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NATURE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST THE FEMALE STUDENTS OF BANGLADESH: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN TANGAIL MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

Attitude towards women and girls in many cases is liable for making them vulnerable to sexual harassment. Bangladesh as a south Asian country in many cases could not keep it away from such unexpected criminal outbreaks. Patriarchal attitude, disorganized social system, unplanned settlement and lack of social control provoke probable offenders to be involved in such repugnant activities. In this context, this study was an effort to understand the nature of sexual harassment through which the female students of different institutions of Tangail municipality generally undergo. This research included four educational institutions from this municipality and selected those institutions purposively. Primary data for this study then were collected with a pre-set questionnaire within the month of February to April 2017. A number of 120 female students of the selected institutions were, therefore, interviewed to understand the nature of sexual harassment experienced by them and their intimates. The study finds that most of the students were the victims of such incidents at least for once in their lives and most of them were victimized in the locations that are outside of their educational institutions. The study also reveals that these incidents or experiences of their own and that of others have generated a considerable fear among them. Therefore, such incidents of harassment put an impact on their academic and social life with dreadful psychological consequences. For preventing such offensive actions, most of the female students insisted on strict law enforcement process so that it can have a deterrent impact on the society.

Contribution/ Originality: This paper's primary contribution is finding the nature of sexual harassment that the female students of the study area experienced. In this way, it can help the stakeholders in adopting effective measures to prevent such unexpected events.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a country located off the northern part of the Bay of Bengal having its own culture and heritage. As a great delta, it has inherited a simple code of life. Irrespective of having great cultural heritage, with the advent of time it bore some cultural backdrops also (Khan and Kamruzzaman, 2010). One of such backdrops is showing the inferior attitude towards girls and women. Even with the advent of modernization, such kinds of sexual harassment

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has turned into different forms (Khan *et al.*, 2014). Gender inequality is seemingly an issue of concern here, which mostly affects the girls and women in this country. Despite its high frequency, this is considered as a taboo to express about one's experience of sexual harassment in public here (Ahmed, 2018). It is a very common perception of general mass that 'Girls are weak in strength, they are vulnerable because of their physique and thus they are less capable in protesting while they are attacked' and because of such perceptions among people, the females are vulnerable in the society (Kenny, 2011). The condition is so serious that many of them experience sexual harassment before reaching to their adulthood. The present study, however, was conducted in Tangail municipality of Tangail Sadar upazilla under Tangail district, which is situated in the central part of Bangladesh under the division of Dhaka (Figure 1).

Some researchers before decades conducted research about sexual harassment to focus mostly on the college campus or workplace in different countries. The students of the high school for long were not treated as victims of such harassment (Loredo *et al.*, 1995). Howeverm, some, findings of a study of the USA showed that a significant number of sexual assaults are committed against the girls aged 18 years or less (Greenfeld, 1997). It is evident also in Bangladesh. The number of child-victims in terms of harassment is not less here (Rahman, 2005). In this study, therefore, we have incorporated high school level students along with other senior students from college and university levels to find out their victimization of sexual harassment and to address their problems deeply by analyzing cross-sectional data.

