

## Street harassment in the Isfahan city (Iran) according to the witnesses' viewpoint

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### Abstract

*This research has been studied the observed street harassment according to the men and women's viewpoint – both of them- and also some factors affecting it in the Isfahan city. The research population consists of the over 15 Isfahan city's citizens. A sample size of 400 people was chosen. Present research, in respect of access to information, is a survey. For gathering the necessary information, a questionnaire with closed questions has been used. The findings show that there is a significant correlation between crowded public places, used transport and traffic time with observed street harassment.*

**Keywords:** *Sexual harassment, observed street harassment, crowded public places, used transport, traffic time*

### Introduction

The victimization of women has not been sexually restricted to one hundred percent rape cases. Most women have experienced the occurrences with different degrees of sexual harassment that one of the researchers calls them small rapes. Since sexual harassment occurrences are different in respect of the harassing rate and coercion, its legal or scientific definition and also its individual definition are difficult (Hyde, 2004: 433). However, Dziech and Weiner believe that sexual harassment is a form of illegal employment discrimination in many countries, and is a form of abuse (sexual and psychological) and bullying (Dziech and Weiner, 1990). Paludi states that sexual harassment is intimidation, bullying or coercion of a sexual nature, or the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors (Paludi, 1991). In Mackinnon's view, sexual harassment is sex discrimination because the act reinforces the social inequality of women to men (Mackinnon, 1979) and in Shaheen's opinion, sexual harassment refers to persistent and unwanted sexual advances where the consequences of refusing are potentially very disadvantaging to the victim (Shaheen, 2005: 5). One of the sexual harassment forms is the sexual harassment in the street or it would be better to say, the street harassment. The street harassment is considered a part of social experience of many girls and women, "starting at a young age and as many as 80 percent of women around the world face at least occasional unwanted, harassing attention in public places from men" (stopstreetharassment.com, 2011). Kearl states that street harassment is a form of sexual terrorism (Bibi, 2010) that occurs in public places between strangers (Kearl, 2011). The street harassment always occurs in light of anonymity. It is not the current social adversities, but it has a long background.

Even though many women and girls are harassed on a regular basis, many people do not recognize that street harassment is a problem. Some people don't realize that their behavior is considered disrespectful, annoying, or in some cases – threatening. And some girls are disrespected so much that they think that street harassment is just a part of daily life (helpingourteengirls.org, 2012). Consequently, street harassment is one of the important issues which must be dealt with. Thereby, this part of sexual deviance is studied as research problem. For this purpose, street harassment in the present research is defined as: acts like wolf-whistling, making sound of kissing, jibing, saying four-letter words, taunting girls/ women's appearance or complimenting them, cursing, joking, intimidating, making sexual advances, requesting sexual favours, harassing by phone, giving phone number, blocking path, honking the horn by private cars and persisting in giving them a ride, turning the car's light on and off and making excessive and meaningful stops/ moves in front of girls/ women waiting for taxi, driving at full throttle and making a figure skating by bikers,

taking continuous erotic stares, paying unwelcome and unwanted attentions, leering, following, bullying, elbowing, pinching, making vulgar gestures, public masturbation, flashing, touching up girls/women, fondling, groping and hugging which observe (have observed) in the public transport (such as bus and taxi), university, workplace, street or other public places and cause (have caused) mental or physical harm for individuals. Considering what was said, this research will study the observed street harassment according to the men and women's viewpoint – both of them- and also some factors affecting it in the Isfahan city.

