advocacy, these things take so much time, when they reach the Parliament they change a lot. So we are not having a lot of hope in them making change any time soon. How we approach the issue is that we can't have a sexual harassment law that targets MDWs without doing necessary changes to the Kafala system because then how can we really ensure that it is going to be applied or there will be safety mechanisms placed where MDWs are still locked in houses. And it goes hand in hand, it can't be separated. Even if they were not included [in the labour law], there can still be mechanisms that can help. But even in that

case if we keep the legal framework the same it will not really do any real change when it comes to most people living under the system. (Interview, September 2018)

In the case of MDWs, without their full inclusion in the labour laws, they will not be able to benefit from sexual harassment – or other – legislation.

Talking about the importance of collective action, an MCC representative said:

When we are talking about people who experience harassment from people who are not their employers, whether they are Lebanese people or migrants or people who aren't their sponsors, there is nothing that can be done specially if they don't have papers. They cannot rely on any legal action or any legal mechanisms to remedy that. So this raises the question of the importance of community awareness or community action that in the absence of legal protection (it is important) to have communities that can defend themselves and can bring justice and safety to those involved. (Interview, September 2018)

This could be done through various awareness-raising public campaigns, such as Adventures of Salwa and #MeshBasita, discussed in Section 7.

Lebanon's law on domestic violence which came into force in 2014 was an important first step in terms of gender-based violence legislation; however, the new law is problematic in its definitions and implementation (Munshey 2018b: 7). Learning from the experience of domestic violence legislation in Lebanon, the power of legislation is limited without associated social change and collective action demanding legislation and broader accountability.

7 Collective action

Collective action led by civil society in Lebanon has made significant achievements towards gender equality and combating gender-based violence such as the promulgation of domestic violence legislation in 2014. In recent years, sexual harassment has begun to receive increased attention within activism.

In 2011, a major public campaign aimed at sexual harassment was launched named 'The Adventures of Salwa'.⁸ The video campaign featured an animated character, Salwa, who encounters sexual harassment in several settings and she uses her red bag to stay safe.⁹ The intervention included an online reporting tool and geographical mapping of sexual harassment incidents across Lebanon.¹⁰ As part of the project, the Nasawiya (Feminist) Collective made up of civil society activists, lawyers, judges, and researchers drafted a comprehensive law on sexual harassment (Legal Agenda 2014). This draft law was later

incorporated to some extent into the proposed law which is currently in front of the Lebanese Parliament (Nasr 2017).

In 2012, the AUB paved the way forward within the private sector by instituting an Equity Program with initiatives such as a code of conduct and an online reporting platform for incidents of sexual harassment and violence (AUB 2012). In 2013, Association Najdeh¹¹ launched a campaign with the slogan 'put your hand in my hand and not on it, you and I can stop harassment' to combat sexual harassment, targeting communities residing in Palestinian camps (WEE Portal 2013). That same year, the organisation Say No to Violence launched a campaign entitled 'Have You Seen Harassment?', advocating for effective laws and policies to combat sexual harassment (An-Nahar 2013).

Civil society organisations have made efforts to collect data under the larger umbrella of gender-based violence. In 2015, Lebanon Support's Civil Society Knowledge Centre in collaboration with KAFA (Enough – a feminist NGO) launched an interactive map of incidents of violence against women across Lebanon, which allows filtering by type of violence, including sexual harassment (Civil Society Knowledge Centre 2018). In 2016, a group of activists launched HarassTracker, an online platform to anonymously report sexual harassment.¹² The aim of HarassTracker was to de-normalise the prevalence of sexual harassment (WEE Portal 2017). Data show that police and security forces are themselves the harassers in many cases, and that women do not trust them to protect them in cases of harassment (Hassan *et al.* 2017). This lack of trust is heightened in the case of refugees and MDWs, who are effectively unable to demand accountability from duty bearers who are unaccountable to them.

In August 2017, prior to the #MeToo movement in the West, #MeshBasita or 'It's not OK' was launched on social media in Lebanon. Launched by the KIP Project at AUB's Business School, in partnership with the Minister of State for Women's Affairs, #MeshBasita was designed to raise awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment among the general public and build pressure on lawmakers to legislate on sexual harassment (McKernan 2017). The campaign highlighted the many forms of harassment that women face every day.¹³ As the Director of the KIP Project said:

That was part of the success. People were talking about it and we were involving them in developing messaging and what should we do here, etc. It just spread. It was coming from very local dialogue with these champions that are in their own disciplines or in their own stakeholder groups whether in business (or other industries). (Interview, September 2018)

However, the KIP Project did not originate with a focus on sexual harassment; rather, this came out of the project's initial research and activities:

We realised sexual harassment was everywhere, whether we were talking about economic empowerment or health and wellbeing or GBV [gender-based violence] in the form of harassment and more extreme [...] it was everywhere. So that's why we decided to focus on sexual harassment in year two [of the project]. (Interview with Director of the KIP Project, September 2018)

Reflecting on the experience of the KIP Project, the Director said that a number of diverse stakeholders were involved in the project:

KIP garnered a lot of positive support. There was very little backlash. The government reached out to KIP to get involved in the conversation, there was the establishment of the new Ministry [of State for Women's Affairs]. We had been reached out to by gender focal points in other ministries, for example finance. We had a lot of private sector companies very interested and INGOs [international NGOs] [as well]. (Interview, September 2018)

During the interview, the Director focused on the localised nature of the KIP Project and associated social media activity.

