

The Hardship Faced by University Female Students in Sexual Harassment Events

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Abstract: Sexual harassment is defined as a behavior of sexual violence, often happening when the assaulters overpower the victims, causing hardship for female victims to protest and resist. Women in universities who experienced sexual harassment are facing hardships in the expression of sexual harassment, the protest process, and stigma after harassment happened. The first hardship after sexual assault is aphasia, this may be due to both internal and external factors. The shame and self-loathing may be the internal factors, while external factors are the unjust treatment women received. This aphasia causes women to not fight back and the increasing rate of sexual harassment. Secondly, the dilemma faced by victims of sexual harassment is the dilemma of fighting for their rights. The protection of victims of sexual harassment is sufficient due to the less comprehensive law and the public behavior. Such insufficient protection causes female victims in college not to report the assaults they suffered. Finally, the hardship faced by female victims is the difficulty of protecting their reputation, stigmatization is the main hardship faced by female college students.

Keywords: female students, university, feminism, sexual harassment

1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is defined as a behavior of sexual violence, often happening in a situation when the assaulters outpowered the victims, causing a hardship situation for female victims to protest and resist. The term “sexual harassment only came into widespread use starting in the 1970s [1]. Sexual harassment can be classified by the place the events occurred, and whether it is verbal or physical. There is a large number of women who face sexual harassment, while this amount is only limited to women who are willing to speak up. University is a common place where harassment takes place, while few reasons are causing female victims to choose not to protest. Even in modern society, one of the pervasive responses toward sexual harassment is still recognizing sexual harassment as feminine attraction and blaming female victims for the harm they suffered. The law determining whether a behavior is sexual harassment or not remains vague. Even though activities such as “Me Too” were organized, women still struggled to express the assaults they experienced. The conservative social opinion and cultural norms led to the hardships female victims faced.

The research introduces the hardship of female victims while they protest sexual harassment, the negative public opinions they face, and the reasons and effects of being stigmatized. The essay is separated into three parts, it investigates the three different dilemmas faced by women who underwent sexual harassment hardships it can be classified into the dilemma to speak up, the dilemma to protest, and the dilemma that female victims face on their reputation. The essay aims to investigate the hidden reasons for the dilemma and promote gender equality.

2. The Dilemma of Expression of a Female College Student Who Was Sexually Assaulted

2.1. The Collective Aphasia of Female College Students During Campus Sexual Assault

The first dilemma faced by victims of sexual assault is after the occurrence of sexual assault, female victims may choose to remain silent, this may be due to many factors, and will lead to serious impacts.

According to the report carried out by Hunan Women's University, 20% of women experience sexual harassment on the internet, while only 52% of them are willing to speak up [2].

Both the sense of shame and external opinion lead to aphasia, according to the report in People's Daily, in 2022, a school in Guangzhou claimed that sexual harassment happened because victims were attractive. The school required female victims not to wear exposing clothes. This is a typical example of negative public opinion and if such opinion continues, female victims won't have any space to express the assaults they suffered.

2.2. Reasons Why Female College Students Dare Not Speak Out

Several reasons lead to the aphasia of female college students, it can be concluded as the factor on women themselves, and the external factors.

The internal reason for the aphasia of women is the sense of shame they feel after harassment happens. The misogyny in our society leads to the objectification of women, which means objectifying women's bodies into objects and losing the ability to subjectify themselves [3]. This leads to self-loathing and creates shame while facing sexual harassment, female victims may not consider such behavior as sexual harassment, and as a result, female victims in college choose not to report the assaults happened.

As for the external reasons, the public opinion toward female college students being harassed can be negative and unjust, deep misogyny in society causes the public to blame the victims for the harm they suffered. Female victims were blamed for attracting men, while the public helped injurers to find excuses. Even though female victims considered some behaviors as sexual harassment, the public may consider those victims as sensitive. In some cultures, the virginity of a woman is extremely important, and women are required to be conservative. After harassment occurred, the first thought that came into people's minds was the behavior of the female victim, whether she wore exposed clothes or whether she seduced the injurer. The attitude that the public has caused aphasia in women because of the fear of being treated unfairly and blamed by the public after reporting sexual harassment.

The other external factor causing the aphasia is the position of the injurers. University female students' study is essential, however, some of the injurers who committed sexual harassment may be the professors, causing victims to dare not to speak out because of the power the injurers have, they faced threats on their studies.