### **Research Background**

Shaheen (2005) studied this problem in a research with the subject of "Street Harassment against Girls in District Gujranwala". Some findings of the research are •of the female respondents, not a single one replied that girls are not suffering from harassment •40 percent of the respondents replied that boys harass the girls to get sexual and mental satisfaction. 24 percent of the respondents attributed this to enjoyment, 8 percent to the nature of male and 8 percent to media influence •40 percent of the male respondents said that boys do not regret or feel guilty after harassing girls, whereas 12 percent said yes they do and 48 percent were of the view that some times boys do have such feelings (Shaheen, 2005).Stringer (2007) studied this problem in a research with the subject of "Hidden in Plain Sight: Sexual Harassment and Assault in the New York City Subway System". Some findings of the research are •44 percent of respondents indicated that they have witnessed an incident of sexual harassment in the New York City subway system. Of those respondents, 93 percent indicated that the victim was female, and 98 percent indicated that the perpetrator was male •44 percent of respondents who indicated that they have witnessed an incident of sexual harassment stated that the incident occurred during morning and evening rush hours that is 5:30 to 9:30 am and 4:30 to 7:30 pm •96 percent of witnesses did not report incidents of sexual harassment to any authorities for reasons as perceived unimportance of the occurrence, witness discomfort in reporting sexual harassment and a belief that the perpetrator will never be apprehended (Stringer, 2007).Chaudoir and Quinn (2010) studied this problem in a research with the subject of "Cat- Calling, Bystander Sexism and How Sexual Harassment Hurts Men". They state that harassment has serious effects on women who are not victims and men who are not harassers because simply being a bystander to sexism is enough to inspire women to report higher identification with women as a group, and heightened feelings of negativity toward men. Moreover, for the men who are not harassers and men who are not doing anything wrong, these harassers may be shaping the ways that they're being perceived as well. Chaudoir and Quinn note that the effects of this bystander sexism help to explain how a cat- call targeted at one woman can work to demean all of us. This study shows that men and women have an alike investment in working to eliminate sexual harassment (Chaudoir and Quinn, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework of Research**

The approaches of explaining street harassment in this research can be studied in three categories which will be described one by one in the following.

#### **First category- The approach of environment role in explaining street harassment**

**Clifford Shaw and Henry Mckay-** Shaw and Mckay used social ecology for studying geographical distribution of lawless behaviour in Chicago (Winfree, 2009: 213). They divided Chicago into five districts and studied crime rate in each of these districts. Then by the use of delinquents' statistics, they found that delinquency rate decreases from the first district which is the trade centre to the fifth district that is in a suburb, respectively. They explained the result as the following: the first district is the traffic place and high movement of population. High movement of population prevents the society to be stable and leads to social disorganization (Sotoudeh, 2010: 153). They considered social disorganization equivalent to weak collective control that ends in the advent of geographical areas with high crime and delinquency (Winfree, 2009: 213). The signs of social disorganization are: delinquency, prostitution, gambling, illegal consumption of drugs, consumption of alcoholic drinks, aggression and separated families (Sotoudeh, 2010: 154). Shaw and Mckay did not assume people as inherent deviant or delinquent but they referred to the problem of the areas' influence. When high rate of crime fixes, regardless of what kind of people live in these areas, the said rate will remain high. As if deviance has come down to another generations of the residents like a tradition. What they found was not the groups with high rate of delinquency but it was the areas with high rate of delinquency (Winfree, 2009: 213) and in explaining that, they declared that such deviance occurs in

commerce and trade centre because there is social control in movement centres of population and controls such as public opinion, public supervision and familial control are not powerful enough to prevent the advent of deviant norms and values (Sotoudeh, 2010: 154).

**Patricia and Paul Bratingham-** They implemented the plan of "crime prevention through environmental design" in Canada and suggested some designs for projects of new housing, trade centres and even schools in the state of British Columbia. They found that locating the shopping centres and schools far away from each other (for preventing the schoolchildren's aggregation in dinner- time and after school) affects the crime prevention (Bratingham and Bratingham, 1993).

**Residential land and commercial areas theory-** In the early 1960s, environmental views' theorists ascribed the crime to the way of using of land. Like what Jane Jacobs (1961) theorized about correlation between using of residential land and commercial areas. In the analysis of interaction quality along the streets of residential areas, she noted that interaction can cause supervision increase and this can lead to security increase and crime decrease. The variety in using of land especially commercial functions close to residential areas is the key of security creation and crime rate decrease. It means that districts with various functions such as commercial, administrative and recreational are safer than the exclusively unifunctional ones because when the land is exploited for commercial goals exclusively, occupations owners leave their properties for a long time and these uncrowded places facilitate committing the crime and criminals' activities and vice versa the multifunctional districts attract citizens day and night, so an informal supervision is made in this way (Jacobs, 1981).

