DOI: https://doi.org/10.63770/vssr.2.1.009 Paper type: Research Article

Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and its Association with Perceived Risk Factors among Undergraduate Girls in Bharatpur

Samiksha Thapa[1*], Sudha Regmi[2]

[1]BBA Scholar, Valley State College, Bharatpur, Chitwan

[2]Department of Healthcare, Valley State College, Bharatpur, Chitwan

*Corresponding Email: samikshathapa0628@gmail.com

*ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-7551-5396

Received: March 9, 2026
Revised: March 22, 2026
Accepted: April 22 2026
Published: April 29, 2026

How to cite this paper:
Thapa, S., & Regmi, S. (2026). Prevalence of Sexual Harassment and its Association with Perceived Risk Factors among Undergraduate Girls in Bharatpur. *Valley State Research Review, 2*(1), 70-79.

ABSTRACT

Sexual harassment refers to any unwelcome sexual behaviour verbal, physical, non-verbal, or digital that is non-consensual and causes harm to the recipient. It remains a serious concern in academic settings, where power imbalances, fear of judgment, and weak institutional responses discourage victims from speaking out. This study examines the prevalence of sexual harassment and its associated perceived risk factors among female undergraduate students in Bharatpur, Chitwan.

A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed. Data were collected from 124 female undergraduate students at three colleges in Bharatpur using a structured, self-administered printed questionnaire comprising 35 items across seven variables, rated on a three-point Likert scale. Data were entered in Microsoft Excel and analysed using SPSS software.

Results indicate that 26.6% of respondents explicitly acknowledged experiencing sexual harassment, while 50% expressed uncertainty a pattern likely reflecting definitional ambiguity and cultural inhibition rather than absence of experience. The most strongly perceived risk factors were lack of awareness (up to 94.4% agreement), social stigma and victim-blaming (90.3%), and the enabling effect of perpetrator impunity (90.3%). A statistically significant association was found between college attended and harassment experience ($p = 0.007$). The study concludes that targeted awareness programmes, stronger institutional policies, and culturally sensitive support systems are urgently needed to protect undergraduate women in semi-urban Nepali academic environments.

Keywords: *Awareness, psychological harm, risk factor, sexual harassment, silence, stigma, victim-blaming*

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is a serious social and institutional problem that affects individuals across different settings, including educational institutions. It refers to any unwelcome sexual behavior verbal, physical, non-verbal, or digital that is offensive, non-consensual, and causes discomfort or harm to the person experiencing it. Unlike friendly or mutual interactions, sexual harassment often involves a power imbalance and can leave lasting negative effects on victims, especially in academic environments where silence, fear, and weak institutional responses are common (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2018).

Globally, sexual harassment is highly prevalent. Studies indicate that between 40% and 68% of women and 9% to 13% of men experience sexual harassment within a five-year period Okechukwu et al., (2014). In higher education settings, such experiences can seriously affect students' mental, physical, and academic well-being. Research shows that sexual harassment is linked to depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), physical health problems, substance use, low self-esteem, reduced academic performance, and in some cases, withdrawal from education or employment (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). Despite these serious consequences, many cases remain unreported due to fear of retaliation, shame, or lack of trust in reporting systems (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Wagle et al., 2022).

Within academic institutions, sexual harassment creates unsafe and hostile learning environments. It negatively affects students' concentration, attendance, and participation in both academic and extracurricular activities, ultimately limiting their educational opportunities (Ranganathan et al., 2021). In Nepal, particularly in the Chitwan District, reported cases of sexual violence including rape and child sexual abuse have increased in recent years (TRN online, 2022). A flash survey conducted by Wagle et al. (2022) among undergraduate girls in Bharatpur found that 86% had experienced sexual harassment. Verbal harassment was the most common form, followed by physical and non-verbal harassment.

Cultural and social factors further shape how sexual harassment is experienced and addressed in Nepal. In semi-urban areas like Chitwan, deep-rooted patriarchy, stigma, and victim-blaming often discourage individuals especially women from speaking out. Many victims remain silent due to fear of social judgment, family shame, legal complications, or disbelief (Delker et al., 2018). Although global movements such as #MeToo and Time's Up have encouraged survivors to share their experiences (Murphy, 2019), such cultural shifts remain limited in rural and semi-urban Nepal.

