Human factors affecting street harassment against women in the Isfahan city (Iran)

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Abstract
Present research objective is to provide a comprehensive picture of street harassment situation against women and also study human factors affecting it in the Isfahan city. It is a survey. The sampling method was a quota. The results show that there is a significant correlation between age, marital status and employment status with street harassment, but there is not any significant correlation between gender, education level and income level with street harassment.

Keywords: Street harassment, harasser, victim, Isfahan, women

Introduction
Sexual harassment, as an instance of violence causes social irreparable consequences in addition to damaging the victim and threatening the sanctity of the family. Nowadays, sexual harassment on the street is one of the most common forms of violence, and meanwhile the one which is studied less than the others. Not only does it need to be dealt with immediately by sociologists, researchers and social workers, but also it has to be studied by psychologists, legislators and politicians. Sexual harassment on the street or in other words, street harassment is a serious issue with potentially harmful physical-psychological consequences for women/girls. Women are harassed on the streets every day. Many of them feel threat, annoyance or fear, and their cries for justice are mostly ignored or understated. A street harassment is a entrance to crime, and creates a culture which accompanies any other forms of violence against the women.

Motahari believes that “no rapist begins raping at the first time, but he has made a wolf whistle and jibed at the women first days, yet he has not faced an appropriate reaction (the only reaction was his friends’ persuasion), he has threatened the women, yet there have been no reactions again. Therefore, he realizes that there is no reason not to overstep” (Motahari, 2008). The studies on street harassment, though sadly few and far between consistently put the proportion of women who have experienced street harassment, around the eighty or ninety percent mark in most countries (Cumbo, 2011). Therefore, street harassment is not a middle eastern problem (The Daily Dish, 2011). Street harassment specifically in Iran, has become such a noticeable and perceptible issue which seems to be an inevitable part of social relationships between men and women in everyday life (Gheysari, 2010). Unfortunately, people evade this issue and avoid talking about it in public despite the fact that you could hardly find a girl who has not personally experienced it in her lifetime (Shaheen, 2005: 5). The majority of ladies in any age ranges and with any kinds of appearance have certainly faced such harassments which have nothing in common with our moral principles, culture and religious background (Naderi, 2006). 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 and giving phone number which observe (have observed) in the public transport, university, workplace, street or other public places and cause (have caused) mental or physical harm for individuals. Being harassed on the street, etc. for a woman have to be socially considered unacceptable. According to what was said, this research is going to study the most important human factors (such as age, education level, income level,
employment status, marital status and gender) affecting street harassment against the over 15 women and girls of "Isfahan" who are considered the most involved age range in these harassments.

**Research Background**

Aghajani (2004) has studied the consequences of street harassment in an article entitled “Plurality of violence in street harassments”. He expresses two types of influences considering individual aspect:

- Influence on the harasser such as the loss of sexual identity, promiscuity and absolute liberation
- Influence on the victim like deprivation of individual security and a damage to human reputation and dignity (Aghajani, 2004).

Alikhah and Najibi-e Rabiyi (2006) have studied this issue in an article entitled “Women and fear of crime in urban areas”. The results indicate that:

- There has been lower level of fear of crime among women who are educated and are on higher income
- There is a significant correlation between age and employment status of women with the level of fear of crime. That is, the level of fear of crime in the under 25 age ranges has been more than over 45 age ranges, and this level has been less in employed women in comparison with the unemployed (Alikhah and Najibi-e Rabiyi, 2006).

Motahari (2008) presents some recommendations based on campaigning against street harassers in an article entitled “The eighth parliament and street and non-street harassers” which include the following:

- First recommendation can be implemented through television broadcasting subject to the passage of a law in the eighth parliament by which it is allowed to clearly show the face of those who disturb the peace
- Second recommendation: filing electronic dossiers containing card of behavioral health for street harassers and making it obligatory to present such card for employment or many other activities. At the end, Motahari declares that people can not be divided into two groups of harasser and non-harasser from the first, for some people we call harasser, behave in such ways because of their inappropriate upbringing or inattention to what they do (Motahari, 2008).