**Defensible space theory-** In 1972, Oscar Newman presented "defensible space" theory as a recommendation to reduce crime in urban areas. He believed that spaces in which people can be seen and is approximately impossible to escape, have less potential for criminals' activities (Schweitzer et al, 1977). Defensible space theory consists of four parts "•Individual's house is a private place •Physical structure of a district depends on residents' ability in monitoring what happens •It refers to the capability of physical design in creation of a mutual feeling of security in residents and also for potential aggressors. Physical design of a district expands or limits the feeling of control or responsibility which residents experience •Social environment of other characteristics which may affect the security such as proximity to the park or shopping centre". Newman considers the crime as a result of the informal social control rate of the residents and a criterion for measuring economic deprivation (Newman, 1972). The creation of defensible space for current neighbouring districts is also possible. In the early 1990s in Deiton Ohio, designers invited Newman for the creation of defensible space in a district which was collapsing. Newman created several small neighbouring districts which had entrances with this idea that smaller districts increase the collective sense and make problems for the circumstances of committing nameless crimes. Such changes decrease the population traffic up to 67 percent, total rate of committing crime up to 26 percent and violent crimes up to half (Winfree, 2009).

### **Second category- The approach of population density role in explaining street harassment**

**Max Weber's view-** Weber believes that as the number of people who enter the interaction (as a result of standardization of social relationships) become more and more, their relationships get more and more transient and people's recognition of each other decreases to transient behaviours. Thus the popular and informal social control process becomes weaker more and more and the way for people's deviance and disorganization is paved more and more (Sheikhavandi, 1974: 291) because informal sanctions contrary to formal sanctions dominate a wide area of behaviours and play an important role in providing conformity and social order (Giddens, 1997: 132).

**Georg Zimmel's view-** Zimmel also believes the same as Weber. He considers increasing population density with intensity of social control in an inverse correlation. He believes that as population density increases, the gap between social macrostructure of the society and individual will increases, social control (especially formal social control) becomes weaker and thus individual will enjoy more freedom in action and behaviour. In Ritzer's expression, Zimmel believes that the feeling of loneliness and anonymity of the individuals increases as a result of increasing population density and their individuality (individual will and feeling of effectiveness) is threatened. Then, individuals can only show themselves in society by joining to small groups (kinship, local groups, etc.) (Sharafi, 2005: 180).

**Edwin Sutherland's view-** Sutherland believes that as the number of people in interaction become more and different, the possibility of their abnormality and disorganization is more (Giddens, 1997: 142). Therefore, when society contains the plurality of groups and variety of subcultures, different individuals can easily find their coreligionist and homogeneity and join them. Such large communities are prone to massive disturbances and deviance substantially (Sharafi, 2005: 182).

### Third category- The approach of time role in explaining street harassment

In Ghaniloo's view (2012), 11 am to 2 pm and 5 to 11 pm are the most time which harassments have reported (Ghaniloo, 2012: 7).

Table 1. The relation between independent variables and theoretical framework of this research

Independent variables	Relevant views and theories
crowded public places	Shaw-Mckay, Bratingham- Bratingham, Jacobs, Newman
used transport	Weber, Zimmel, Sutherland
traffic time	Ghaniloo

### Research Hypotheses

- There is a correlation between crowded public places and observed street harassment.
- There is a correlation between used transport and observed street harassment.
- There is a correlation between traffic time and observed street harassment.

Table 2. The operational definition of research variables

Row	Variable	Dimensions	Operational definition	
1	observed street harassment	verbal	wolf-whistling, making sound of kissing, jibing, saying four- letter words, taunting girls/ women's appearance or complimenting them, cursing, joking, intimidating, making sexual advances, requesting sexual favours, harassing by phone, giving phone number	
		behavioural	weak	blocking path, honking the horn by private cars and persisting in giving them a ride, turning the car's light on and off and making excessive and meaningful stops/ moves in front of girls/ women waiting for taxi, driving at full throttle and making a figure skating by bikers
			moderate	taking continuous erotic stares, paying unwelcome and unwanted attentions, leering, following, bullying, elbowing, pinching, making vulgar gestures
			intense	public masturbation, flashing, touching up girls/women, fondling, groping, hugging university, workplace, shopping mall, park, street, alley
2	crowded public places	—	private car, bus, taxi, etc.	
3	used transport	—	6-10 am, 10 am- 4 pm, 4-7 pm, 7-12 pm, 12 pm- 6 am	
4	traffic time	—		

### Research Method

Present research, in respect of access to information, is a survey because it generalized the sampling results to a population by sampling from population and studying a select sample. From a time point of view, it is cross- sectional. In respect of the research level, it is casual- explanatory because it included a description of subject in the population, study of factors affecting it and explanation of data, and in the case of purpose, it is applied. The research population consists of the over 15 Isfahan city's citizens. A sample size of 400 people was chosen. Considering the heterogeneity of the population, the sampling method was a quota. For gathering the necessary information, a questionnaire with closed questions has been used.