The definition of sexual harassment is often misrepresented in legal, psychological and national notions (Cohen and Cohen, 1998). One of the reasons behind this is associated with the handling of such cases by the third party who does not necessarily feel the exact phenomenon (Gehlauf and Popovich, 1994). Nowadays, the legal and broader lay definition of sexual harassment is often confounded to make a practical definition in case of scientific investigation (Gutek, 2007). Some researchers tend to think that sexual harassment is a kind of dominance due to retaining power in terms of gender, social position etc (Kenny, 2011).
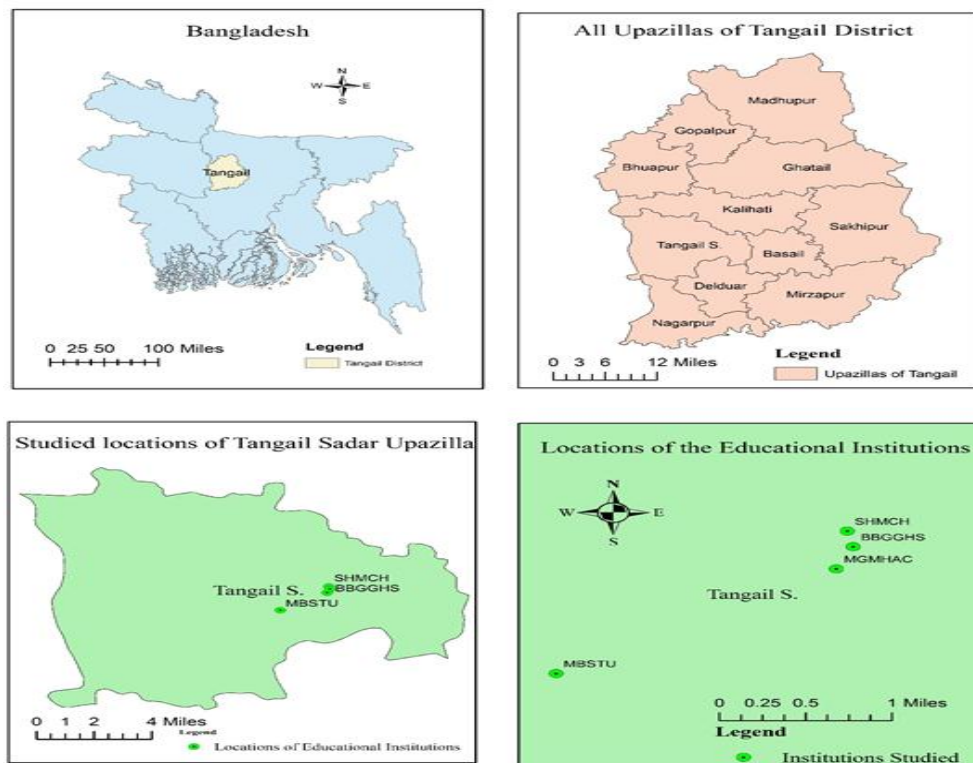

Figure-1. Locations of the Study

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

On the other hand, some other scholars think that sexual harassment is the unwanted and non-exchanging male attitude towards women in the form of sexual assertion (Farley, 1978; Gutek, 2007). It generally indicates gender based violence that creates a hostile or intimidating environment for the victims. It is a kind of "unwelcome sexual behavior" that is offensive, humiliating and dreadful; it can be direct, indirect, verbal and physical in nature (Mahtab, 2012).

It is essential to understand the sexual harassment from the legal point of view in Bangladesh. It is not clearly articulated in the Prevention of Repression against Women and Children Act, 2000 in Bangladesh. This statute includes only the physical characteristics like touching various bodily parts of a woman or child, making an impolite gesture or annoying a woman sexually in course of satisfying their sexual urge mischievously (Khan, 2015). The directives of High Court division of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh include some issues regarding the definition of sexual harassment against children and women at workplace, educational institutions and on the streets. It defines sexual harassment as some sexually suggestive comments or gesture conveying directly or over the phone, sending email in indecent means, watching indecently and use of some offensive languages like "sundori" ("beautiful" in slang) etc. In response to a writ petition filed by Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), the High Court division of Bangladesh declared 11-point directives suggesting the definition of sexual harassment that incorporates all non-contact sexually connoting offences and all other contemporary means of sexual insults against the potential victims (Hussain, 2016). However, a recent report by a newspaper claims that till now the educational institutes and the workplaces of Bangladesh have not coped with the guidelines of the court due to lack of awareness (Farhin, 2018).

In this context, this paper intends to include the characteristics of sexual harassment that are faced by the female students of the selected educational institutes of Tangail municipality as per the directives of High Court division of Bangladesh. The definition of sexual harassment, therefore, was incorporated by the researchers in the questionnaire to address the problem of the study area properly. This study focuses on the socio-demography of students, types of sexual harassment, victimizers of such harassment, time of incidents occurred, level of fear etc. to understand the types of unwanted sexual harassment that the girls exprience on a regular basis. Finally, the suggestion from the students to reduce the fear of such victimization has been incorporated with the recommendations.