Against this background, the present study aims to examine the prevalence of sexual harassment among undergraduate students in Bharatpur and identify the factors associated with increased risk. The study focuses on understanding different forms of sexual harassment, exploring the relationship between perceived risk factors and harassment experiences, and analyzing how individual and environmental factors interact to influence vulnerability. By generating context-specific evidence, this research seeks to support the development of effective policies, awareness programs, and safer, more inclusive academic environments.

2. RELATED WORKS

Rajbanshi (2012) conducted a study in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, to assess the prevalence and forms of sexual abuse among high school students, revealing a 41.3% prevalence, with higher rates among boys. The most common forms of abuse were verbal, indecent exposure, and physical contact. The study stressed the need for targeted interventions to address sexual abuse in adolescents.

Okechukwu et al. (2014) reviewed the impact of workplace injustices on occupational health

disparities, highlighting that socially disadvantaged groups face more severe outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, and substance use. The authors recommended longitudinal studies to better understand these effects and inform policy.

Delker et al. (2018) explored the concept of family betrayal among young adults with childhood abuse, showing the role of family dynamics in shaping long-term trauma. Their work emphasized the importance of addressing family involvement in recovery interventions.

Kaltiala-Heino et al. (2018) studied the connection between sexual behavior and harassment among Finnish adolescents, finding that advanced sexual behaviors were strongly associated with harassment, particularly among girls. This highlighted the need for early preventive education.

Murphy (2019) discussed the #MeToo movement's role in raising awareness about sexual harassment, emphasizing its impact on both women and men, and encouraging accountability for perpetrators.

Bondestam & Lundqvist (2020) conducted a systematic review of sexual harassment in higher education, revealing high prevalence rates, particularly among female students. The review identified gaps in effective interventions and called for improved research and prevention strategies.

Clancy et al. (2020) examined the inadequacy of current institutional responses to sexual harassment in higher education, advocating for science-informed, proactive strategies to tackle the root causes of harassment.

Wood et al. (2021) analyzed risk factors for sexual harassment among students, finding significant rates of harassment from both faculty and peers, with gender and race/ethnicity influencing vulnerability. The study called for systemic changes to prevent harassment.

Wagle et al. (2022) studied sexual harassment in public transportation in Bharatpur, Nepal, among female students, finding high prevalence rates, especially verbal harassment, and the need for better policies to protect women in public spaces.

Palikhe et al. (2024) reviewed the prevalence and impact of sexual harassment in Nepal, emphasizing its widespread occurrence among young women. The study highlighted the need for better research and preventive measures to combat harassment in Nepalese society.

3. METHODS

3.1 Study Design and Population

This study employed a cross-sectional quantitative analytical design to describe the prevalence of sexual harassment and respondents' opinions on perceived risk factors at a single point in time. The target population comprised female undergraduate students enrolled at colleges in Bharatpur, Chitwan. A purposive sample of 124 respondents was drawn from three institutions Valley State College, Central Model College, and Birendra Multiple Campus based on availability and willingness to participate during the data collection period.

3.2 Method of data collection and analysis

This study used primary data source for the data collection. Well- structured printed questionnaires was physically distributed to the respondents in Three point Likert scale. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions related to different variables of Sexual harassment and its perceived risk factor. The printed questionnaires was distributed by visiting 3 different school. Data were entered in excel sheet and for data analysis, SPSS software was used.

3.3 Theoretical background

The theoretical background of this study is grounded in the Theory of Social Stigma (Goffman, 1963) and the Theory of Power and Control (Popovich & Warren, 2010). Goffman's Social Stigma theory highlights how societal attitudes often blame and shame victims of sexual harassment, leading to negative perceptions that hinder victims from seeking support and reinforcing their social

marginalization. This stigma creates a cycle of silence and inaction, especially when victims internalize blame. Meanwhile, the Theory of Power and Control explains how perpetrators of sexual harassment exploit power dynamics to dominate and control victims. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how factors like substance use, media portrayals, and unequal power relations (such as student-teacher or peer-to-peer interactions) can enable and normalize harassing behaviors.