Then 'Me Too' happened – when 'Me Too' happened, that's the first time we heard the conventional criticism of 'this is an American thing, a European thing, why are you guys talking about it?'. [It was the] first time, we had never heard it before. This is similar to the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] rights criticism we get – 'this is American imperialism in a new form'. We had never heard that from KIP. Once 'Me Too' happened, then we started hearing it... it disempowered some of the streams of local narrative by having this rise. Some would say isn't that great that it's happening in the US at the same time, let's build a bridge and make it bigger. No. There's a tipping point where it's disempowering and delegitimising. At some point, it becomes positive again, but right now it's a little murky [...] There's an anti-colonial sense. Pushing back against the hegemony of history that we're still working through. There's a strong history there that's powerful and painful that people are trying to work through. (Interview with Director of the KIP Project, September 2018)

Speaking about the nature and power of collective action, the Director of the KIP Project said:

An eye-opening experience for me in the first month of KIP was, I invited key stakeholders from different groups, for example, a 16-year-old activist, with an entrepreneur, with a large-scale CEO, etc. We held seven focus groups and each one was specifically focused on a different aspect of

economic empowerment. Observing the conversation, to me, solidified the point that collective mobilising isn't about bringing together the different activists that work on GBV to sit at the same table [...] that's not collective mobilising [...] collective mobilising is people with different world views, with different agendas that have the same core agenda interest in women's empowerment on a specific area or dimension. They may be doing it for different reasons, but the outcome is to improve. And it's challenging. We had people leaving the room because of language – they couldn't agree on the same word to use. (Interview, September 2018)

Despite a resistance to institutional change, civil society in the form of NGOs, academia, and local groups have continued to make positive efforts. Speaking of her own work, the Director of the KIP Project said:

I don't think that change is going to come from national level legislation, at least not for the foreseeable future because we don't have stable mechanisms or stable government and so I believe that partnering with the private sector is the way to go at this point in time with this particular legislation around sexual harassment. (Interview, September 2018)

In the wait for legislators to act on the issue, civil society has been instrumental in breaking the silence around sexual harassment and shaping policy.

8 Lessons learned

Collective action by civil society in Lebanon has highlighted the prevalence of sexual harassment and the need for accountability, particularly among refugees and MDW groups. This public realisation is a significant step forward in demanding accountability for victims/survivors. Prior to the global #MeToo movement, civil society has been pushing towards innovative data collection methods and awareness-building. However, there remains a lack of specific sexual harassment legislation. The two draft laws currently being considered by Parliament present a step forward in achieving legal accountability. However, the legislation has shortcomings in terms of definitional decisions and an understanding of the intersectional nature of sexual harassment. For accountability to become a reality for marginalised groups, holistic legal and social change is necessary.

Accountability has many shapes and forms. In the Lebanese context, the importance of collective action does not just lie in pushing for legislative change and legal accountability; it also lies in the process itself. Collective action is itself a form of accessing support mechanisms for marginalised groups like refugees and MDWs which leads to allies, community, and a form of accountability. For women, the recognition that they were wronged and that their voices are being heard in a supportive

environment, can be powerful. In addition, collective action and activism around sexual harassment has educated the general public on the unacceptability of sexual harassment and created new avenues of redress which may be parallel and complementary to holding harassers legally accountable.

Given the barriers to accessing justice for women who experience sexual harassment around the world, social change is equally important to legal change. To make a tangible difference in women's daily lives, attitudes towards sexual harassment must change, barriers of accessing justice must be reduced, and efforts among refugee and migrant communities must be amplified (Munshey 2018a). Collective action in Lebanon is itself a form of accountability – it has the effect of building a narrative of delegitimisation and breaking the silence around sexual harassment.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Menaal Munshey, PhD Candidate, Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge, UK.
- 2 For more information about the event, see the **American University of Beirut website**.
- 3 Burj Barajneh is a Palestinian camp in Beirut with a population of 17,945 refugees and it has a general lack of adequate basic services. For more information, see the **United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) website**.
- 4 Lebanon is not a signatory to the ILO's Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention (2011), or the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990).
- 5 A study found that 88 per cent of employers agreed that the employer had the right to keep a worker's passport 'in order to prevent her from escaping'; 31.3 per cent admitted to locking domestic workers in their houses; and 80 per cent said they would not allow workers to take a day off and leave the premises (KAFA 2010).
- 6 From author's recordings: see endnote 2.
- 7 From author's recordings: see endnote 2.
- 8 A precursor to sexual harassment-focused initiatives was the 'Speak out, don't hide' (*takkalami wala takhjali*) campaign in 2010 (WEE Portal 2017).
- 9 See the **Adventures of Salwa YouTube channel**.
- 10 See the **Adventures of Salwa official website**.

- 11 **Association Najdeh** is a feminist, secular NGO focusing on Palestinian women's rights in Lebanon.
- 12 **HarassTracker** categorises sexual harassment ranging across offensive behaviour of a sexual nature using audiovisual tools, oral or verbal harassment, physical acts or gestures with sexual connotation, sexual assault, intimidation, stalking and threats.
- 13 For more information on the social media campaign, see the **KIP Project website**.

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Accountability with Teeth*

Maha El Said¹

Abstract Universities worldwide have had policies to combat sexual harassment since the 1980s. Nonetheless, having policies in place does not mean that universities are held accountable for the safety of their students, nor does it guarantee that perpetrators are held accountable for their deeds. While the politics of power are always at play when discussing sexual harassment, at universities it is more complex due to the hierarchy integral to their structure. This article investigates the trajectory of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit at Cairo University and explores how effective the implementation of the policy has been in holding the university accountable to victims of sexual harassment. Making use of accountability assessment frameworks, it explores how the university can be held accountable to victims. It focuses specifically on responsiveness, responsibility, and liability to assess the effectiveness of the anti-sexual harassment policy, and identifies loopholes that need to be addressed.

Keywords sexual harassment, accountability, policy, responsiveness, university campuses, politics of power, culture.

1 Introduction

Voice needs teeth to have bite – but teeth may not bite without voice.

(Jonathan Fox, 'Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?')

On 16 March 2014, a girl walked onto Cairo University main campus wearing a red t-shirt and jeans, and was followed by tens of male students whistling and making sexist comments. This public sexual harassment was caught on camera, and therefore made it difficult for the university community to deny that female students were being sexually harassed on campus. The incident was an embarrassment for the university's administration, especially as the then-president of the university, Gaber Nassar, had been elected to lead the university in the post-revolution era based on promises of freedom, liberty, and equity. The first reaction and



public statement made by Dr Nassar blamed the victim, focusing the issue on the way she was dressed. However, this stand could not be sustained as civil society and the university community held the administration accountable. Under pressure from several academic activists, the university proclaimed responsibility and the president of the university stated:

In my personal and professional capacity, I affirm my full condemnation of the crime of harassment against women, and the perpetrators must be punished. No blame should be put on the victim and she should not be subjected to any accusation. It is a crime that is unjustified... Finally, I want to make it clear that I support all the efforts that combat violence against women inside or outside the university and will not allow any similar behaviour on campus (Nassar 2014).