2.3. The Dangers of Aphasia for a Female College Student Who Was Sexually Assaulted

The aphasia of female college students may lead to something more severe. One of the severe impacts is the growing rate of sexual harassment, without resistance from the victims, injurers may consider

this as a sign that gives them further opportunity to continue to commit assaults. Sexual harassment may develop into further violence such as rape. Secondly, the aphasia of female victims leads to the abuse of power and injuries. authority and power may use their power to prevent the resistance of victims. The aphasia of women may cause no support after suffering assaults, without support, female victims may suffer psychological issues such as lower confidence [4].

3. The Dilemma of Female College Student Who Was Sexually Assaulted in Fighting for Their Rights

3.1. Female College Students Who Were Sexually Assaulted Fight for Their Rights

Although there have been numerous previous victims began resisting and took action to fight for their rights - some college girls reported sexual harassment experiences to their relatives and friends to ask for support and assistance, and some opened up about their personal sexual assault stories on social media and wished to seek understanding from the public, hoping someone can help them defend their rights, and some of the victims who suffered more severe injuries have filed legal appeals hoped to get their cases fairly adjudicated - there are still numerous victims in college did not get the protection and compensation they deserve. Thus, some college girls who have experienced sexual harassment on campus choose to be silent and hold their tongue rather than fight back to defend their rights in time, because they need to get admission for their graduation thesis or maintain harmonious relationships with others, which means they may take the risk of delayed graduation by speaking out against some professor's will. In a piece of recent news, a graduate student at Huazhong University of Science and Technology who had suffered sexual harassment for 2 graduate years dared to defend her rights by publishing an article about sexually harassed experiences both physically and verbally from her professor only after she graduated.

3.2. Insufficient Protection of Female College Students' Rights Against Sexual Infringement

In the first place, due to the lack of accurate laws to delineate the boundaries of sexual infringement, several perpetrators did not receive the punishments they deserved, giving them the chance and courage to continue harassing girls. The introduction of Article 1010 of the Civil Code was a significant leap forward in the history of civil law on sexual harassment in China. However, according to some scholars, this article is a product of the law adapting to the needs of society and does not provide detailed provisions on the meaning of sexual harassment at the legal normative level. The latest amendment to the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women lists common forms of sexual harassment, and it can be assumed that the concept of sexual harassment has been relatively well established in China. Because the Civil Code, as the guiding law for the subordinate law, is more principled and abstracted in its provisions, it is easier for the subordinate law to discuss in detail. However, the subordinate law is limited to legislative technology and reality and cannot exhaust the list of manifestations of sexual harassment. In addition, because of the subjective nature of the interpretation of the concept, in practice, there is a dilemma of "differentiated judgment" [5].

Secondly, a lot of bystanders did not speak out against sexual harassment to protect victims due to the bystander effect. The bystander effect occurs for two reasons: diffusion of responsibility which means if others are present, someone feels that other observers are responsible for intervening, and social influence. Some bystanders observe others' behavior to determine the correct behavior, so if no one is intervening, then that seems to be the correct behavior, as people abide by the status quo. This can even give the appearance that the abuser's behavior is condoned by observers [6]. Furthermore, the lack of popularization of an explicit definition of sexual harassment causes different people to have disparate perspectives on the same cases. A study aimed to delineate the definitions of

sexual harassment and their relation to various subject characteristics. Results showed that although some Chinese demonstrated a high level of consensus regarding overt unwelcome physical contact and coercive sexuality as sexual harassment, only a small percentage of them classified sexist and misogynistic behaviors, verbal disrespect, pressure for dates, and unsolicited disclosure of personal and emotional feelings as sexually harassing [7], which means the boundaries for different people to define sexual harassment vary from one to another. In some eyes, some victims' behavior is also problematic. Instead of thinking sexual harassment is caused by men who cannot control themselves or have certain fetishes that drive them to continue harassing women, some onlookers may believe it is caused by these girls' seduction, accusing the girls of wearing revealing clothes, and others assert that some verbal disrespect is just normal jokes between friends of the opposite sex, attacking them by saying that they are overly sensitive and cannot even take a joke. This phenomenon in society also leads to fewer supporters of sexual harassment victims in fighting for their rights.

3.3. The Harm of the Lack of Protection of the Rights of Female College Students Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted

From time to time, due to the lack of accurate and explicit laws to define different levels of sexual harassment, many women believe they do not need to or lack the courage to tenaciously defend their rights because they believe that the courts will not grant them the judgments they seek and that men will not be severely punished no matter how hard they fight for their rights, considering the numerous experiences of previous victims who were not given a fair sentence by the courts. Moreover, the harasser may even retaliate against them for their resistance. Fear of retaliation Just as in the Carlson case, many of the women we interviewed said they did not report harassment against themselves or others because of the fear of retaliation by the harasser or organization. There's a reason for this—research has found that sexual harassment can be trivialized by organizations or result in hostility and retaliation against the victim [6]. Also, as the case mentioned above in 3.1, the graduate student at Huazhong University of Science and Technology is a good case in point. The fear of being retaliated by making her delayed graduation prevents her from rejecting her teacher's inappropriate words and speaking out for help, which causes her to submit to humiliation for 2 years. While some other college students report sexual harassment to people around them and ask for assistance, rather than getting enough comprehension, they receive a lot of discrimination and prejudice, accusing them of not defending themselves and disliking them for having a stain at such a young age. In other words, instead of affording sufficient comprehension and protecting them from being misunderstood, some biased bystanders may even add more pressure on these girls' shoulders and make them feel ashamed, causing even more serious psychological problems. Consequently, more and more victims in college decide to hold their mouths to spare themselves further trouble rather than adding to their already heavy load.

4. The Dilemma of a Female College Student Who Was Sexually Harassed in Protecting Her Reputation

4.1. The Stigma of Sexually Harassing Female College Students

The concept of stigmatization was first elaborated by sociologist Goffman in his 1963 book *Stigmatization: Notes on the Management of Damaged Identities*. According to Goffman, stigma is what people in a community learn to recognize demeaning markers and respond accordingly. A stigmatized person is reduced in the normal mind from a normal person without flaws to a defective, despised person. He makes it clear that people assume that the stigmatized group is no longer fully human, and based on that assumption, people begin to discriminate of all kinds. Through these kinds of discrimination, we can effectively and often unthinkingly reduce the life chances of stigmatized

groups [8].

Because some people believe that sexual harassment is orchestrated or induced by women, many comments show a strong tendency to dislike and despise it. There were 734 Weibo posts with such feelings in 2014 and 267 in 2018. For example, in the case of Professor Wu Chunming at Xiamen University, a female student exposed a chat record of Professor Wu Chunming harassing her after drinking. “Don’t talk about forced kissing. You deserve rape,” one netizen commented. On the contrary, some netizens commented on Professor Wu Chunming: “He may also be pure, but some girls are not as simple as everyone thinks, who is the victim is hard to say [9]!” As shown above, the gratuitous attacks and rumors against these women are stigmatization of women who have been sexually harassed.

4.2. Reasons Why Female College Students Who Were Sexually Harassed Are Stigmatized

Stigmatization of sexually harassed female college students reflects people’s “otherization” of women. “The other” is a keyword in Western philosophy and even literary criticism, which refers to “those alienated people who have no or lost self-consciousness, are under the domination of others or the environment, are completely in the status of objects, and have lost their subjective personality [10]. The “other” in feminist theory refers to women, that is, in male epistemology, “the non-autonomous person relative to man is closed, passive and uncreative [10].” Japanese feminist scholar Chizoko Ueno pointed out that in the gender binary system of gender order, the core position is discrimination against women’s “otherization” [11]. It can be seen from all kinds of people’s criticism of the sexually harassed women that people put the harassed women in a position of “sex barter” and regard the sexual harassment as a “benefit exchange” on the premise that the women are willing. The typical view is that female students who have been sexually harassed can successfully graduate or pass their papers through this matter, that is, seek their interests. Such views display the logic of objectifying the female body. Seeing women as “servers” and men as “takers” is itself an agreement. The exposure and disclosure of women after the event are both acts of “being bitches and standing archway”. It should be criticized by everyone. Thus, the most important “involuntary” feature of sexual harassment is removed from this bandit logic. This is what stigmatizes college women who are sexually harassed.

4.3. The Secondary Trauma of Being Stigmatized by Sexually Harassing Female College Students

Whether a person is flawed or tainted is not important. What is important is whether the person is perceived as flawed or tainted by others in a certain social group and relationship. Because this will directly affect the public opinion of his evaluation, to his indelible harm and inestimable consequences.

After experiencing sexual harassment, female college students have suffered a great negative impact on their studies and psychology. Under the already depressed emotions, some of them dare to speak out about their misfortune, to seek support and help from society. At this time, such stigmatization is undoubtedly worse for these women and may become “the last straw that breaks the camel’s back”. This will cause secondary trauma to these female victims.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, hardships women face come from multiple directions, both the expression and protest process of victims of sexual harassment may all face difficulties. If this situation continues, this will lead to severe impacts. The impacts include the increasing seriousness of sexual assault, the risk of abuse of power, etc. Prevention of sexual harassment is extremely important and is a social issue faced by all of us. Reduce the hardship faced by women and provide them an environment to protest,

promote gender equality, and reduce the level of sexual violence. This research is limited in the reason and phenomenon behind the hardships. However, no solutions are mentioned. Future research can focus on the solution to the hardships of sexual harassment faced by victims.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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