4. RESULT

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 124 female undergraduate students participated. Table 1 summarizes their demographic characteristics.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)
Age	18–20 years	61 (49.2%)
	21–23 years	54 (43.5%)
	24–26 years	9 (7.3%)
Year of Study	1st Year	18 (14.5%)
	2nd Year	45 (36.3%)
	3rd Year	21 (16.9%)
	4th Year	40 (32.3%)
College	Valley State College	61 (49.2%)
	Central Model College	37 (29.8%)
	Birendra Multiple Campus	26 (21%)
Residency	Non-resident	99 (79.8%)
	Resident	24 (19.4%)

The majority of respondents (49.2%) were aged 18–20 years, reflecting the typical undergraduate entry cohort, followed by the 21–23 age group (43.5%). Second-year students formed the largest academic cohort (36.3%), with fourth-year students comprising 32.3%. Valley State College contributed the highest proportion of respondents (49.2%). A striking 79.8% of participants had migrated to Bharatpur from other towns or rural areas specifically for higher education, a finding directly relevant to social isolation and vulnerability, as these students are separated from their primary family support networks (Wagle et al., 2022).

4.1.2 Respondent's opinion towards perceived risk factor of Sexual Harassment

Table 2 presents item-level responses across six risk factor domains. The overall instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.777). Percentages are calculated as a proportion of the total sample (N = 124).

4.2.1 Lack of Knowledge and Awareness

Findings on Lack of Knowledge and Awareness highlight a significant gap in students' understanding of sexual harassment, which contributes to their vulnerability to harassment. A dominant response of Agree (ranging from 81.5% to 94.4%) was observed across all questions.

Table 2: *Lack of Knowledge and Awareness*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Dominant Response
Students unclear on what constitutes harassment	8 (6.5%)	15 (12.1%)	101 (81.5%)	Agree 81.5%
Not knowing reporting channels enables harassers	6 (4.8%)	14 (11.3%)	104 (83.9%)	Agree 83.9%
Ambiguity leads to acceptance of bad behaviour	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.3%)	113 (91.1%)	Agree 91.1%
Confusion/fear during incident causes silence	3 (2.4%)	4 (3.2%)	117 (94.4%)	Agree 94.4%
Absence of consent education increases risk	4 (3.2%)	7 (5.6%)	113 (91.1%)	Agree 91.1%

Table 3: *Poor Communication and Weak Boundaries*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Dominant Response
Failure to say 'no' may be misread as acceptance	16 (12.9%)	6 (4.8%)	102 (82.3%)	Agree 82.3%
Silence because the perpetrator is known	8 (6.5%)	15 (12.1%)	101 (81.5%)	Agree 81.5%
Peer miscommunication about personal limits	6 (4.8%)	16 (12.9%)	102 (82.3%)	Agree 82.3%
Tolerating bad behaviour to avoid conflict	11 (8.9%)	30 (24.2%)	83 (66.9%)	Agree 66.9%
Unclear boundaries invite boundary violations	10 (8.1%)	16 (12.9%)	98 (79.0%)	Agree 79.0%

The majority of respondents (81.5%) agreed that students are unclear on what constitutes harassment, indicating a lack of awareness regarding what behaviours are considered inappropriate. Additionally, 83.9% agreed that not knowing reporting channels enables harassers, suggesting that the absence of clear reporting mechanisms allows harassment to persist unchecked. An overwhelming 91.1% agreed that ambiguity leads to acceptance of bad behaviour, showing how unclear definitions and expectations around appropriate conduct can normalize misconduct. Furthermore, 94.4% of respondents agreed that confusion or fear during an incident causes silence, underscoring how students may refrain from speaking out due to uncertainty or fear of consequences. Lastly, 91.1% agreed that the absence of consent education increases risk, highlighting the critical role of consent education in reducing the occurrence of sexual harassment. (see Table 2) Collectively, these findings reflect a widely shared recognition that definitional ambiguity and absent consent education are primary drivers of vulnerability consistent with Bondestam and Lundqvist's (2020) identification of limited institutional education as the foremost barrier to reporting.