This statement was an announcement that the university assumed responsibility, would be held accountable, and would hold any perpetrators accountable. Furthermore, it was an indication that there was enough political will to endorse a policy to combat sexual harassment and violence against women on campus. Accordingly, with a lot of support, a policy was formulated and the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit at Cairo University was established to oversee its implementation.

This article investigates the trajectory of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit and explores how effective the policy has been in holding the university accountable to victims of sexual harassment. Making use of accountability assessment frameworks, it will explore how the party that 'sets the rules' can be held accountable to the 'subjects', i.e. the victims, while at the same time holding perpetrators accountable. It will specifically focus on responsiveness, responsibility, and liability in order to assess the effectiveness of the anti-sexual harassment policy, and identify loopholes that need to be addressed.

1.1 Note on subjectivity

It is important to note that this study is based on first-person experiential observation and reflection. As the author of this article, I was able to describe, analyse, and evaluate the effectiveness of the unit from within. As one of the founders and current director of the unit, I was able to access quantitative data that might not have been easily accessible to outsiders. Nonetheless, the navigation through this data had to be supported by insights and personal experience in its analysis. My relationship with the unit investigators enabled me to verify verdicts which to me seemed questionable. During the whole process, as researcher, I aimed at striking a balance between the facts and the personal assumptions and emotions, with commitment towards confidentiality and preservation of the privacy and anonymity of the victims.

2 Sexual harassment at universities

Sexual harassment on campuses is not a new phenomenon nor is it confined to one geographical region or university. As early as the 1970s, Mary Rowe of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) managed to discuss sexual harassment at the university (Rowe 1974), and succeeded in having MIT develop an anti-sexual harassment policy, after which other US universities followed suit.² On the other side of the Atlantic, UK universities have also been trying to prevent sexual harassment on campuses. Evonne Leonora Von Heussen's efforts, together with the National Association for Victims of Stalking and Harassment, led to the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. In 2010, the National Union of Students (NUS) began campaigning on the issue of sexual harassment, combined with the call to end violence against women and girls, and the taskforce work of Universities UK. This all culminated in the End Violence Against Women Coalition (EVAW) producing a legal briefing in January 2015, focusing on universities' obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) of the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998 (see Universities UK 2016).

Universities all over the world in places such as Australia, North America, and Africa have had policies to combat sexual harassment since the 1980s, with varying levels of effectiveness. Bill 132, the Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act 2015 in Canada led to universities reviewing their policies.³ A recent report by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017: 4) on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities found that policies need to be reviewed since 'only 6% of students thought that their university was currently doing enough to provide and promote clear and accessible information on sexual harassment procedures'.

3 Sexual harassment at Cairo University

Until late into the twentieth century, sexual harassment in Egypt was not spoken of; women had to put up with unwelcome comments and looks as part of their daily experience of being in public spaces. Even when sexual harassment got more aggressive, with groups of harassers touching and groping women, it was still considered a taboo issue and victims of harassment hesitated to report incidents for fear of being stigmatised or blamed.

After 25 January 2011, the silence around harassment as a social problem was broken and the issue became the subject of wide debate. A growing public awareness of the problem of sexual harassment gave rise to many initiatives to combat it. That is not to say that before the revolution there was no violence or there were no efforts to combat violence, but it is to say that the issue of sexual harassment became a pressing problem needing both the efforts of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and citizen groups on the one hand, and a legal framework on the other, to

eliminate it. Research and initiatives addressing and documenting sexual harassment started to mushroom and have been on the rise since 2011. In early 2014, and in response to NGOs working on combating sexual harassment in society, the government issued a law criminalising sexual harassment and made amendments to the penal code to include the term 'sexual harassment' for the first time in Egyptian law.⁴

While laws applying to street harassers are important, the context of Cairo University as an educational institution with its own particularity needed to be addressed within its own laws and culture. With the ultimate goal of making universities safe spaces and creating an environment conducive to equal opportunity and mutual respect, a group of academics from Cairo University started exploring and researching the issue. In March 2014, a working group, including faculty members, student representatives, and several civil society organisations active in the field of anti-sexual harassment, was set up to formulate an anti-harassment policy for Cairo University.

One of the very first concerns the working group had was to come up with a policy that was contextually relevant to all of the university's community, whether academic staff, students, or administrative staff. The first step taken towards achieving this was to explore the Supreme Council of Universities' bylaws and regulations.⁵ It was no surprise that there was nothing on sexual harassment, yet in studying disciplinary actions outlined in the universities' laws, the group was able to outline disciplinary actions to be taken in the case of sexual harassment based on these. With no model to follow, however, the mandate of the unit was unclear. Nonetheless, with the objective of creating a safe university where both males and females had equal respect and opportunities, the unit emulated standard protection policies, focusing on: (1) prevention through awareness raising; (2) intervention, which basically is the processing of grievances; and, (3) referral, where victims are referred to counselling for psychological support.

The ratification of the policy, on 22 June 2014, makes Cairo University (a governmental body) the first national university to endorse an anti-harassment policy that commits to raising awareness about the problem and which enforces disciplinary measures.

What makes this initiative unique is the fact that it is homegrown; the participatory nature in which the policy was developed, as faculty, students, and civil society associations all collaborated to formulate it, gives ownership to the university community, and creates a type of social mobility in support of the initiative.

