Misogyny and Sexual Harassment in Higher Education of Nepal

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Abstract

This research has investigated the occurrences, frequency, and institutional reactions to misogyny and sexual harassment in Nepal's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Utilizing a mixed-methods strategy targeting students and staff from both public and private colleges with few comprehensive interviews with the stakeholders— the study has examined types of harassment, obstacles to reporting, policy efficiency, and effects on academic involvement and professional paths. The findings of the study imply ongoing gendered power disparities; under-reporting linked to stigma and fear of backlash, and varied institutional responses. The paper ends with policy suggestions for universities, regulatory agencies, and civil society. Nepalese colleges must adopt and promote a zero-tolerance stance against harassment, highlighting that such actions lead to severe repercussions. This can be accomplished by employing display boards, posters, and awareness campaigns that effectively convey the institution's position on harassment. Moreover, implementing periodic feedback surveys can offer important information regarding the experiences of female students, enabling colleges to grasp the difficulties they encounter. Creating an environment where women feel safe to voice their concerns without the fear of stigma is vital, promoting a culture of openness and support. By tackling these problems methodically, colleges can aid in fostering a safer and more welcoming learning environment.

Keywords: Bullying, Marginalization, Isolation, Institutions, Discrimination

Introduction

Sexual harassment and misogyny within higher education weaken academic freedom, compromise student safety, and damage institutional integrity. In Nepal, universities have increased access to higher education; however, gender-based norms and power structures on campus may perpetuate harassment and discrimination. This study examines the occurrence of misogyny and sexual harassment in Nepali higher education institutions, institutional

responses, and the experiences of female students. The growth of higher education in Nepal has been a continuous but intricate journey shaped by political shifts, globalization, and rising public interest in advanced educational options. The higher education system in Nepal started with the founding of Tri-Chandra College in 1918, which was the first higher studies institution in the country. A significant advancement took place with the establishment of Tribhuvan University (TU) in 1959, which emerged as the main institution for higher education for numerous decades. After nearly 30 years of a single university (TU) controlling the system, Nepal now has more than a dozen universities, such as KU, PU, FWU, MU, Purbanchal University, Pokhara University, Lumbini Buddhist University, Nepal Open University, Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology (in planning/operation), among others. These institutions provide a variety of programs in science, management, humanities, engineering, medicine, law, agriculture, and new technologies (Bajracharya, 2021).

Sexual harassment within higher education institutions in Nepal is a significant yet frequently unreported problem. It impacts students' mental health, educational success, security, and self-esteem, and indicates underlying socio-cultural and institutional issues. Research and news articles highlight that female students in Nepal encounter various harassment problems that heavily affect their educational journey (Bajracharya, 2021). This encompasses intimidation from instructors, upperclassmen, and classmates, appearing in different ways including excessive demands from teachers to participate in personal meetings, individual tutoring sessions, or to provide "special privileges." Moreover, instances of stalking happen both on and around educational campuses, intensifying the difficulties encountered by these students. Unacceptable remarks during lessons or field activities contribute to a negative educational atmosphere, while bullying during practical sessions, research guidance, and internships further jeopardizes their academic goals. Additionally, the increase in online abuse via social media, messaging apps, and classroom groups introduces further complexity to the harassment faced by female students, underscoring the critical necessity for thorough measures to tackle these widespread problems. Even with policy improvements, there is a lack of empirical, institution-specific studies detailing the incidence, types, and institutional responses to misogyny and sexual harassment within Nepali higher education institutions.

Research Objectives
- To record instances and occurrence of misogyny and sexual harassment in Nepali higher education institutions
- To assess organizational policies and grievance procedures
- To recognize obstacles to reporting and obtaining remedies

Research Questions

- What types of misogyny and sexual harassment are reported by students and staff in Nepalese higher education institutions?
- How efficient are policies and procedures for filing complaints within institutions?
- What elements deter individuals from reporting and seeking help?

Literature Review

A key objective of working with men on an individual level to transform gender relations is to begin a reflective process regarding the consequences of their lifestyles and to recognize alternatives, encouraging them to advocate for gender equity. Nevertheless, concepts regarding gender function within social groups and encompass the unequal social value assigned to men compared to women in numerous societies (Hearn et al. 2012), influencing not only men's self-perception but also the dynamics of social groups, resource accessibility, and the endorsement or rejection of specific behaviors. Altering hegemonic masculinity necessitates a transformation in the ideals collectively held within society.