4.2.2 Poor Communication and Weak Boundaries

The majority of respondents (82.3%) agreed that failure to say 'no' may be misread as acceptance, suggesting that unclear communication of consent can lead to misunderstandings and harassment. Similarly, silence due to the perpetrator being known was agreed upon by 81.5%, indicating that fear of retaliation or social consequences may cause students to remain silent in uncomfortable situations. Additionally, peer miscommunication about personal limits was agreed upon by 82.3%, pointing to the role of unclear boundaries in peer interactions. Further, tolerating bad behaviour to avoid conflict was acknowledged by 66.9%,

Table 4: *Personality Traits and Behavioural Vulnerability*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Dominant Response
Silence after harassment emboldens perpetrators	2 (1.6%)	6 (4.8%)	116 (93.5%)	Agree 93.5%
Dress/social events make women targets	52 (41.9%)	40 (32.3%)	32 (25.8%)	Disagree 41.9%
Late-night social media use increases risk	14 (11.3%)	40 (32.3%)	70 (56.5%)	Agree 56.5%
Excessive trust/ignoring early warning signs	2 (1.6%)	15 (12.1%)	107 (86.3%)	Agree 86.3%
Dismissing minor misconduct allows escalation	2 (1.6%)	11 (8.9%)	111 (89.5%)	Agree 89.5%

Table 5: *Emotional and Social Vulnerability*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A(%)	Dominant Response
Shy/emotionally vulnerable women are targeted more	11 (8.9%)	30 (24.2%)	83 (66.9%)	Agree 66.9%
Fear of job/scholarship loss prevents reporting	8 (6.5%)	27 (21.8%)	89 (71.8%)	Agree 71.8%
Anticipated disbelief from family silences victims	8 (6.5%)	19 (15.3%)	97 (78.2%)	Agree 78.2%
Socioeconomic powerlessness hinders resistance	8 (6.5%)	18 (14.5%)	98 (79.0%)	Agree 79.0%
Victim silence gives harasser opportunity to re-offend	0 (0.0%)	8 (6.5%)	116 (93.5%)	Agree 93.5%

reflecting how students may tolerate inappropriate actions to maintain social harmony. Finally, 79.0% of respondents agreed that unclear boundaries invite boundary violations, highlighting how weak or poorly communicated personal boundaries can lead to exploitation and harassment (see Table 3). These findings are consistent with Clancy et al. (2020), who demonstrated that unclear interpersonal norms and power differentials are structural enablers of harassment in academic settings.

4.2.3 Personality Traits and Behaviours that Increase Vulnerability

Findings show that 93.5% of respondents agreed that silence after harassment emboldens perpetrators, and 86.3% agreed that excessive trust or ignoring early warning signs increases vulnerability. Additionally, 56.5% agreed that late-night social media use increases risk, and 89.5% agreed that dismissing minor misconduct allows escalation. However, 41.9% disagreed that dress/social events make women targets, indicating that appearance or social gatherings were not seen as primary factors in harassment (see Table 4). This distributional pattern indicates that the majority of respondents reject victim-blaming explanations of harassment, a position well-supported in the academic literature (Ranganathan et al., 2021; Clancy et al., 2020).

4.2.4 Emotional and Social Vulnerability

Findings show that emotional and social factors significantly impact the likelihood of experiencing and reporting harassment. A dominant Agree response (ranging from 66.9% to 93.5%) was observed across all questions. The majority of respondents (66.9%) agreed that shy or emotionally vulnerable women are targeted more, and 71.8% agreed that fear of job or scholarship loss prevents reporting. Additionally, 78.2% agreed that anticipated disbelief from family silences victims, and 79.0% agreed that socioeconomic powerlessness hinders resistance. Finally, an overwhelming 93.5% agreed that victim

Table 6: *Social Blame, Discrimination, and Stigma*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Dominant Response
Women coerced to comply in male-dominated spaces	6 (4.8%)	24 (19.4%)	94 (75.8%)	Agree 75.8%
Society blames victims more than perpetrators	4 (3.2%)	8 (6.5%)	112 (90.3%)	Agree 90.3%
Reporting results in victim judgment; perpetrators free	6 (4.8%)	13 (10.5%)	105 (84.7%)	Agree 84.7%
Perpetrator impunity normalises further harassment	4 (3.2%)	8 (6.5%)	112 (90.3%)	Agree 90.3%
Previously harassed women seen as easier targets	8 (6.5%)	36 (29.0%)	80 (64.5%)	Agree 64.5%