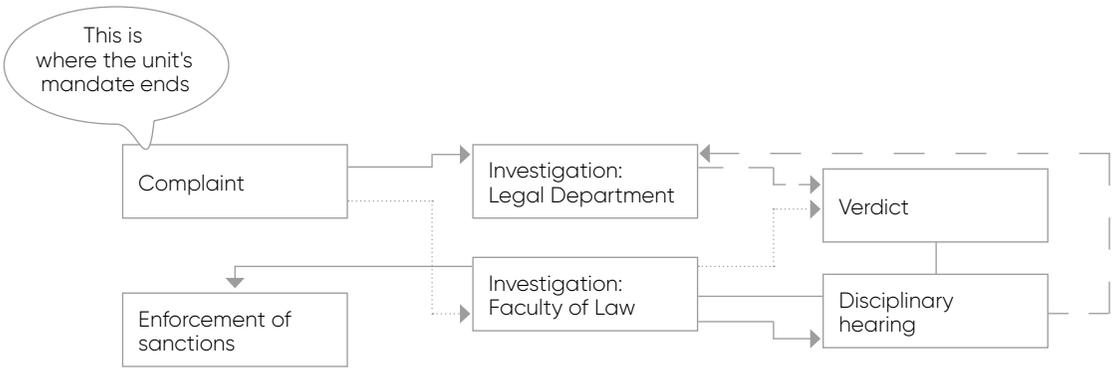
An important component of the policy is the grievance procedure, outlined below.

- 1 **Filing a complaint:** The victim is required to file a complaint with the anti-harassment unit coordinator.⁶ The victim (according to the instructional pamphlets and videos) should contact the unit coordinator, who in turn is supposed to assess the situation and then pass it on to the executive committee, who in turn passes it on to the president of the university to call for an investigation.
- 2 **Investigation:** It is important to note that university law distinguishes between the different categories of the university community. While professors are adjudicated according to provisions of Article 110 of the Law on the Organisation of Universities No 49 of 1972, which starts with a written warning and escalates to termination of employment, students are adjudicated according to Article No 126 of the Executive Regulation No 809 of 1975, which again starts with a warning and escalates to dismissal. As for non-teaching staff, such as teaching assistants (TAs), administrative staff, security personnel, and janitors, they are not governed by the university law and thus the provisions of Article 157 of the Law on the Organisation of Universities No 49 of 1972 shall be applied, which again is graduated from a warning up to final dismissal from the university. The basic difference between the three is that the investigation authority and disciplinary committee differs in accordance with the Supreme Council of Universities' bylaws. Academic staff (lecturers to professors) can only be subject to investigation by the president of the university and are questioned by a professor from the faculty of law assigned by the president. Students and administrative staff are investigated by the legal department in their faculty and it is the dean's authority to command investigations.
- 3 **Verdict:** After listening to both victim and harasser, and after examining all the evidence and questioning witnesses, the investigator(s) gives an opinion. The results of the investigation are summed up in a memorandum, together with any recommended sanction based on the level of culpability, and sent to the president of the university, as sole holder of executive power for enforcing sanctions in the university.

If a minor sanction is recommended, such as a warning, there is no need for the convening of a disciplinary committee. However, if the investigator considers that there should be more serious sanctions, such as suspension, then the case is reverted to a disciplinary committee that is formed by the president. In the case of professors, the disciplinary committee must have a representative from among the judges of the State Council.⁷

- 4 **Enforcement of sanction:** After the verdict is signed by the president, a decree is issued and sent to the dean of the faculty to be implemented. Ironically, neither the complainant

Figure 1 Process



Source Author's own.

nor the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit are informed! Once the recommendations are sent to the president of the university, it therefore becomes very difficult to track the case. In fact, the unit is seen as not entitled to any information and is no longer part of the process as the case falls under the legal department's mandate.

4 Evaluating the process

Regardless of how strong the procedures may look, actual implementation is the only judge. The glitches of this reporting mechanism are numerous. First and foremost, it is a very complex multilayered process. Second, it requires highly trained coordinators who are supposed to be accessible and capable of assessing the situation. Third, it assumes that all investigators are up to par and capable of investigating sexual harassment cases just like any other cases they handle. Finally, and most importantly, it alienates the unit from the case as its connection with the case ends at the complaint stage.

A further unfortunate incident, similar to the sexual harassment incident that facilitated the establishment of the unit, subsequently happened at the university.⁸ A student in her second year was verbally harassed by three male students who made sexual comments about her appearance. The student, not knowing about the existence of the unit, filed a complaint with the dean who in turn called for an official investigation. When the student went to the legal department, not only was she belittled and made fun of in front of the harassers, but the investigator asked her 'What were you wearing?!' The humiliation did not stop there. He went further by asking her to go home and get the sweatshirt she was wearing when the incident happened, and put it on to make sure she was dressed appropriately! Doubly traumatised, the student heard about the unit and came to us.⁹

In spite of all the awareness-raising campaigns around the newly ratified sexual harassment policy, it was impossible to guarantee that all legal departments at the various faculties would have the capacity to investigate sexual harassment incidents appropriately. Gehlauf and Popovich (1994) have listed several factors that can influence the handling of sexual harassment complaints in universities and these are mostly based around personal perceptions. The investigator's reactions, therefore, were in line with the Egyptian cultural context where sexual harassment is not well defined. Verbal harassment is not considered actual harassment in this context, and all sexual harassment myths that blame the victim and find excuses for harassers are perceived as undebatable truth.

In an attempt to avoid similar incidents, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit then put in place a centralised system where all sexual harassment cases are presented either at the unit itself or at the president of the university's office. Two female lawyers, trained on how to handle the cases – either psychologically or legally – are assigned to the unit and all questioning now takes place at the unit for reasons of confidentiality and reassurance. This arrangement applies only to students, junior faculty, and administrators. Since the unit still had no say on which law professor undertook any investigation against any academic staff member, the victim and the case in this circumstance were still subject to the professor's personal perception. However, after some negotiation with the university administration, a law professor who happens to also be a member of the unit's executive committee, has now been assigned to investigate all sexual harassment cases filed against professors.

This arrangement has helped the unit on two fronts. First, finally after two years the unit could keep a record of sexual harassment cases and trace identifying patterns, thus enabling it to create more effective interventions. Second, it gave the unit credibility and created a sense of trust that was important for the victims. Ganga Vijayasiri's study 'Reporting Sexual Harassment' (2008) asserts the importance of trust and an enabling culture as two vital factors to encourage reporting. These are achieved to a great extent by this modified reporting and investigation system. Although it is hard to assert that this new system is the direct cause of increased reporting, it is safe to say that it has at least contributed to it.

