Susannah Zietz
PAA 2015- Extended Abstract
September 2014

"Nobody Teases Good Girls" A study on Perceptions of Sexual Violence and Harassment Among Young Men in the Slums of Mumbai

Background

A study in Delhi found that 91.5 percent of girls and women age 16-49 years reported ever experiencing any form of sexual violence in public spaces, most commonly verbal.[1] Sexual harassment of adolescent girls and women in public spaces, one form of sexual violence, is commonly named and socially constructed in South Asia as "eve teasing."[2] Sexual harassment in public spaces has been found to have a considerable impact on the health and well-being of girls and women in South Asia. Sexual harassment in public spaces reflects inequitable gender norms, which is a risk factor for both the perpetration of and experience of intimate and sexual violence at the individual level.[3]

Qualitative studies have found that parent's fear of sexual harassment often has an effect on whether their daughter is allowed to visit certain locales within or outside their community, including school. Sexual harassment is also risk factor for early marriage due to concerns about protecting the reputation of a girl once she matures. Parents often cite wanting to marry off their girls early to avoid the potential stigma of their girls receiving sexual attention in public.[2,4]

The aim of this study is to understand attitudes and perceptions of adolescent boys and young men on sexual harassment in public spaces. Structural factors (social, economic, and legal) significantly impact the attitudes and behaviors that adolescent boys and young men have towards masculinity and gender-based violence (GBV). This study is guided by the ecological framework, which is commonly used for understanding proximate and distal risk and protective factors for the experience of and perpetration of various forms of GBV, including sexual violence.[5,6,7,8]

Introduction

There are multiple forms of verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment in public spaces which include unwanted pressure for sexual favors, unwanted deliberate touching, leaning over, cornering, or pinching, receiving unwanted sexual looks or gestures, unwanted sexual teasing, whistling and catcalls, and sexual comments.[5,6,7] A key underlying component of all forms sexual harassment is that the attention is unwanted by the subject, regardless of his/her response.[9]

Baseline findings from Delhi the UN Women Safe Cities Free From Violence Against Women and Girls found that 87.6 percent of girls and women age 16-49 years reported ever experiencing comments/sexual jokes/whistling/leering/sexual gestures (61.6 percent in the past 6 months). Additionally, 52.5 percent reported having experienced touching/brushing/groping of the breast or buttocks (20.6 percent in the past 6 months), 32.3 percent reported having experienced stalking (9.7 percent in the past 12 months), and 22.5 percent reported having experienced flashing of genitalia (8.1 percent in the past 12 months).[1]

Young adulthood is a key period in which gender norms are solidified, males are particularly likely to perpetrate sexual harassment in public spaces, and females are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and assault.[10] This paper analyzes qualitative data on adolescent boys' and young men's attitudes and behaviors related to verbal or physical harassment in public spaces. This paper analyzes 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with men and boys in adjacent slum communities in Mumbai, in order to explore the perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs around sexual harassment among adolescent boys and young men in Mumbai slum communities.

Methods

Over 100 participants were recruited from Shivaji Nagar and surrounding slum communities to take part in 10 FGDs focusing on gender norms and attitudes towards violence,

drug/alcohol use, and sexual behaviors/attitudes in their community. The FGDs were part of formative research from ICRW for an intervention to decrease violence and risky sexual behaviors among adolescents. Participants for this study were recruited from a list of young men who had taken part in the Parivartan intervention. The Parivartan study employed a quasi-experimental design where boys in the comparison group received only the sports component and then a delayed gender intervention. The FGDs were conducted between April and June of 2012, one year after the conclusion of the delayed gender intervention in the comparison group. Mentors from each plot of Shivaji Nagar and Cheeta Camp slums invited all of the participants in the program (from the intervention and comparison groups) who were at least 14 years old. Participants were then organized into two different age groups: those 14 to 17 and those 18 to 24 years of age.

Two male researchers with extensive experience working in these communities were trained by senior ICRW research staff to conduct the FGDs using a multi-topic guide that included a section on violence. A codebook was developed based on themes in the interview guide as well as themes that came up in the initial review of the transcripts. Both inductive and deductive codes were applied using Atlas.ti 7. Memos and matrices were then developed to explore the interconnections between participant's attitudes on sexual harassment in public spaces.

Selected Findings

Sample Characteristics

A total of 103 adolescent boys and young men participated in the FGDs, 45 adolescent boys age 14-17 in four FGDs and 58 young men age 18-24 in six FGDs. The focus groups ranged in size from 8 to 16 participants. The majority of participants were in school or had attended school, either full time secondary school, night school, or full-time college. Two participants age 18-24 reported never attending school and three participants who dropped out of school reported discontinuing their schooling at 3rd standard, 8th standard, and 10th standard. Twenty young men age 18-24 reported that they worked, most worked in the informal sector collecting goods at the landfill adjacent to their community.