My study originates from Nepal. The researchers examine obstacles that might occur when applying the concept of hegemonic masculinity in interventions and emphasize a case study of the intervention Machofabriken [The Macho Factory] from Sweden (Jewkes et al., 2015). Raewyn Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity (1987) acts as a tool for analysis to pinpoint the behaviors and mindsets among men that sustain gender inequality, encompassing both men's control over women and the authority of certain men over other (often marginalized) men. The notion has been extensively utilized and discussed, and throughout the years has been polished (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), with the fundamental premise that hegemonic masculinity represents 'a culturally idealized form' and 'serves as both an individual and a communal endeavor' (Donaldson, 1993). However, the text provided only contains:

> a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (Jewkes and Morrell, 2012, p. 40)

Masculinities are diverse, adaptable, and changing, and dominant forms are not the sole masculinities present in any society. They might also be viewed as roles filled based on

circumstances, where the role held, practices embraced, and values upheld in one context can differ from those in another. A fundamental aspect of the formation of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality, which is constructed to varying degrees as a gender role that is defined as much by being 'not female' as it is by being 'not gay'. The concept of hegemony originates from Gramsci's work and fundamentally represents a dominant status achieved through a degree of agreement rather than through direct coercion, although it may be supported by force (Gramsci, 1971). The agreement is established among those who gain from the support of masculinity, including many of those who suffer from it, particularly women. Hegemonic masculinity serves as a cultural ideal of manhood for both women and men, earning rewards in the form of women's interests, attention, and their endeavors to replicate this ideal in the men around them (Jewkes et al., 2015, pp. 113—114).

The question whether violence was detrimental to hegemonic masculinity was vigorously discussed. Hearn and others contend that men's aggression towards women has not been a primary emphasis in the formulation of the theoretical notion of hegemonic masculinity. Simultaneously, the employment of violence devalues men, and thus alternative methods, like hypermasculinity, might be more effective than hegemonic masculinity in describing men who engage in violence, as they do not merge a hegemonic process with a gender stereotype. Aggressive and misogynistic masculine norms and behaviors can be, but are not, necessarily dominant in a particular culture (Messerschmidt, 2012).

The opposing viewpoint is that men who resort to violence and intimidation frequently possess a significant range of common low-level violent behaviors, especially aimed at their partner at home, and this does not lessen their status in public. Certainly, this could potentially contribute indirectly to improving it as they may appear to have 'control' over their residences. The idea of hegemonic masculinity is occasionally employed within a theory of change, but is more frequently viewed as a crucial aspect of the gender order that helps explain the presence and continuation of gender inequality. Although it is never static and explicitly embraces change over time, and primarily asserts that masculinities are inherently fluid and dynamic, it is not meant to facilitate the recognition of key instances when hegemonic masculinity is more or less gender equitable. The idea of hegemonic masculinity can be purposefully integrated into intervention planning to facilitate transformation. It may be included in an intervention's theory of change, yet the issue of whether hegemonic masculinity can evolve to the extent of being non-oppressive to women, and the implications for the hierarchy of masculinities at that stage, remains uncertain.

Discussions about gendered power often require an indirect approach to avoid resistance to processes that may be viewed as outrageous for challenging men's power or absurd when men's power is considered 'normal'. When gender identities or power dynamics are not perceived as 'an issue,' it becomes challenging to involve people in gender initiatives.Gender activists frequently recognize the importance of initiating discussions indirectly, typically by highlighting what is perceived as an issue within the community or by the target audience, and utilizing these as entry points for conversations. This is achieved quite successfully in a Stepping Stones (Welbourn, 1995) manual activity called *The Joys and Problems of Sex*, where the participants, gathered to talk about HIV prevention, are invited to shout out (or write down) terms associated with sex that illustrate joys, challenges, or both. These are subsequently examined to foster group ownership of the 'issues,' paving the way for later conversations about their origins and effects through a process of critical reflection and guided dialogue regarding the gendered aspects of these issues.

The difficulty for gender activists lies in addressing gender and, by extension, gender roles, while maintaining a focus on the dynamics of power and gender identity. Gender roles and norms are well-known and significantly simpler to talk about in groups than reflecting on gender binaries, values, and power dynamics. A variety of tools are available for gender activists to facilitate change, including the educational theories of Paulo Freire (1970) (i.e., transformation via dialogue, reflexivity, and raising awareness) as well as insights from discursive psychology (i.e., 'cultural conflict prominently expressed in conversation') and Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman (2002) (i.e., by 'reclaiming agency' through critical observation, reflection, and engagement with counter-normative discourses). Each of these can serve as instruments in transformative processes.