As can be seen, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit is not involved in any of the investigations, nor does it have the authority to even start an investigation. With no legal authority or investigatory powers, the unit's role has become that of an entity that tries to follow up on cases to ensure victims' rights and fair processes. Nonetheless, with very little authority, it has become difficult to even keep a record of cases.

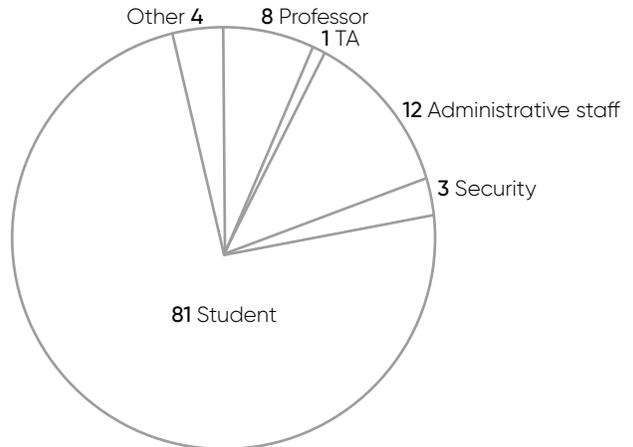
5 Empowerment and accountability

Before assessing accountability to victims of sexual harassment at Cairo University, it is important to clarify what is meant by both empowerment and accountability in the context of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit. The focus in this article is on the concept of accountability as a contractual relationship in a moral community, within which relevant relationships exist (Schweiker 1993; Shearer 2002; Smiley 1992). Thus, the definition offered by Menocal and Sharma (2008: 5), where accountability is 'the relationship between two parties, those who set or control the application and implementation of the rules, and those who are subject to the rules' is the most relevant to this research. Yet those 'subject to the rules' are not just passive recipients, but rather they are active participants who are aware of their rights and make their own choices. Hence, empowerment in this context is the power to break the silence and speak up about sexual harassment. This simple act of speaking up involves a courageous act of defiance, defiance of both power structures and cultural norms, but most importantly it is a demand for the 'application and implementation of the rules', that is a demand for accountability. Therefore, in order to assess the level of accountability, it is important to investigate both 'voice' and 'response'.

5.1 Voice and response

In the past four years, the unit has mainly dealt with peer-to-peer sexual harassment complaints – 74 per cent of the complaints have been student against student. Complaints from administrative staff amount to 11 per cent of the total, again the majority of which is peer-to-peer harassment. Professors come in third place of those accused of harassment, with 11 per cent of cases against professors. Reports against security guards

Figure 2 Total reports of sexual harassment to the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit



Source Author's own.

Table 1 Sanctions applied

Verdict	Student	Professor	Employee	Other
Suspended for a specific duration	5	1		
Subject to disciplinary board	16	3		4
Formal warning	15			
Verbal warning	2	2		
Investigation retained due to the absence of complainer	6			1
Investigation retained due to lack of evidence	11	2		
Suspension from work on half payment basis			2	
Salary deduction			3	
Termination	1			2

Source Author's own.

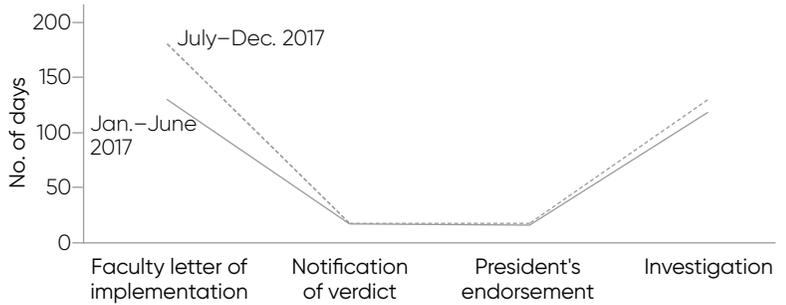
are 4 per cent, while reports against technicians and janitors represent only 3 per cent.

Apart from 8 of the 109 cases, complaints were from students. Most grievances have been about verbal abuse; however, sanctions vary, based on the investigators' judgement as to the gravity of the incident (see Table 1).

The number of cases that have been closed is alarming. A total of 13 cases were closed for lack of evidence, while another 7 were closed due to the absence of the complainant. Both reasons are of concern since this could be an indication of lack of trust or lack of confidence in the results. Plus it also raised the issue of 'evidence' that needs further consideration. In three cases, sanctions were imposed on the complainant because the report implicated her.¹⁰ Similar to other universities, 'tension between complainant empowerment and concerns about legal liability is built into the institutional fabric of the university as its practices, rules, and interests systematically constrain the handling of sexual harassment complaints' (Kihnley 2000: 70).

From statistics available for cases over the past four years (2014–18), it has become clear that the actual implementation of a verdict is rare, especially if the accused is a professor or a high-ranking administrator. For example, out of the eight cases filed against professors during the past four years, only one professor was subject to suspension for two academic years,

Figure 3 Timeline of complaint process



Source Author's own.

while the other three were subjected to disciplinary hearings: one was acquitted, another got a verbal warning, and the third has no verdict as yet.

Table 1 shows that as long as it is a student, employee, technician, or janitor, the university holds responsibility and tries to ensure that disciplinary action is taken against the harasser. Yet challenging the impunity and power of professors needs different strategies. Therefore, it is important to consider both empowerment and accountability in degrees. If we look at the numbers, it becomes obvious that there is a direct relationship between numbers of reports and responsiveness, since the response to the large number of student-against-student reports, and the enforcement of sanctions on non-teaching staff testify to both empowerment and accountability. However, if compared to student-against-professor reports, it becomes clear that there is neither absolute empowerment nor absolute accountability.

Another challenge to responsiveness is the time span each case takes. Although the average total time is 55 days, very close to the verbal agreement that a case is resolved within a maximum of 50 days, this is misleading, as some cases take much longer while others take a much shorter time.