2. METHODS AND MATERIAL

This study is based on primary data collected from four selected educational institutions of Tangail municipality namely, Bindu Basini Government Girls' High School (BBGGHS), Major General Mahmudul Hasan Adarsha College (MGMHAC), Sheikh Hasina Medical college and Hospital (SHMCH/ TMC) and Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University (MBSTU). Data have been collected during the months of February, March, and April of 2017. A questionnaire survey was used to collect data from the respondents of selected educational institutes. The total number of respondents for this study was 120 and they were selected by using a non-probability judgmental sampling method. 60 female students were selected from the secondary and higher secondary level institutions (30 from BBGGHS and 30 from MGMHAC) and the rest 60 students were selected from the undergraduate level (40 from MBSTU and 20 from SHMCH) (Table 1). A pre-set questionnaire was used in the survey for collecting the primary data. The respondents participated in the survey voluntarily and were free to answer the questions. They were free not to answer any particular question if they do not want. Data were collected with the prior permission of the authority in all of those institutions. Relevant other secondary data were collected from various international reports, government reports, research papers, books, journals, and newspapers. For the analysis of data, MS Excel and SPSS software have been used. ArcMap 10.1 have been used for making the map. This descriptive study tends to present the status of the sexual harassment experienced by the female students in the study area as it was during the study period.

Table-1. Selected educational institutions, geographic coordinates and the no. of respondents

Educational Institutions	Latitude and Longitude	No. of Respondents
MBSTU	24.2353° N, 89.8918° E	40
MGMHAC	24.2500° N, 89.9153° E	30
SHMCH	24.2553° N, 89.9162° E	20
BBGGHS	24.2531° N, 89.9167° E	30
		Total 120

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

3.1. Socio-Demographic Information of the Respondents

3.1.1. Age of the Respondents

This study was conducted on the students studying in secondary, higher secondary (college level in Bangladesh) and university level (undergraduate level only) of the selected institutions. Most of the female students who were the respondents of this study belonged to the age group of 14 to 17 (47.5%). The frequency of the respondents for the age group of 18 to 21 and 22 to 25 are 24.2 and 28.3 percent consecutively (Table 2). The students of this age group enter a new psychophysical stage that they never experienced before. They are not experienced enough to take precaution to prevent such harassments. Moreover, a group of males wants to involve them forcefully to an affair- which maybe with the purpose of marrying or making love with girls beyond their consent or taking sexual advantage from them. Thus, the girls of this age range become the easy prey of probable offenders who appear as predators in the whole incident. After 18 years, girls are considered to be more conscious of such victimization and achieve better capacity to prevent such victimization if it is compared to other age groups.

Table-2. Age of the Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percent
14-17	57	47.5%
18-21	29	24.2%
22-25	34	28.3%
Total	120	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.1.2. Name of the Respondents' Institutions

Data for this research were collected from all different levels, i.e.-high school to undergraduate level. Therefore, research data were collected from the students of one unitarian high school (where only female students study), one combined higher secondary college and two graduate level institutions. For this, Bindu Basini Government Girls' High School, Major General Mahmudul Hasan Adarsha College, Mawlana Bhasani Science and Technology University and Tangail Medical College were selected for collecting data from the students. Most of the respondents were selected from Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University as a single institution (33.33 percent). The students from MBSTU were the female students from undergraduate level. The percentages of the respondents from Major General Mahmudul Hasan Adarsha College, Bindu Basini Government Girls' High School, and Sheikh Hasina Medical College and Hospital (Tangail Medical College) are 25 percent, 25 percent, and 16.67 percent respectively. The sample size of the respondents from MBSTU is comparatively larger than other samples because of its comparatively larger population size than other institutions selected for the present study (Figure 2).
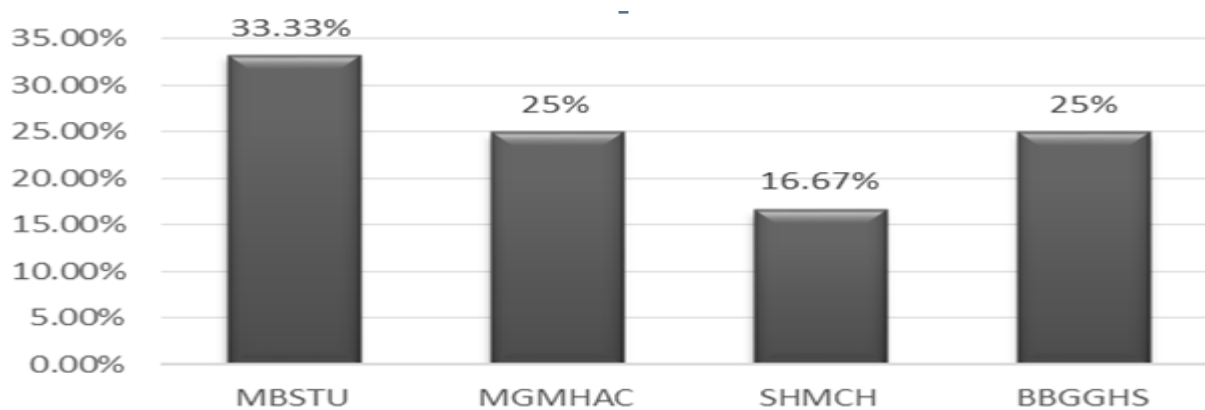
Figure-2. Percentage of the Respondents in All the Institutions