Connotations of Sexual Harassment

Chamdi, a slang term in Mumbai, was mentioned in reference both to sexual harassment perpetrated by men and boys against girls and women in public spaces and also to girls who have sexual relationships with boys. *Chamdi admi* refers to a man who constantly pursues women while *chamdi aurat* refers to a woman who is easily available. However, in the FGDs, *chamdi* was also used to describe the perpetration of sexual harassment or teasing of girls and/or women in public. *Chamdi* ranged from watching girls in public, following girls and standing where you know they will be each day, whistling and calling out to girls, grabbing girls sexually, and/or propositioning girls for sex including offering money or goods in exchange for sexual favors. According to one participant, "if you give her money, why won't she come?" (FGD 4: 14-17) Participants mentioned many common places in the community for *chamdi* including the market, near the landfill adjacent to the community, near public toilets, near municipal schools, outside beer bars, in restaurants with private rooms, and at train stations. Additionally, girls and women are more likely to experience *chamdi* during festivals. According to one participant:

> *Now Ramzan is coming…no girl will go out alone. She'll go with some family member like mother, father, or brother to the market as there is a fear of being eve-teased. (FGD 5: 18-24)*

Perceptions of effects of sexual harassment

There were various perceptions among participants of the effect of *chamdi* on women and girls. When asked about the general safety of girls in their community, the vast majority readily

admitted that girls and women are not safe in their community. *Chamdi* was the most commonly mentioned reason for this. One participant made the differentiation that girls from families of a higher socioeconomic status are safer.

> *Only rich people's daughters are safe or whose brother is known well and has some good command over area she is safe. Here common man's daughters are not safe. (FGD 10: 18-24)*

Another participant argued that girls are not safe in his community "because of their [boys and men's] chamdi." (FGD 3: 14-17) Participants referred to an effect of *chamdi* on the mobility and education of girls. Participants referenced girls either speaking back to boys and men on the street or telling their family members or boyfriends, which causes fights and conflict in the community. According to one participant,

> *If there is any quarrel, girls' parents don't allow them to go outside. Stop their learning. (FGD 1: 14-17)*

There was the general perception that *chamdi* had a harmful effect on girls in their community. One participant explicitly identified *chamdi* as a form of violence:

> *If I trouble girl or women and if she turns and says bad words then I force her and that is one kind of violence. This is wrong but it happens over here a lot. (FGD 6: 18-24)*

According to another participant, the majority of girls in the area are not allowed to travel from the community due to a perception that there are more dangers for girls in the form of sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence outside of the community as there are in the community. Most of the government secondary schools are located outside of these communities, limiting their schooling.[19]

Norms of Sexual Harassment

Though many participants mentioned that some girls do not like "pushing" or other forms of *chamdi*, most of the participants justified the practice of *chamdi* based on the moral designation that only "bad girls" are harassed in public. When asked how the girls reaction to *chamdi*, participants responded that girls either smiled, inviting further attention from the boys, yelled abuse on the boys, and/or changed their walking route the next day to avoid harassment. One participant estimated that 40 to 60 percent of girls and women in the community are "bad" because they flirt with boys, run away with boys, or have affairs. He said "here you go to hide and nothing is hidden you get to know that soon." (FGD 10: 18-24) There were many narratives spread amongst the boys of "bad girls" who have sexual intercourse with many men at a time, girls near the dumping ground who will have sex for money, and older women who have affairs with young men.

Participants justified *chamdi* based on whether the subject was a "good girl*"* or "bad girl."

> *First, we look at the girl; if she's of good nature then we don't do anything, else if we feel that she's shrewd then we start teasing. (FGD 5: 18-24)*

Characteristics of "bad girls" included if they did not wear the loose and concealing *salwar kameez* warn by most girls in the community: "if ladies wear shorter dresses then its their fault too," (FGD 7: 18-24) their expressions: "girls give smiles to boys," (FGD 2: 14-17) and their words: "If they back answer, then it's correct; if they fire bad words back, then it's alright." (FGD 5: 18-24) Though what makes a "good girl" is not explicitly explained, participants described

being innately able to identify a "bad girl," which extends beyond the bonds of family and friendship.