As can be seen from Figure 3 showing the number of days that each action within a case took during the first and second halves of 2017 (El Said 2017), the investigation legitimately takes a long time, yet the time a faculty takes to implement a sanction is the longest. In one case, where the verdict was the suspension of a student for a month, by the time the faculty was notified, he had already graduated. If this is indicative of anything, it shows that a response is not always timely.

6 Accountability for whom?

There are around 260,000 students, comprising the majority of the university community. There are also, however, administrators, faculty, security, and janitors with different levels of power and

influence. Working with students has been easy and rewarding. Many students got involved with the unit's awareness-raising campaigns and volunteered to form what we have termed the 'students' team', which currently has approximately 1,000 student volunteers. Most of the faculty, however, still resist engagement with a lot of cynicism and sarcasm. Several attempts at addressing the staff have been made, such as holding awareness events at the faculty club, or addressing the different departments' councils. Though there is no open hostility, there is, however, very minimal cooperation and very limited participation.¹¹ In short, it is reasonable to say that the unit has not been welcomed among university staff. It has been made to look like a student activity that does not involve the rest of the university community and, more importantly, does not challenge any power relations or threaten the hierarchy of power.

A greater focus on students, on the assumption that they were the most vulnerable, led to the silencing of a very important strata of the university: young scholars, demonstrators, and assistant lecturers. It is true, as Menocal and Sharma have shown, that 'not all voices are equal or equally heard. It remains unclear who is actually excluded by some of the spaces and mechanisms created to encourage "voice" and "participation"' (2009: xi). Ironically, the most muted voices are not the most vulnerable, i.e. students and administrative staff: in fact, the most silenced voices are those of graduate students and TAs. Recent research conducted at the university to assess the extent of sexual harassment on campus found that nearly 48 per cent of the researched sample of graduate students and TAs had been exposed to sexual harassment (Amer 2014), yet almost none had been reported. Out of a total of 109 complaints, only two official complaints have been made from a graduate student against her supervisor; while there has been a number of verbal complaints, in each case the student refused to officially file the complaint. This is evidently due to the fact that reporting their research supervisors will put them at higher risk and threaten their status. One of the complainants who filed an official complaint subsequently decided to stop investigations and drop all charges; the other insisted on continuing in spite of efforts made by the professor's colleagues to stop her.

7 Accountability and power

Power and fear are both at play when it comes to disclosure of sexual harassment cases, as noted by Billie Wright Dzeich and Linda Weiner as early as 1990 in their book *The Lecherous Professor: Sexual Harassment on Campus*. While peer-to-peer harassment can be as harmful as professor-to-student harassment, professor-to-student harassment is much more complex with multiple layers of power dynamics. As Leila Whitley and Tiffany Page (2015: 39) correctly note, 'the intensely hierarchical structure of relationships inside the university... [coupled with]... the power inherent in the teaching relationship

creates an unequal dynamic that can leave students vulnerable to abuses of that power'. Stories of sexual abuse are many, yet the amount of courage needed to file a complaint against a professor is enormous, especially given that the structure can put the victim at a disadvantage. The total number of official complaints against professors during the life of the unit has been just seven (see Table 1). Three of the cases were based on collective complaints, where both male and female students complained about the professor's attitude towards women students and sexist remarks they had made about them. Though the three cases ended with the professor only receiving a verbal warning, the fact that they were collective complaints put pressure on the university and thus some sort of sanction was enforced. On the other hand, individual cases have rarely resulted in sanctions and many attempts at pressurising the student have been made.

According to research '[a]ccountability challenges power and vested interest' since 'more transparency about abuse, corruption or other forms of wrong doing can create an image in public opinion that things are getting worse, while the opposite is the case' (Theisohn 2006: 20). The only case where a graduate student insisted on filing an official complaint with the unit put the accountability of the university to the test and exposed how power and accountability are at odds. After months of investigations and questioning, the investigator could only reprimand and recommend a written warning because there was not enough evidence to indict the professor. While the woman was sufficiently empowered to come forward and speak, she did not have any leverage to hold the university accountable. In fact, the consequence for the student was much graver than the sanction on the professor. The department where she was registered for a doctoral degree has tried to dismiss her for lack of academic seriousness, in that she failed to submit parts of her dissertation for a few months, disregarding the fact that there was an ongoing legal dispute between her and her supervisor.

As Director of the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit, the reaction I received when I followed up the complaint with the relevant parties in the dispute felt for me as if professors were invincible, and that accountability has its limits when dealing with those in positions of privilege. The universal phenomena of 'complaining women' as 'disrupting departments, placing reputations and careers in jeopardy, and interrupting other students who are also academically dependent upon the sexual harasser', as noted by Whitley and Page (2015: 44), resonated with the responses that the unit was receiving from those who shared their experiences. Whereas the unit sees its role as pressing for accountability, some in academia see this role as a vilification and causing undue reputational damage for faculties.

It became apparent that as long as the unit works with students, it is 'safe' as we are not treading on anybody's toes or challenging any power structure. If the offender is a peer, there are few obstacles to accountability, as in the case of student-to-student harassment or employee-to-employee harassment. Reporting a grievance against a peer is also less risky, and so it was easier for women to report peers. Reporting research supervisors, however, will put a complainant at higher risk and threaten their status.

Structures of power in a male-dominated domain such as the university inevitably influence the degree of accountability. The university as an institution is hierarchal by nature with complex power relations, which allows for various types of abuse including sexual (Osborne 1992; Kihnley 2000; Whitley and Page 2015). Within this hierarchal context, the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit is trying to empower women and give them voice, with the view that, as Alina Rocha Menocal and Bhavna Sharma explain, increasing voice will make the institution more responsive and thus more accountable. The means by which the unit attempted to give voice was through creating an effective reporting mechanism. Nonetheless, an effective reporting mechanism does not guarantee 'effective voice' (Menocal and Sharma 2009: 8).