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.2. Types of Sexual Harassment Faced by the Respondents

Types of sexual harassment have been analyzed through a table which incorporates multiple responses from the respondents. This table postulates that the most common type of victimization of sexual harassment is "unwelcome gestures e.g. finger signs and teasing" that 48.4% of the respondents faced in their lives. The second most frequent type of harassment is "touching body sexually without the consent of the girls. 29% of the total incidents among them were about such an unexpected touch from any male. Another frequent form of sexual harassment reported here is making phone-calls with the unwanted proposal (24.7 percent) or sending explicit messages by using cell phone. Other than these, the most common forms of harassment which were reported by the respondents were physical assault (like holding hand forcefully), uttering insulting sexual comments, exposing or indicating any body part of the girls or the offenders themselves, sending e-mails or explicit messages through social media, sending SMS and MMS about any private part of the victim's body, spreading rumors about the victim's alleged arbitrary sexual relationship etc. (Table 3). All of these incidents are illegal and certainly come in the definition of sexual harassment.

Table-3. Type of Sexual Harassment Faced by the Respondents

Type of Harassment	Responses	Percent of Cases
Physical assault	5	5.4%
Touching sexually without consent	27	29.0%
Making phone calls with the unexpected subject or sending a vulgar message	23	24.7%
Speaking insulting sexual comments	11	11.8%
Exposing body parts e.g. Thighs, Breasts, Other Private Parts	5	5.4%
Sending Explicit Sexual Messages through e-mail and social media	4	4.3%
Sending SMS or MMS that has Explicit Sexual contents	3	3.2%
Spreading Rumors about the Sexual relationship	1	1.1%
Unwelcome Gestures e.g. Finger Signs, Teasing	45	48.4%
Total	**124**	**133.3%**
Number of respondents (N): 93		

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.3. The Relationship between the Nature of Harassment and the Associated Offenders

The study tried to find out the relationship between the type of sexual harassment and their associated offenders. It also reveals that most of the incidents of sexual harassment against the respondents were committed by the unknown persons, which is 80 % of the total incidents. Among the incidents, only 6% were committed by the classmates inside the institutions having a combined setting (for combined institutions where both male and female students study). A small number of respondents claimed that their teachers, cousins, and neighbors harassed them and the percentages for such harassment are 2%, 1%, and 1% respectively (Table 4).

Table-4. Type and Offender of Sexual Harassment

Type of Sexual harassment	Unknown person	Teacher	Neighbor	Classmate	Cousin	Local stroller (boy)	Total
Sexually assaulted you	4	0	0	0	0	1	**5**
Sexually touched without consent	23	1	0	0	0	1	**25**
Made phone calls that have unwanted or explicit sexual messages	14	0	0	2	0	2	**18**
Spoken insulting sexual jokes	6	0	0	1	0	0	**7**
Sending E-mails that have explicit Sexual messages	2	1	0	0	0	0	**3**
Sending SMS that have explicit sexual messages e.g. about your private parts	1	0	0	0	0	1	**2**
Unwelcome gestures, e.g. finger signs, teasing	30	0	1	0	1	1	**33**
Total	**80**	**2**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**6**	**93**

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.4. Time of Victimization

Most of the respondents (91%) were victimized after the class hour. A minor percentage of the students reported that they have been victimized and harassed during the class hour and break time where the percentages are 3.2 and 5% respectively. Here the cause behind this was quite apprehensible. Although during the class hour, the frequency was quite low, during the break, the frequency was a little more than that. It is obvious that when the girls are accompanied by many people or their classmates, they are less vulnerable and when they become alone or less in number, their vulnerability increases. Going back home or coming to the educational institution thus makes them less in number and allows the greater chance to the motivated offenders to harass them by adopting different means (Table 5).