### Key Findings

- 98.25 percent of the male and female respondents indicated that they have witnessed the street harassment for others in the Isfahan city's public transport, university, workplace, street or other public places.
- The frequency distribution of "the observed street harassment cases" shows that:

- **Verbal-** jibing (88.5%) is the most and intimidating (13.3%) is the least. The other cases are as: wolf-whistling (38.5%), making sound of kissing (38.1%), saying four-letter words (50.4%), taunting girls/women's appearance or complimenting them (62.8%), joking (61.1%), cursing (28.3%), making sexual advances (41.6%), requesting sexual favours (37.2%), harassing by phone (54.9%) and giving phone number (81.4%).

- **Weak behavioural-** honking the horn by private cars and persisting in giving them a ride (93.8%) is the most and blocking path (40.7%) is the least. The other cases are as: turning the car's light on and off and making excessive and meaningful stops/moves in front of girls/women waiting for taxi (78.8%) and driving at full throttle and making a figure skating by bikers (72.1%).

- **Moderate behavioural-** leering (87.6%) is the most and pinching (15.9%) is the least. The other cases are as: taking continuous erotic stares (72.1%), paying unwelcome and unwanted attentions (62.4%), following (51.8%), bullying (31.0%), elbowing (54.9%) and making vulgar gestures (48.7%).

- **Intense behavioural-** groping (48.2%) is the most and public masturbation (12.4%) is the least. The other cases are as: flashing (16.8%), touching up girls/women (43.8%), fondling (38.5%) and hugging (15.0%).

- Of the public places (university, workplace, shopping mall, park, street, alley), the highest percent of harassment has observed in the street (83.8%) and the lowest percent of harassment has been in the university (5.5%). The other public places were as: workplace (16.8%), shopping mall (55.3%), park (66.0%) and alley (59.3%).

- Of the bus routes, the highest percent of harassment has observed on the Sofeh- Darvazeh Shiraz- Hakim Nezami- Darvazeh Tehran - Malek Shahr route (45.2%) and the lowest percent of harassment has been on the Sepahan Shahr- Kuye Imam- Darvazeh Shiraz route (0.74%).

- Of the taxi lines, the highest percent of harassment has observed on the Sofeh- Darvazeh Shiraz- Hakim Nezami- Darvazeh Tehran- Malek Shahr line (33.76%) and the lowest percent of harassment has been on the Keshvari- Mir- Simin junction line (1.29%).

- Of the said hours:

- The highest percent of harassment in the public places has observed between 7 to 12 pm (43.3%) and the lowest percent of harassment has been between 12 pm to 6 am (1.8%).

- The highest percent of harassment on the bus and taxi has observed between 10 am to 4 pm- bus (18.0%), taxi (6.8%)- and the lowest percent of harassment on the taxi has been between 12 pm to 6 am (0.3%).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

- There is a significant correlation between crowded public places and observed street harassment. This correlation approves Shaw- Mckay, Bratingham- Bratingham's studies and Jacobs, Newman's theories. It must be stated that the street harassments for girls and women, especially in metropolises, are considered as crimes which functions and type of space are affecting these abnormalities occurrence.

- There is a significant correlation between used transport and observed street harassment. This correlation matches Weber, Zimmel and Sutherland's theories. It must be declared that the street harassment in the cities is a part of crimes which the population density is affecting its occurrence. For example, the population density on the city buses causes harassments such as jibing, elbowing, touching up, paying unwelcome and unwanted attentions, etc.

- There is a significant correlation between traffic time and observed street harassment. Traffic time has been studied considering the crowded public places and type of used transport. This correlation approves Ghaniloo's study. In Ghaniloo's view, 11 am to 2 pm and 5 to 11 pm are the most time which harassments have reported.

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