8 Accountability with no teeth

As Fox (2015: 357) has noted, 'Voice needs teeth to have bite – but teeth may not bite without voice'. It would be a naive assumption to believe that a rise in numbers of complaints means greater 'voice' or greater accountability. As Menocal and Sharma (2008: 66) have rightly stated, a 'linear causal relationship in which increased voice automatically results in greater accountability cannot be assumed and could lead to unrealistic expectations about what increasing citizens' voice alone can achieve'. Whereas an increase in reporting is an increase in empowerment as victims speak up, and could be considered as a marker of success. According to Janet Beer in her speech at the Universities UK Conference to address harassment, 'One measure of the success of university communities effectively beginning to tackle sexual violence and misconduct are disclosure and reporting levels' (2017). Yet it is important to have a responsive system that can be accountable to victims of harassment. Menocal and Sharma (2008: 30) conclude that '[I]inking "voice" and "accountability" can only be meaningful when citizens have the knowledge and power to make demands, and those in positions of power have the capacity and will to respond'.

The Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit has made an impact and attracted a lot of attention, being the first of its kind in the Middle East. The support of the administration and its association with the president of the university gave it power and authority. Nonetheless, very important elements are missing. The UNDP *Institutional Arrangements to Combat*

Corruption: A Comparative Study (2005) determines seven factors for the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies: (1) independence; (2) a solid and comprehensive legal framework; (3) strong political backing; (4) adequate financial, human, and technical resources; (5) adequate powers of investigation; (6) a coherent and holistic strategy; and (7) support of society at large. Out of these seven factors, the unit only has a 'coherent and holistic strategy' that is based on the three-pronged approach of prevention, intervention, and referral.

Similar to any anti-corruption body, the unit needs to have its independence. Despite the appearance of power, in reality, with no budget, the unit has no autonomy which is necessary for any independent body. Secondly, the fact that the unit was invented 'on the spur of the moment' by a decree from the president of the university and since it is unprecedented and is not part of the university's organisational structure, there is no sustaining legal structure, making it fragile and dependent on the goodwill of the university's council. Finally, and most importantly, it does not have any investigatory powers, making it dependent on the university's legal department which in many cases represents a chauvinist culture that blames the victim.

The lack of these elements makes accountability and answerability questionable. Jonathan Fox asks a very important question: 'Is "answerability" enough to "count" as accountability, or does the concept necessarily require the inclusion of the capacity to sanction as well?' (2015: 353). He states:

[F]rontline accountability campaigners, operating in institutional contexts that combine high risk with little means of recourse or redress, are likely to be quite strategic about investing their limited political capital primarily in forward-looking, preventative approaches. (*ibid.*)

The question then becomes whether the unit should follow his advice and confine its work to prevention, and if so how is accountability to be factored in, and more seriously what will happen to the credibility of the unit itself?

9 Conclusion

It is important to note that addressing sexual harassment is a very thorny issue as it challenges both structural and cultural power structures. It is important to be able to work within the system to reform it. It is also important – borrowing Chris Linder's title – to develop a power-conscious framework that would dismantle these power structures (Linder 2018).

After several years of work, it has become obvious that the campus community cannot be dealt with as a homogeneous community. Hierarchy is an integral part of the higher education system; therefore, it is necessary to tailor the message in response

to this hierarchal structure. Furthermore, and more importantly, is to reconsider the measures that would guarantee that in spite of the different legal procedures for each category of the community, there is enough transparency to ensure fairness.

In order to ensure accountability, it is mandatory to shift the focus 'from the avoidance of liability to the need to educate learners and educators on the effects of sexual harassment, the myths surrounding sexual harassment, and the role that culture plays in the perception of sexual harassment' (Smit and du Plessis 2011: 40). Having vertical accountability, whether upwards or downwards, is not enough for creating a campus free from harassment. There needs to be horizontal accountability, where peers hold perpetrators accountable to ensure a zero-tolerance policy. Although it has been noted that horizontal accountability is integral to academia (Lindberg 2013), when it comes to sexual harassment, it takes more than informal norms and sets of regulations; it takes a change of culture that does not tolerate sexual harassment, and a change of perception. However, this will not happen until there is a cultural change that genuinely incriminates sexual harassment and hence enforces what Lindberg (2013: 14) calls 'reputational accountability'.

Nonetheless, it is no small feat that the discourse around sexual harassment at the university has changed. A spillover effect is taking place, giving more credibility to the Anti-Sexual Harassment and Violence Against Women Unit and empowering more victims. To sum up, I can say that we have been taking giant steps towards achieving our goal, 'a safe university for all'.

Notes

- * This issue of the *IDS Bulletin* was prepared as part of Action for Empowerment and Accountability (A4EA), an international research programme exploring social and political action in fragile, conflict, and violent settings. A4EA is a consortium led by IDS and funded with UK aid from the UK government (Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office – FCDO). The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the official policies of IDS or the UK government.
- 1 Maha El Said, Professor, Cairo University, Egypt.
- 2 See the **United States Department of Justice website** for an overview of the law and its implications for educational institutions.
- 3 See **Legislative Assembly of Ontario website** for more information.
- 4 Article 306A of the penal code was amended to criminalise harassment in the form of words, gestures, and actions expressed in person or through other means of communication. Although the amendment criminalises sexual harassment, it still falls short of civil society ambitions, especially in that it defines key concepts narrowly, such as limiting harassment to

- the 'intent to receive sexual gratification', and marital rape is not mentioned. Furthermore, it focuses on the defendant's motivation, rather than the harm done to the victim, ignoring the survivor's feelings of humiliation and intimidation.
- 5 The Supreme Council of Universities is a governing body that oversees all universities in Egypt; see its **website** [in Arabic].
 - 6 Due to the massive population of students (around 260,000), it was found sensible to appoint unit coordinators at each of the 25 university institutions and faculties. Ideally, each faculty is supposed to have two coordinators for liaison between the faculty and the unit.
 - 7 Egyptian Disciplinary Courts are part of the judicial section of the Egyptian State Council. It is mandated with the disciplinary procedures for employees of the highest level of management and their equivalent thereof. Accordingly, all disciplinary committees for professors have to have a member from the State Council.
 - 8 It is unfortunate that changes to the situation concerning sexual harassment only happen as a reaction to a scandal or grave situation. The law criminalising sexual harassment was passed only after nine women were sexually assaulted during celebrations of El Sisi's election. The unit was established due to another scandal when a student was harassed by a group of students on campus.
 - 9 The victim in this case needed intensive psychological support, which she received through the unit.
 - 10 In two of these cases, the girl was accused of insulting the harasser using obscene language. The victim had no witness, but the perpetrator had witnesses.
 - 11 The unit holds several public events such as marathons, cycle rallies, and on-campus marches. In spite of the fact that the-then president of the university participated, less than ten professors have taken part.