Table 7: *Substance Use, Power Dynamics, and Media Influence*

Question Summary	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Dominant Response
Men harass to assert power/control	6 (4.8%)	26 (21.0%)	92 (74.2%)	Agree 74.2%
Violent pornography normalises aggression	9 (7.3%)	39 (31.5%)	76 (61.3%)	Agree 61.3%
Celebrities' offensive behaviour is imitated	6 (4.8%)	32 (25.8%)	86 (69.4%)	Agree 69.4%
Alcohol/drugs reduce inhibition and increase harm	6 (4.8%)	17 (13.7%)	101 (81.5%)	Agree 81.5%
Objectifying media normalises disrespect	3 (2.4%)	32 (25.8%)	89 (71.8%)	Agree 71.8%

silence gives harassers the opportunity to re-offend (see Table 5), highlighting how silence enables perpetrators to continue their behaviour echoing Delker et al.'s (2018) framework of institutional and relational betrayal.

4.2.5 Social Blame, Discrimination, and Stigma

A dominant Agree response (ranging from 64.5% to 90.3%) was observed across the questions. The majority of respondents (75.8%) agreed that women are coerced to comply in male-dominated spaces, and 90.3% agreed that society blames victims more than perpetrators. Additionally, 84.7% agreed that reporting harassment results in victim judgment while perpetrators go free, and 90.3% agreed that perpetrator impunity normalizes further harassment. Moreover, 64.5% agreed that previously harassed women are seen as easier targets, indicating a cycle of victimization(see Table 6)The results are possibly reflecting the cultural sensitivity of linking marital/ victimisation history to future targeting. These findings are consistent with Palikhe et al. (2024) and underscore how structural stigma functions as a social control mechanism suppressing disclosure.

4.2.6 Substance Use, Power Dynamics, and Media Influence

A dominant Agree response (ranging from 61.3% to 81.5%) was observed across the questions. Most respondents (74.2%) agreed that men harass to assert power/control, and 81.5% agreed that alcohol and drugs reduce inhibition and increase harm. Additionally, 61.3% agreed that violent pornography normalizes aggression, while 69.4% agreed that celebrities' offensive behaviour is imitated. Finally, 71.8% agreed that objectifying media normalizes disrespect, showing the role of media and substance use in reinforcing harmful behaviour patterns (see Table 7). These findings are supported by Palikhe et al. (2024) and Wood et al. (2021), who documented the role of power dynamics and media environments in perpetuating harassment cultures.

Table 8: *Item-Level Responses Experience of Sexual Harassment (n = 124)*

Form of Harassment	DA (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	Interpretation
Verbal (catcalling, body-shaming, sexual jokes)	40 (32.3%)	17 (13.7%)	67 (54.0%)	Majority experienced
Physical (unwanted touch, kissing, hugging)	50 (40.3%)	19 (15.3%)	55 (44.4%)	Near-majority experienced
Non-verbal (disturbing stares, suggestive gestures)	21 (16.9%)	29 (23.4%)	74 (59.7%)	Most commonly reported
Online/digital (sexual messages, fake accounts)	56 (45.2%)	16 (12.9%)	52 (41.9%)	Substantial minority
Emotional (threats, blackmail, explicit imagery)	85 (68.5%)	16 (12.9%)	23 (18.5%)	Least reported; most severe

4.3 Experience of Sexual Harassment among Respondents

Findings reveals varying levels of prevalence and severity across different forms of harassment. Verbal harassment, such as catcalling and sexual jokes, was experienced by the majority of respondents (54.0%), while physical harassment, including unwanted touching and kissing, affected nearly half (44.4%). Non-verbal harassment, such as disturbing stares and suggestive gestures, was the most commonly reported (59.7%). Online/digital harassment, including sexual messages and fake accounts, was experienced by a substantial minority (41.9%). Emotional harassment, such as threats, blackmail, and explicit imagery, was the least reported but considered the most severe by respondents (68.5%) (see Table 8). These findings are consistent with Wagle et al. (2022) and Rajbanshi (2012), both of whom identified verbal and non-verbal forms as predominant in Nepali contexts.