Men's rights movements promote the notion of men as 'victims' (against women's empowerment) by presenting an analysis that overlooks the structural aspects of men's power. Gender activists face the challenge of initiating conversations about men's vulnerabilities while guiding group analyses of men's situations away from the stance of the men's rights movement. This discussion is crucial, as experiences of personal trauma, such as childhood abuse or homophobic harassment, have been associated with a higher tendency for men to commit violence against women, and many men exhibiting hyper-masculinity often have a background of personal trauma. Creating an environment where men can express their vulnerabilities is crucial for examining masculine identities, as it enables men to experience support and acceptance instead of blame and judgment. It is equally vital to the processes of dismantling the gender binary, where vulnerability is viewed as indicative of feminized frailty and facilitates conversations about diverse masculinities.

Methodology

The study has employed a convergent mixed-methods approach, integrating both numerical and verbal data to explore the frequency and connections of campus sexual misconduct, while also seeking to better comprehend the experiences of those impacted. The intended population consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as faculty and administrative personnel from both public and private universities in Nepal. The sample included a random number of the stakeholders based on convenient approach. The questionnaire consisted of open discussions with theme regarding the sexual harassment faced by female students. Their responses and opinions became the basis of the analysis for this study.

Discussion

Sexual harassment, sexual violence, and misogyny within colleges and campuses of Nepal pose major obstacles that jeopardize the academic atmosphere and the welfare of students and staff. An in-depth examination of demographics shows an allocation of incidents based on gender, age, student or staff role, program, and institution type, emphasizing differences in experiences of harassment. Recent research shows that a significant percentage of people have indicated they faced harassment with prevalent types being unwanted remarks, stalking, inappropriate touching, coercive academic interactions, and online harassment. Worryingly, only a small percentage of those impacted have informed authorities like department heads, student affairs, or anti-harassment committees, frequently because of social stigma, fear of academic or professional repercussions, inadequate confidentiality, and skepticism regarding the complaint procedures. Responses from institutions to reported incidents often involve delays and a sense of unfairness, which worsens the effects on victims. The consequences of this harassment reach beyond safety issues, negatively impacting academic achievement, attendance, mental well-being, and future employment aspirations. Elements like knowledge of institutional policies, availability of supportive faculty, incident severity, and socio-economic background act as indicators of the experiences and reactions of impacted individuals. Tackling these challenges is essential for promoting a safer and fairer educational atmosphere in Nepal (Bajraacharya, 2021).

Sex role socialization highlights childhood experiences and presents received messages as less debatable. Besides, it focuses on micro-level elements and fails to acknowledge the intricate connections between micro, meso, and macro variables. A favored definition of gender socialization currently is that it denotes "continuous, multi-faceted processes of societal expectations, regulation, and conflict that uphold and undermine gender systems. In this view, gender is not an attribute of individuals but of cultures.

Various institutions influence gender development: schools, families, workplaces, peers, mass media, and new communication technologies play crucial roles in today's society. Institutions influence and are influenced by individual actions; consequently, the process is dynamic and prone to transformation. Formal education plays a significant role in conveying and solidifying cultural norms for both genders, but it is also regarded as a place with substantial freedom to develop new and innovative identities.

Socialization is a key concept that social theorists employ to clarify cultural preservation and cultural transformation. Socialization connects the person to communal existence by shaping individuals to adhere to and collaborate with societal expectations. Simultaneously, the process is not fixed, as individuals can challenge and dismiss specific cultural traits. In other terms, the process is fluid and dependent on various factors; therefore, some researchers believe that the phrase "identity formation" better reflects the dynamic characteristics of the socialization process. Socialization undeniably takes place in various institutions and contexts, including the mass media and peer groups, which are gaining unprecedented influence. Interaction within schools, significantly linked to the informal (hidden) curriculum, plays a vital role in education by potentially transforming social perceptions or, on the other hand, perpetuating conventional values and attitudes. This socialization includes various practices, encompassing administrators' and teachers' attitudes and expectations, textbook content, peer interactions, classroom dynamics, and the broader environment.

Most of the time in school involves interaction with teachers, making them significant role models. In numerous rural schools within developing nations, the absence of books makes the teacher's role critically significant. Educators convey various gendered messages through curriculum choices and organizational policies. In what ways do educators assess the contributions of young girls and boys? What differing attitudes and expectations do they have toward them? Numerous educators assert that they treat male and female students the same and that gender does not matter. This stance is referred to as gender-blindness; it creates an illusion of neutrality and fairness, frequently conflicting with real-world conduct. Teachers' attitudes might reveal biases against girls and boys. Biases are more nuanced than overt discrimination and can lead to unconscious actions that tend to focus more on either boys or girls. These actions might create a feeling of isolation in disadvantaged students and impede their personal, academic, and career growth. Sexist beliefs create disparities and hierarchies in how people are treated according to their gender differences.