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Glossary

- A4EA** Action for Empowerment and Accountability
- AHPSR** Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research [Switzerland]
- AME** Association des Mères Éducatrices [Benin]
- AMOSUP** Association of Marine Officers and Seafarers' Union of the Philippines
- APEFF** Association for the Promotion of Girls and Women [Burkina Faso]
- ARM** Anti-Racism Movement [Lebanon]
- AUB** American University of Beirut
- BBOG** Bring Back Our Girls [Nigeria]
- BJP** Bharatiya Janata Party [India]
- CAPMAS** Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics [Egypt]
- CASA** Centre Against Sexual Assault [Australia]
- CDC** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [USA]
- CEDAW** Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- CJCP** Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention [South Africa]
- CREID** Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development [UK]
- DBA** *dalit* Bahujan Adivasi
- ECP** Election Commission of Pakistan
- EU** European Union
- EVAW** End Violence Against Women [UK]
- GBV** gender-based violence
- GONGO** government-organised non-governmental organisation
- GSCASH** Gender Sensitisation Committee against Sexual Harassment
- HE** higher education
- ICC** Internal Complaints Committee
- ICS** International Chamber of Shipping [The Philippines]
- IDG** International Day of the Girl
- IDRC** International Development Research Centre [Canada]
- IFI** Issam Fares Institute [Beirut]
- ILO** International Labour Organization [Switzerland]
- IMAGES** International Men and Gender Equality Survey
- INE** Instituto Nacional de Estadística [National Institute of Statistics, Spain]
- INEI** Instituto Nacional Estadística y Información [National Institute of Statistics and Information, Peru]
- INGO** international non-governmental organisation
- ISF** Internal Security Forces [Lebanon]
- ITF** International Transport Workers' Federation [The Philippines]
- JNU** Jawaharlal Nehru University [India]
- KIP** Knowledge is Power
- KP** Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

LBCI Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International
LGBT lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
LGBTQI+ lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex+
MAAP Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific [The Philippines]
MAPP Masters Programme in Social Policy
MCC Migrant Community Centre [Lebanon]
MDW migrant domestic worker
MIMP Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables [Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, Peru]
MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology [USA]
MNA Member of the National Assembly [Pakistan]
MoU Memorandum of Understanding
MPA Member of the Provincial Assembly [Pakistan]
MQM-P Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan
NA National Assembly [Pakistan]
NCW National Council of Women [UK]
NGO non-governmental organisation
NGOCC NGO Coordinating Committee
NUS National Union of Students [UK]
ODI Overseas Development Institute [UK]
OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [France]
OHCHR Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [Switzerland]
PML-N Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz
PMMA Philippine Merchant Marine Academy
PODA Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy [Pakistan]
POEA Philippine Overseas and Employment Administration
PPP Pakistan Peoples Party
PSED Public Sector Equality Duty
PTI Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf
RPC Research Programme Consortium
SDG Sustainable Development Goal
SGBV sexual and gender-based violence
SMS short message service
SNAEF National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education [Burkina Faso]
SOAC State of Australian Cities
SRC Social Research Center [Cairo]
TA teaching assistant
TARSC Training and Research Support Centre [Zimbabwe]
UGC University Grants Commission [India]
UNDP United Nations Development Programme [USA]
UNFPA United Nations Population Fund [USA]
UNGEI United Nations Girls' Education Initiative [USA]
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [Switzerland]
UNICEF United Nations International Children's Fund
UPCIDS University of the Philippines Center for Integrative and Development Studies
USAID United States Agency for International Development

WANEP West Africa Network for Peacebuilding [Ghana]
WARA West African Research Association [USA]
WEE Women Economic Empowerment [Lebanon]
WHO World Health Organization [Switzerland]
WILDAF Women in Law and Development in Africa [Zimbabwe]
WPS Women Parliamentarians Survey [Pakistan]

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Volume 51 (2020)

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Periodical ID statement The *IDS Bulletin* (ISSN 0265-5012 print) is published in four issues per year. Mailing agent: Gary Edwards, Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261 idsbulletin@ids.ac.uk

Postmaster Send all address changes to *IDS Bulletin*, Gary Edwards, Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261 idsbulletin@ids.ac.uk

Journal customer services For ordering information, claims and any enquiry concerning your journal subscription please contact Gary Edwards, Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK. Tel: +44 (0)1273 606261 idsbulletin@ids.ac.uk

Print details Printed in the UK by Nexus Design & Print Ltd, Studio 38, Adur Business Centre, Little High Street, Shoreham-by-Sea BN43 5EG, UK.

Delivery terms and legal title Prices include delivery of print journals to the recipient's address. Delivery terms are Delivery Duty Unpaid (DDU); the recipient is responsible for paying any import duty or taxes. Legal title passes to the customer on despatch.

ISSN 0265-5012 (print), 1759-5436 (online)

Collective Action for Accountability on Sexual Harassment: Global Perspectives

Editors **Mariz Tadros and Jenny Edwards**

Volume 51 | Number 2 | September 2020

IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

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Mariz Tadros and Jenny Edwards

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Ayesha Khan, Zonia Yousuf and Sana Naqvi

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Adrija Dey

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Jordan J. Steiner and Anne M. Spear

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Harassment**
Lucia Tangi

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in Cities**
Sophie Tanner, Nicole Kalms, Hayley Cull, Gill Matthewson and
Anthony Aisenberg

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Menaal Munshey

Accountability with Teeth
Maha El Said

'Collective action and accountability is critical for transforming the fight against sexual harassment into an issue that is everybody's business. Grass-roots work that has long been taking place, well before the spotlight on the #MeToo movement, shows the experiences and pathways for mobilising for accountability.'