In a report quoted from Tabnak website (2011) headlined “Differences between street harassments for female students of secondary schools and high schools” the following results were achieved:

- 19.9% of secondary school students have observed getting phone number in the behavior of harassers, these statistics are 38.2% for high school students
- 21.5% of secondary school students have realized that most of harassers are looking forward to making verbal communication while it is 32.4% for high school students
- 25.4% of secondary school students have known most of harassers as individuals who jibe at women, but it is 32.9% among high school students. The findings suggest that high school students have observed such behaviors from street harassers more than the first mentioned group (tabnak.com, 2011).

**Theoretical Framework of Research**

The views of explaining street harassment in this research can be studied in two categories which will be described in the following.

**First category- Pathology View of Harasser**

As Davis and Litenberg put (1987), rapist is mostly young and in ages of 16-30 (Dadsetan, 2008: 221).

Sykes and Matza (1957) have revealed a process which results in violating laws widely by criminals from any gangs, both the upper class and the lower class, without considering their deeds’ consequences. As they put, values and norms have seemed to be justified guideline principles and have a limited function in different time, places, individuals and social situations. Sykes and Matza have studied mechanisms which allow delinquents to accept the society norms, yet they violate them. As they believe, delinquents employ variety of neutralization methods to deny occurrence of a lawlessness or crime, considering ethic. According to Sykes and Matza’s opinions, not only don’t the delinquents necessarily regard themselves responsible for their own bad deeds and a lawbreaker who step out of line, but also they legitimize their own bad deeds in a way that seems to be credible for themselves, despite the fact that these deeds are not worthy for a larger society. Sykes and Matza (1961) developed a theory of subcultural delinquency in a way by which underground values and their role in leisure activities have also been considered effective. They noted that, certain values distinguish between delinquents and other people: “it seems that juvenile delinquency is spread by a certain set of values characterized as the following: seeking pleasure, humiliation of work and also effort and desire for a great privilege and acceptance of aggressive disobedience as an evidence of masculinity”. They believed that, these values which are mostly considered exclusive to teenagers, have equivalents in predominant culture specifically in leisure activities. For example, seeking
pleasure is an underground value which is equivalent to seeking danger of the middle class (Winfree, 2009: 242).

Hirschi, founder of "social bond" theory believes that a bond between individual and society is regarded as an important deterrent factor against deviance. As Hirschi puts, when the bond between the individual and society is weakened or broken, the deviance occurs. He discusses four elements affecting the bond between individual and society, as the following:

- Attachment- Attachment to others and social institutions is considered as one of the effective elements whereby, the individual links him/ herself to the society. Weakening of such bonds causes the individual to liberate him/ herself from moral constraints of society and commit deviance.
- Commitment- Individuals, who have spent their time and energy in trying to reach their purposes, become more committed to their daily usual activities. That is, such individuals do not commit deviance to preserve the social status which they have earned by effort.
- Involvement- Individuals, who are involved in conformity, do not have the opportunity to commit deviance or even think about it. Participation in social activities, takes much of their time and energy and this can, in turn, cause reinforcement of the commitment.
- Belief- As the rate of individual’s belief in moral values and cultural- social norms is less, the possibility of individual’s deviance become more. An individual, who is not bound by usual beliefs of the society, does not, in turn, consider any moral duty for him/ herself to be in conformity with formal and informal rules of the society (Hirschi, 1969).

Walter Reckless (1961) advanced the research about social controls to a new level entitled “containment” theory. He talked about forces which repel individuals from conventional society, or direct them towards misbehavior. These forces include:

- Social push- Such as living with poverty, circumstances of minorities, limited livelihood opportunities and family quarrels.
- Social pull- Which prevents the individual from doing the acceptable behavior such as criminal and delinquent subcultures or bad company (friends).
- Biological or psychological push- Such as hostility, aggression and inner tension.
- Rebellion against authority- Which is emanated from the inside of the individual and results in the advent of adverse norms in life.