In numerous classrooms, educators are moving away from masculine language to address both boys and girls, and in various cases, they are working to create a non-sexist educational

atmosphere. In many colleges, sexist language teaching practices continue to exist. A common and extensive observation is that boys prefer more demanding engagement with teachers, take charge of classroom activities, and attract more attention than girls through criticism, praise, constructive feedback, and assistance. In the Kathmandu Valley, this type of favoritism has been identified over the study period as well.

The research has examined teacher methods in coeducational schools alongside those in single-gender schools (both boys' and girls' schools). Teacher practices have been examined regarding both sexist behaviors (gender reinforcement, sex-role stereotyping, active discrimination, and overt sexual incidents) and equity behaviors (resistance to sex-role stereotyping, compensatory acknowledgment of female accomplishments, and affirmation of girls' abilities, skills, and performance). Sexism has been found in 25 percent of the twenty classrooms. The majority of sexism incidents were started by teachers, with sex reinforcement as the most frequent practice, followed by overt discrimination (linguistic use, interpretation of literature, and visual representations) in both coed and single-sex schools. In coeducational schools, a specific form of sexism—gender dominance or behaviors that granted privileges to male students or allowed them to exert control over female students—was noted. Sexist occurrences differed by topic: they were most frequent in chemistry in both coeducational and girls-only schools, as well as in English in boys-only schools. Equity incidents were more frequent in girls' schools and infrequent in boys' schools.

Widespread among urban middle-school teachers and rural educators at every level were lower expectations for girls compared to those for boys. Within the classroom, educators exhibited a range of behaviors from highly biased to completely impartial. However, there were instances of blatant discrimination and even animosity towards girls from educators. The majority of teachers selected students who raised their hands, and those who did were usually boys. In small groups, girls often yielded to the boys, especially to the more dominant male students. Teachers exhibited common stereotypes regarding women and men, believing that boys generally grasp lessons effectively, provide strong responses, and show ambition, whereas girls were perceived as shy as and less diligent than boys.

Boys generally exhibit assertiveness, aggression, competitiveness, and a tendency to speak out. Boys attract greater attention, leading teachers to offer more praise, criticism, and feedback to boys compared to girls. This is performed equally by male and female educators. In general, boys attract more attention than girls in colleges with diverse social and political settings. While girls usually collaborate, boys often disrupt and dominate the classroom atmosphere. Several studies, however, have indicated that a greater number of girls than boys

start interactions with teachers.The data regarding opportunity structure supports boys: while not every boy speaks, the ones who do speak the most are boys. The diminished focus on girls impacts equal opportunities by making them less noticeable and deserving of attention, likely influencing their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Both educators and learners play a role in a system that offers girls fewer chances to engage in classroom discussions.

Conclusion

The article has highlighted ongoing misogyny and sexual harassment in Nepali higher education even with existing formal policies. Resolving the issue necessitates institutional reforms, autonomous complaint systems, survivor-focused approaches, and enhanced supervision by regulatory authorities. Eradicating sexual harassment and misogyny in Nepali colleges necessitates systemic reform, rigorous enforcement, cultural transformation, and shared accountability. A secure educational atmosphere can only be established when schools implement rules, educators adhere to ethical standards, and learners engage in fostering equality and respect.

In Nepal, the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission are making important efforts to tackle campus harassment by setting minimum standards for harassment policies and oversight in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These actions necessitate that HEIs release compliance reports, thus guaranteeing transparency and responsibility in their attempts to tackle harassment. Moreover, organizations have to be required to set aside funds for training, essential for preparing staff and students with the skills needed to properly address and prevent harassment situations. To better assist survivors, partnering with NGOs and student organizations should be crucial in delivering essential services, such as legal assistance and mental health care. Besides, awareness initiatives targeted at campus leaders were crucial in creating a safer educational space, ultimately promoting a culture of respect and safety for every student.

To effectively tackle harassment in higher education institutions in Nepal, it is crucial to create and distribute clear, behaviorally specific anti-harassment policies. Creating independent complaint systems is essential to guarantee that people feel secure and backed when they report incidents. Establishing survivor-focused protocols that emphasize confidentiality and offer temporary measures like class reassignment, no-contact directives, counseling, and academic support is crucial for creating a setting that promotes healing and justice. Furthermore, required training for faculty, staff, and students on subjects such as consent, bystander intervention, and power dynamics will provide the community with the understanding and abilities needed to prevent and address harassment. Finally, performing

yearly transparent reporting on grievances and their results will enhance accountability and foster ongoing improvement in tackling these crucial issues in the academic setting.

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