> *If our mother and sister are wrong then all will trouble them. If they are not wrong then no one will trouble them. (FGD 6: 18-24)*

Multiple participants mentioned that girls they experience more *chamdi* if they respond to the harassment. For instance, according to one participant:

> Say that I tease a girl and she retaliates, then she starts getting teased incessantly, and still if she retaliates then her daily route gets disturbed so much so that if she sees me from far away, she'll change her path and enter another lane. She completely stops passing through that lane then. (FGD 5: 18-24)

There is an inconsistency between some boys' attitudes that girls should protest or they will be misunderstood, and other boys that think that if they do protest, that they will be exposed to more harassment.

Discussion and Conclusion

This sample of adolescent boys and young men provided an in-depth examination of the attitudes, behaviors, and dynamics of sexual harassment in slum communities in South Asia. This study highlighted some of the attitudes of young men on sexual harassment and how these attitudes are connected to moral designations of girls and women as "good" or "bad." However, there were some contradictory statements on what makes a girl or woman "good" or "bad" and if a girl or woman should respond to sexual harassment. Overall, this moral designation is a "blame the victim" approach, which legitimizes sexual harassment. This approach reflects acceptance of harassment among men at the individual level, weak sanctions against harassment at the community level, traditional gender norms supportive of harassment, and ideologies of male sexual entitlement at the society level.

Limited social sanctions against sexual harassment make it difficult for a girl or woman to identify the perpetrator to authorities and seek help outside of their family without experiencing blame or stigma.[11] Baseline findings from the Safe City Delhi Programme found that 26 percent of women and 14 percent of men are aware of a law on sexual harassment. Additionally, 58.1 percent of women who reported experiencing comments/sexual jokes/whistling/leering/obscene gestures in the past 6 months did nothing. While 61.4 percent of these women reported that the sexual harassment they experienced was minor, other reasons given for not reporting sexual harassment included not wanting to attract attention (35.3 percent), fear of retaliation from the perpetrator (22.5 percent), shame (17.5 percent), fear that others would blame her (11.4 percent), fear that her mobility would be restricted (8 percent), and fear of hurting her family's reputation (21.0 percent).[1]

Norms around sexual harassment and the sexual dynamics between boys and girls, boys and women, men and women, and boys and men were more complex and fluid that previously described.[12,13] For instance, this group of adolescent boys and young men were aware of the adverse effects of sexual harassment, but created elaborate systems of justification, which were related to the behavior of the girl but also her social status in terms of her economic status and the protection of her brothers.

This study adds to existing quantitative findings on the perpetration of violence to knowledge on the attitudes towards violence and possibly how the contradictory attitudes on the distinction between a "good" and "bad" girl could inform community mobilization efforts around sexual harassment.

References

1. International Center for Research on Women and UN Women. Safe cities free from violence against women and girls: Baseline findings from the Safe City Delhi Programme." UN Women and ICRW. 2012.
2. Nahar P, van Reeuwijk M, Reis R. Contextualising sexual harassment of adolescent girls in Bangladesh. *Reprod Health Matters*. 2013;21(41):78-86.
3. World Health Organization/London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Preventing intimate partner and sexual violence against women: taking action and generating evidence. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2010.
4. Plan Asia Regional Office. Asia Child Marriage Initiative: Summary of Research in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. Bangkok (Thailand). 35 p.
5. Fulu, E., Warner, X., Miedema, S., Jewkes, R., Roselli, T. and Lang, J. (2013). Why Do Some Men Use Violence Against Women and How Can We Prevent It? Quantitative Findings from the United Nations Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women and UNV.
6. Abramsky T, Watts CH, Garcia-Moreno C, et al. What factors are associated with recent intimate partner violence? Findings from the WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence. *BMC Public Health*. 2011;11:109-2458-11-109.
7. Jewkes R. Intimate partner violence: Causes and prevention. *Lancet*. 2002;359(9315):1423-1429.
8. Heise LL. Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *Violence Against Women*. 1998;4(3):262-290.
9. Basile KC, Saltzman LE. Sexual violence surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2002.
10. Abrahams N, Devries K, Watts C, et al. Worldwide prevalence of non-partner sexual violence: A systematic review. *Lancet*. 2014.
11. United Nations International Emergency Children's Fund. UNICEF-Bangladesh. UNICEF supports efforts to end sexual harassment of girls and women in Bangladesh Web site.http://www.unicef.org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/infobycountry/bangladesh_55216.html. Updated 2012. Accessed 02/13/2014.
12. International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) and Population Council. 2010. Youth in India: situation and needs 2006-2007. Mumbai: IIPS.
13. Verma RK, Pulerwitz J, Mahendra V, et al. Challenging and changing gender attitudes among young men in Mumbai, India. *Reprod Health Matters*. 2006;14(28):135-143. doi: 10.1016/S0968-8080(06)28261-2.