According to the mentioned forces, inner and outer containment are the only effective factors which exist between an individual and a life with crime. Reckless believed that these limiting factors suffice to control most of behaviors.

- Outer containment issues from family and other supportive forces in the society. This type of containment (among the other affairs), is a sustained moral pattern, norms, rational expectations, supervision, effective discipline and correlation between group.
- Inner containment is a psychological concept which includes self-control, super-self, sense of responsibility and orientation towards a purpose (Winfree, 2009: 277).

Gheysari considers unemployment and lack of plan in leisure time, one of the effective factors in outbreak of a lot of abnormal behaviors in teenagers and the youth and states that: if we witness that the youth are always wasting their time, in groups and without any plan or purpose in non-recreational centers such as streets, stores and shopping centers, so it will be normal to expect abnormal behaviors such as street harassments (Varshowchi, 2006).

As Alder (1984) puts, rapist mostly belongs to the lower class and almost half of those who have been arrested for rape, have been married or had already married, and about 60 percent of them have had one or more children (Dadsetan, 2008: 221). As Moidfar puts, parts of street harassments are accomplished by married men. He declares that, when a man is not satisfied sexually and mentally, tries to compensate it by street harassments (Moidfar, 2011).

Marx describes correlation of delinquency with capitalism system in a book named “German Ideology”. As Marx and Engels believe, the economic conditions and specifically material poverty are considered the fundamental factors of delinquency. In Marx’s opinion, the contradictory nature of capitalism is implied that increase of manufacture means causes some other processes instead of raising the workers’s standards
of life including: •Mounting proliferation of number of workers •Intensification of poverty (Navabakhsh and Madani-e Lavasani, 2008).

**Second category- View of Victim as a Catalyst for Harassment**

As Plogman and Stens Road (1986) put, victims are mostly young (16-25 years old), unmarried and low-paid. Also most of victims have been university students, and housewives and employees have been in danger of being harassed less than the others. They point out that, unmarried women are victimized more than married women, because of their way of life (such as travelling on their own, living alone and residing in poor areas) (Dadsetan, 2008: 220). Due to study done by Alikhah and Najibi-e Rabiyi, rate of fear of crime among educated women and those who are on high income, is less than the other (Alikhah and Najibi-e Rabiyi, 2006). Barnett and Hamberger believe that in terms of personality, victims who are underlying cause of sexual violence themselves, are mostly unmarried girls, widows or wives who have adhered to social-moral commitments less than the others in their life (Barnett and Hamberger, 1992).

A mutual element among all feminist approaches is that, women have faced discrimination throughout history for their gender (Sadeghi-e Fasayi, 2010: 119). Sharlot Bunch notes that, substantial numbers of the world’s population have regularly been tortured, starved, humiliated and even killed, simply because of being woman (Piterz and Volper, 2003: 8). Hayden San (1995) declares that according to claims of feminist theory, women are mostly victims of rape and other sexual harassments, and such deviance are results of patriarchal society for suppressing women and maintaining male domination (Sedigh Sarvestani, 2010: 73).

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Relevant views and theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harasser</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>Davis- Litenberg, Sykes- Matza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education level</td>
<td>Hirschi, Reckless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>income level</td>
<td>Alder, Marx</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment status</td>
<td>Hirschi, Reckless, Gheysari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marital status</td>
<td>Hirschi, Alder, Moidfar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Victim</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>Plogman- Stens Road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education level</td>
<td>Alikhah- Najibi-e Rabiyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>income level</td>
<td>Plogman- Stens Road, Alikhah- Najibi-e Rabiyi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment status</td>
<td>Plogman- Stens Road</td>
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<tr>
<td>marital status</td>
<td>Plogman- Stens Road, Barnett- Hamberger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common variable between harasser and victim</strong></td>
<td>Feminist views</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Research Hypotheses**

- There is a correlation between age (harasser, victim) and street harassment.
- There is a correlation between education level (harasser, victim) and street harassment.
- There is a correlation between income level (harasser, victim) and street harassment.
- There is a correlation between employment status (harasser, victim) and street harassment.
- There is a correlation between marital status (harasser, victim) and street harassment.
- There is a correlation between gender (harasser, victim) and street harassment.