Table-5. Time of Victimization

Time	Respondent	
	Number	**percent**
Class hour	3	3.2%
Tiffin hour/ during break	5	5.4%
On the way to or from the school/college or university	85	91.4%
Total	**93**	**100%**

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.5. Number of Offender between the Respondents and Their Intimates

The study reveals that most of the incidents were committed when the offenders were more than two (44.1 percent). 35.5 % of the respondents mentioned that in many cases the offenders were only one and in a lesser percentage the offenders were two in number (Table 6). The number of the motivated offenders if is large that give them the courage to commit offences and thus to terrorize the girls by fulfilling their sexual desire by those girls. This is, however, not the only issue here. While the overall situation comes in favor of a motivated offender, he can commit a crime even being less in number. That is why the absence of the fear of being apprehended or being protested can create an environment where such victimization can happen even the perpetrator maybe a single person. Therefore, the overall system should be kept under control to prevent such incidents of offending the girls. Situational crime prevention technique should be used to handle the overall criminal outbreaks.

Table-6. Number of Perpetrators of Sexual Harassment

Number	Respondent	
	Number	**Percent**
One person	33	35.5%
Two person	19	20.4%
More than two	41	44.1%
Total	**93**	**100%**

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.6. Consequences of Sexual Harassment

3.6.1. Level of Fear in Distinct Places

Due to various experiences related to the sexual harassment, the female students often go with the traumatic situation. They sometimes fear the places which should not be feared and sometime fear those places where they perceive that they have less opportunity to get help from others. These fear are often created by their own experience, others' experience and media coverage (both print and electronic) of such incidents.

Students often fear to be harassed when they stay or travel alone (Khan *et al.*, 2009). The aggressive behavior faced by them or their known persos in the previous stages from males can play role in creating such fear among them. This research intended to measure the relative differences in fear of the female students in different places like office-room, staff-room, laboratories, dormitories, playground and the walkway (to and from their home). Therefore, It is revealed from their perception analysis that they consider office room, staffroom, laboratory and dormitory as safer in most of the cases than the walkways using which they go to educational institutes or come back home (Table 7).

Table-7. Level of Fear in Different Places

Fear	Value	Level of Fear					Total
		Safe	**Less safe**	**Unsafe**	**More unsafe**	**Most unsafe**	
Office room	f	64	41	12	2	1	**120**
	%	53.3	34.2	10.0	1.7	.8	**100**
Staffroom	f	74	25	17	3	1	**120**
	%	61.7	20.8	14.2	2.5	.8	**100**
Laboratory	f	74	25	17	3	1	**120**
	%	61.7	20.8	14.2	2.5	.8	**100**
Dormitories	f	69	28	15	6	2	**120**
	%	57.5	23.3	12.5	5.0	1.7	**100**
Playground	f	36	36	31	11	6	**120**
	%	30.0	30.0	25.8	9.2	5.0	**100**
On the way to and from Home	f	9	43	36	20	12	**120**
	%	7.5	35.8	30.0	16.7	10.0	**100**

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

3.6.2. Suggestion for Preventing Sexual Harassment

The researchers asked the students about the measures for the prevention of such offences. 61.7% of them emphasized the necessity of having strict legal provisions and practice. This articulate that the punishment for such harassment should be rigorous and the law enforcing agencies should take action immediately. Another 29.2% of the respondents think that rather than apprehending the offenders and being strict about them, providing them with religious and moral education may improve the situation. 25.8% of the respondents think that raising social awareness can solve the problems in many cases where the potential offenders would be able to understand the awful condition of the victims. The social institutions should take various awareness programs to create awareness among the people in this regard. Finally, 22.5% of the respondents think about arranging various motivational programs for the boys can help them feel the problems of girls and improve the system (Table 8). Thus, taking one or more of the interventions (as per the opinion of the respondents) may solve the problem to a large extent and reduce or eradicate the fear of the girls.