Table 5: *Overall Frequency Distribution Experience of Sexual Harassment*

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Disagree (No experience)	29	23.4%
Not Sure (Uncertain)	62	50.0%
Agree (Experienced)	33	26.6%
Total	124	100%

Below one third respondents (26.6%) agreed that they had experienced sexual harassment, 62 (50.0%) were 'Not Sure', and 29 (23.4%) disagreed. While 26.6% constitutes a confirmed minimum prevalence rate, the 50% 'Not Sure' response is analytically significant and should not be interpreted as absence of experience. Given that 94.4% of respondents agreed that definitional confusion causes silence (A4), this uncertainty most likely reflects limited awareness of what constitutes harassment rather than a genuine absence of such experiences a pattern documented by Bondestam and Lundqvist (2020) across multiple higher education contexts.

4.4 Association between Experience and Demographic Variables

Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant association between the college attended and reported experience of sexual harassment ($p = 0.007$). This indicates that institutional environment encompassing campus culture, physical safety, and administrative responsiveness varies meaningfully across the three participating campuses, producing differential vulnerability among students. No statistically significant associations were found between experience and age group, year of study, or residential status, though these variables may exert indirect influence through social exposure and network dynamics.

5. DISCUSSION

The prevalence rate of 26.6% observed in the present study is notably lower than the figures reported by Wagle et al. (2022), who documented an 86% prevalence among undergraduates in Bharatpur, Nepal, in public transportation settings, and Rajbanshi (2012), who reported 41.3% among school students in Kathmandu. This discrepancy can be attributed to the contextual differences between these studies. While the current study examined a broader campus environment, Wagle et al. (2022) and Rajbanshi (2012) focused on high-risk spaces such as public transportation and specific educational settings. Additionally, the high proportion of 'Not Sure' responses (50%) in our study suggests that the actual prevalence of harassment is likely much higher than the reported 26.6%. If uncertain responses are considered as potential instances of unreported harassment, the true prevalence may align more closely with figures reported in similar Nepali studies, underscoring the hidden nature of this issue. The primary perceived risk factor identified across the sample was a lack of awareness and definitional clarity, with 94.4% of respondents agreeing that confusion surrounding harassment silences victims and that the absence of consent education amplifies

risk (91.1%). These findings strongly highlight the need for structured educational curricula on sexual harassment definitions, reporting mechanisms, and consent education, which should be introduced at the secondary school level. The second most significant perceived risk factor was social stigma and victim-blaming, with 90.3% of participants acknowledging that societal tendencies to blame victims and the impunity afforded to perpetrators contribute to the perpetuation of harassment. This observation is consistent with the broader literature (Clancy et al., 2020; Palikhe et al., 2024) and reinforces the urgent need for cultural shifts, alongside legal enforcement, to challenge these harmful societal norms and support victims. The significant variation in responses across campuses ($p = 0.007$) highlights the role of institutional climate and safety infrastructure in shaping student vulnerability to harassment. Campuses with weak administrative oversight, limited safe spaces, or inadequate grievance mechanisms may unintentionally foster environments where harassment can thrive unchecked. Furthermore, the overwhelming consensus that silence contributes to re-victimization (93.5% agreement, no disagreement) underscores the importance of creating safe, confidential, and trusted reporting pathways. The vulnerability of migrant students (79.8% of the sample) is another critical factor, as geographic displacement often disrupts support networks, such as family and peers, which are essential for victim protection and recovery. These findings suggest that institutions must address both environmental and infrastructural aspects to reduce harassment and support the well-being of all students.

6. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that sexual harassment is a pervasive concern among female undergraduate students in Bharatpur, with at minimum 26.6% of participants explicitly reporting experiences of harassment and a further 50% expressing uncertainty that likely masks additional unreported cases. Non-verbal and verbal harassment are the most prevalent forms; emotional harassment, while least reported, may represent the most serious. The primary risk factors definitional ambiguity, social stigma, victim-blaming, and perpetrator impunity are deeply embedded in cultural and institutional structures rather than in individual behaviour, and the rejection of dress-based victim-blaming by the majority of respondents reflects a growing critical awareness among young women.