**Definition of concepts**

Harasser: In psychologists’ opinion, harassers are those who are looking forward to creating fear, and enjoy the reactions towards their deeds (Ghaniloo, 2012). As Sohrabi puts, street harassers refer to those who spend most of their time in street and regard street as a source of satisfying their emotional, psychological and sexual needs. These individuals are those who have been expelled somehow from their families or their families do not have consistent texture and normal structure. This group plays an important role in harassing women (Sohrabi, 2010).
Victim: As Naderi puts, a harasser selects his victims through those who can not defend themselves. For this reason, women are in this domain. An another reason for being harassed, is their age. Women who are harassed may be either young or not young; and what is more important than the above mentioned reasons is that, women who are in lower classes of the society, face such issues more than the others, because they prosecute such matters less, in comparison to the upper class people (Naderi, 2006).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Operational definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>street harassment</td>
<td>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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>age</td>
<td>teenager (15-19 years old), young (20-30 years old), adult (over 31 years old)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>education level</td>
<td>illiterate, elementary school, secondary school, high school, high school diploma, associate degree, BA/BM, MA/MSc, PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>income level</td>
<td>under 200.000 Tomans, 200.000-500.000 Tomans, 500.001-1.000.000 Tomans, 1.000.001-2.000.000 Tomans, 2.000.001-3.000.000 Tomans, over 3.000.001 Tomans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>employment</td>
<td>employed, unemployed, student, university student, housewife, retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>marital status</td>
<td>unmarried, married, divorced/ have gotten divorced, widowed, have married but who do not live together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>gender</td>
<td>-victim: 1)female 2)male -harasser: 1)female 2)male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Method**

Present research is a survey. From a time point of view, it is cross-sectional. In respect of the research level, it is casual-explanatory and in the case of purpose, it is applied. The population of the research, is the over 15 citizens of the city “Isfahan”, whose numbers are 1,458,391 people due to census taken in year 2006. According to Cochran formula, it is estimated that the sample size is 384 people, and in order to be sure of the results and for more completed questionnaires return, 400 questionnaires were copied and given to respondents. The sampling method was a quota, due to heterogeneous population. For gathering information, a questionnaire with closed questions has been used. Validity and reliability of the research’s variables was favorable. At the end, to analyze the data descriptively and inductively, "frequency, frequency percentage, mean” and "Pearson, Spearman, t-test” was exploited respectively.

**Key Findings**

- Age frequency distribution of respondents indicates that 50.5 percent of respondents are in the age range of 15-26 years old, 34.0 percent are 27-38 years old, 10.5 percent are 39-50 years old, 2.75 percent are 51-61 years old and 2.25 percent of them are over 62 years old. Respondents are at least 15 years old and at most 73 years old.
- 43.5 percent of respondents are female and 56.5 percent of them are male.
- 54.75 percent of respondents are unmarried, 38.0 percent are married, 3.0 percent are divorced/ have gotten divorced, 1.5 percent are widowed and 1.75 percent of them are those who have married, but who do not live together.
- Education level of respondents indicates that high school diploma and bachelor constitute the maximum frequency and the illiterate forms the minimum, with percentages of 31.25 and 1.75 respectively.
- 64.0 percent of respondents are employed, 5.25 percent are unemployed, 6.0 percent are student, 13.0 percent are university student, 9.5 percent are housewife and 1.5 percent of them are retired.
- Study of respondents’ monthly income level indicates that individuals on incomes around 200.000-500.000 Tomans constitute the maximum frequency and individuals on incomes over 3.000.001 Tomans form the minimum frequency with the percentages of 35.8 and 3.3 respectively.
- The frequency distribution of the street harassment shows that: 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%).