Table-8. Suggestions to Reduce the Harassment

Suggestions to Reduce the Harassment	Responses	Percent of Cases
Ensuring strict legal provision and practice	74	61.7%
Increasing social awareness	31	25.8%
Providing religious and moral education	35	29.2%
Introducing correction, rehabilitation, and motivational Program	27	22.5%
Total Response (Multiple response)	**167**	**139.2%**
Number of Respondents: 120		

Source: Prepared by the authors for the present study

4. DISCUSSION

Many studies revealed that most of the students became victims of sexual harassment in their shool life but these incidents were generally addressed as "eve-teasing" in the past, although as per the directives of High Court division of Bangladesh, these are all "sexual harassment" at present. Terming such activities by the word "eve-teasing" can help the offenders to get an indemnity from the severity of a heinous psychological and sometimes physical assault against the girls. Along with this, the rude reality of this country is -in almost all incidents, perpetrators have a tendency to try for making a political back up. Such kind of politicization of crime and criminalization of politics in many cases create obstacles in protesting and preventing such crimes. However, it is evident from the study that when girls are alone and suffer from lack of guardianship, the offenders get the opportunity to make the girls as their prey. Felson and Cohen's routine activity theory mentioned the same issue in their opportunity triangle of criminal activity (Cohen and Felson, 1979). They mentioned in their book that when three components come together at any place and time that may cause criminal outbreaks among probable offender(s), i.e. motivated offender, a suitable target and lack of capable guardianship. Therefore, for the students, it is very essential to take the precaution understanding the opportunity triangle of offence and to remove the conditions by different initiatives. If the patterns of harassment are analyzed, it is seen that most of the harassments were committed by the unknown persons and were related to showing unexpected gesture, touching in an erotic way without consent and sending erotic messages and pictures.

In case of quid quo pro type sexual harassment (by teachers) both sexual touch and sending of the erotic message were reported. In the case of victimization by neighbors and cousins, no statistically considerable number of incidents were reported though some of them were found as potential offenders. Local stroller (boys) though are less reported here but they proliferate more fear among the girls during their going and coming back to and from the institutions. Removal of such fear, therefore, is utmost essential for the girls. It can be done by establishing good examples that the perpetrators cannot evade the law and the girls are not being victimized any longer. Some Western countries (for example-Canada) prefer to use the essence of restorative justice for solving such problems. Restorative justice suggests bringing the victim and offender closer after the reporting of such crime. They talk to each other and feel the pain of the victims by hearing from them directly. This may help the offender(s) to understand the sorrowful condition of the victim(s) and help those offender(s) understand that their activities have a severe impact on people.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

According to one Unicef report of 2014, one in every 10 females in the world is sexually assaulted, raped or abused before reaching the age of 19 (UNICEF, 2014). Bangladesh is always seen as very much unsafe for girls and women because of the probability of sexual harassment. In the present paper, the nature of sexual harassment in the study area has been discussed by measuring the attitudes of the victims and their victimization. It is found that most of the students are harassed by the unknown persons during their journey to and from the educational institutes specially when they are alone. So, to keep them safer they can be grouped according to class or batch of a particular area. Thus, being in a large number can generate fear to the offender of being protested. The guardians should also

be involved in the process so that they can accompany their children specially for the students of secondary and higher secondary level. It is also found from the study that in many cases they have been victimized by their friends and relatives. In this case, their (offenders'/ delinquents') guardians should be informed immediately so that they can rectify their offspring by taking effective measures. In the case of undergraduate students, the female students can ask help from their male friends and institutional authority so that they can address the problem seriously to prevent such dreadful activities. The study also revealed that female students are always fearful about their possibility of being victims of such sexual harassment. Many awareness programs should be undertaken by the institutional authorities for assuring that the victims would get help while they would be in need of that. The committee of each educational institute as per the directives of court should work actively addressing the problems. A monthly or semi-annual program on the effective measures for the prevention of such sexual harassment may lift up the courage and confidence of the students to protest such heinous activities. By adopting different means, all the reported cases should be brought into the careful observation of the local representative or local police force. Electronic monitoring like CCTV can work to prevent such cases. For changing the attitude of males towards the females, family and other social institutions should play an important role. Educational programs should include contents in their curriculum to make the male students more aware of the modesty of girls and women. The deviant people should be taken under the counseling program with proper guidance from the community superiors. Thus, by taking both preventive and corrective approaches by the relevant stakeholders like guardians, families, educational institutions, religious institutions, religious leaders, police and local representative this problem should be addressed where all should work to raise awareness among both males and females about different aspects of such harassment. Empower of women can also be a good solution for such problems in Bangladesh (Khan *et al.*, 2013). It is expected that by strict enforcement of law and taking multi-layer solution process, this problem can be reduced successfully.

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