The findings underscore that effective responses must operate at multiple levels: at the individual level, through campus-based awareness and education programmes; at the institutional level, through differentiated, campus-specific policies and accessible, trustworthy reporting mechanisms; and at the societal level, through community engagement that challenges patriarchal norms, stigma, and impunity. Policymakers, college administrations, and community organisations in Bharatpur and comparable semi-urban Nepali contexts should treat these findings as a call to urgent, evidence-informed action.

7. REFERENCES

Bondestam, F., & Lundqvist, M. (2020a). Sexual harassment in higher education – a systematic review. *European Journal of Higher Education, 10*(4), 397–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2020.1729833

Bondestam, F., & Lundqvist, M. (2020b). Sexual harassment in higher education – a systematic review. *European Journal of Higher Education, 10*(4), 397–419. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2020.1729833

Clancy, K. B. H., Cortina, L. M., & Kirkland, A. R. (2020). Use science to stop sexual harassment in higher education. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 117*(37), 22614–22618. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2016164117

Delker, B. C., Smith, C. P., Rosenthal, M. N., Bernstein, R. E., & Freyd, J. J. (2018). When Home Is Where the Harm Is: Family Betrayal and Posttraumatic

Outcomes in Young Adulthood. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 27*(7), 720–743. https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2017.1382639

Goffman, E. (2009). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. Simon and schuster.

Kaltiala-Heino, R., Savioja, H., Fröjd, S., & Marttunen, M. (2018). Experiences of sexual harassment are associated with the sexual behavior of 14- to 18-year-old adolescents. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 77,* 46–57. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.12.014

Murphy, M. (2019a). Introduction to "#MeToo Movement." Journal of Feminist Family *Therapy, 31*(2–3), 63–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2019.1637088

Murphy, M. (2019b). Introduction to "#MeToo Movement." *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 31*(2–3), 63–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2019.1637088

Okechukwu, C. A., Souza, K., Davis, K. D., & De Castro, A. B. (2014). Discrimination, harassment, abuse, and bullying in the workplace: Contribution of workplace injustice to occupational health disparities. American *Journal of Industrial Medicine, 57*(5), 573–586. https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22221

Palikhe, A., Adhikari, N. B., Baral, R., Bhandari, R., & Phuyal, S. (2024). Sexual Harassment and its Effects in Nepalese Society A Systematic Review. *Asian Journal of Population Sciences, 3*, 98–115. https://doi.org/10.3126/ajps.v3i1.61836

Popovich, P. M., & Warren, M. A. (2010). The role of power in sexual harassment as a counterproductive behavior in organizations. *Human Resource Management Review, New Perspectives in the Study of Counterproductive Behavior in Organizations, 20*(1), 45–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2009.05.003

Rajbanshi, L. (2012). Prevalence of sexual abuse among school children. *Journal of Chitwan Medical College, 1(*2), 69–71. https://jcmc.com.np/jcmc/index.php/jcmc/article/view/1097/692

Ranganathan, M., Wamoyi, J., Pearson, I., & Stöckl, H. (2021). Measurement and prevalence of sexual harassment in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Open, 11*(6), e047473. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-047473

Wagle, R., Joshi, A., Thapa, T., Sigdel, D., & Nepal, S. (2022). Prevalence of Sexual Harassment in Public Transportation among Female Students of a Public College at Bharatpur, Nepal. *Journal of Chitwan Medical College, 12(*2), 107–112. https://doi.org/10.54530/jcmc.534

Wood, L., Hoefer, S., Kammer-Kerwick, M., Parra-Cardona, J. R., & Busch-Armendariz, N. (2021). Sexual Harassment at Institutions of Higher Education: Prevalence, Risk, and Extent. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 36*(9–10), 4520–4544. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260518791228

TRN Online. (2022, July 26). Sexual violence on rise in Chitwan. *The Rising Nepal Daily*. https://risingnepaldaily.com/news/14483