- 99.75 percent of victims have been female.
- 99.75 percent of harassers have been male.
- 21.1 percent of respondents have considered teenagers (15-19 years old) as a harasser, 81.2 percent of them have regarded the young (20-30 years old) and 34.9 percent of them have considered the adult (those who are over 31 years old) as a harasser. It should be stated that, some of the respondents have mentioned several of the above classifications at the same time. Thus, the young constitute the most group of harassers, and teenagers form the least group of them.
- 63.25 percent of respondents have considered unmarried girls as the most group of the female who were harassed (are harassed) and 0.25 percent of them have regarded married women who do not live with their husbands as the least group. As some of the respondents put, 6.25 percent of married women, 3.0 percent of those who are divorced and 0.75 percent of the widow are harassed. 26.5 percent of respondents have stated unawareness.
- 40.5 percent of respondents have considered university students as the most group of the female who were harassed (are harassed) and 1.0 percent of them have regarded housewives as the least group. As some of the respondents say, 6.25 percent of employed girls/women and 29.0 percent of students are harassed. 23.25 percent of respondents have stated unawareness.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Women are harassed on the streets every day. Many of them feel threat, annoyance or fear, and their cries for justice are mostly ignored or understated. Regarding the importance of this issue, street harassment is dependent variable and age, education level, income level, employment status, marital status and gender are independent variables in the present research. The results of this research can be summed up as the following:

- There is a significant and inverse correlation between harasser’s age and street harassment. As it can be seen, the young constitute the most group of harassers. This correlation approves the study of Davis-Littenberg. As they believe, rapist is mostly young and in ages of 16-30.
- There is a significant and inverse correlation between victim’s age and street harassment. In other words, an increase in the rate of street harassment of women is affected by age reduction. This correlation matches the study of Plogman-Stens Road. As they put, victims are mostly young (16-25 years old).
- There is not any significant correlation between harasser’s education level and street harassment. Therefore, this correlation does not approve the theories of Hirschi and Reckless.
- There is not any significant correlation between victim’s education level and street harassment. Hence, this correlation does not match the study of Alikhah-Najibi-e Rabiyi.
- There is not any significant correlation between harasser’s income level and street harassment. Thus, this correlation does not approve the study of Alder and theory of Marx.
- There is not any significant correlation between victim’s income level and street harassment. Therefore, this correlation does not match studies of Plogman-Stens Road and Alikhah-Najibi-e Rabiyi.
- There is a significant correlation between harasser’s employment status and street harassment. So that, employed individuals have committed the least rate of harassments and the unemployed have committed the most. This correlation approves the theories of Hirschi, Reckless and the study of Gheysari. It can be argued due to the first, second and the third elements of “social bond” theory of Hirschi as the following: an employed individual does not commit street harassment, because of his attachment to social institutions, preserving the occupation which he has earned by effort and also involvement in daily activities. Considering the “containment” theory of Reckless, it should be stated that, being employed of an individual functions as a limiting factor; so that, it controls the individual’s behaviors and prevents him from committing street harassment. Due to the study of Gheysari, it should be stated that an unemployed individual or an individual that does not know how to spend his leisure time, will cause harassment for others, in order to spend his leisure time.
- There is a significant correlation between victim’s employment status and street harassment. So that, housewives are harassed the least, and university students are harassed the most. This correlation matches
the study of Plogman-Stens Road. As they put, most of victims have been university students, and housewives and employees have been in danger of being harassed less than the others.

• There is a significant correlation between harasser’s marital status and street harassment. As it can be seen, an increase in the rate of harassments committed by men, is affected by an increase in marriage. This correlation approves the studies of Alder and Moidfar. As Alder puts, half of those who have been arrested for rape, have been married, and in Moidfar’s opinion, parts of street harassments are accomplished by married men.

• There is a significant correlation between victim’s marital status and street harassment. So that, unmarried girls are harassed the most. This correlation matches studies of Plogman-Stens Road and Barnett-Hamberger. As Plogman-Stens Road put, unmarried women are victimized more than married women, because of their way of life. As Barnett-Hamberger believe, in terms of personality, victims who are underlying cause of sexual violence themselves, are mostly unmarried girls.

• There is not any significant correlation neither between harasser’s gender and street harassment nor between victim’s gender and street harassment. These correlations do not approve feminist views.

References