

INVISIBLE VICTIMS: A SOCIO-LEGAL ANALYSIS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT AGAINST MEN AND BOYS

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines the often-overlooked issue of sexual harassment against men and boys through a socio-legal lens. While public discourse and legal framework focus largely on women as primary victims of sexual harassment, male survivors often remain underrepresented in legal recognition, policy formulation and social dialogue. The study explores the limited legal intersection, socio-cultural norms, psychological consequences and reporting barriers that contribute to the invisibility of male victims. The paper further evaluates existing legal provisions and highlights gaps in protection, particularly in gender-specific provisions. A survey-based empirical methodology was used to understand and analyse the respondents' perceptions, prevalence patterns, and reporting behaviour. The finding reveals significant underreporting influenced by social stigma, gender stereotypes and lack of gender neutral legal mechanisms. The paper concludes by recommending legal reforms, awareness initiatives, institutional sensitivity training and gender-neutral grievance redressal frameworks to ensure comprehensive protection for all victims.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Gender-neutral, Socio-legal Perspective, Redressal.

INTRODUCTION:

Whenever the word “harassment” clicks one’s mind, most people presume women as the victims and the thought that even men could be victims never arises, but in reality, even men and boys face sexual harassment. The suppression of their experiences is attributable to societal expectations and cultural beliefs. Thus, the phenomenon of men facing sexual harassment has largely remained neglected and undiscussed in Indian society. Society

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assumes men to be strong, dominant and emotionless because patriarchal cultures value these as 'masculine traits'. And if they even try to express their situation, either they are not believed, or they are suggested as not being 'manly enough'. Gender equality is one of the foundational principles of our modern democracies. The Constitution of India, under Articles 14 and 15, enshrines the principle of equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender.² Yet many statutes look after the protection of women and children explicitly, raising further questions on the protection of men under such circumstances. If we examine the latest Criminal Law reforms, specifically the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, which replaces the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, which replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure, they largely consist of existing provisions on sexual or domestic violence, which aren't gender-neutral. This results in neglect of male sexual abuse or violence and determines that they have no legal recourse. Also, many studies show that the majority of victims of sexual violence are female, but they also purport that men are also victims of it. According to RAINN,³ 1 out of every 10 rape victims is male. This aligns with the hegemonic masculinity theory, which explains that men are supposed to appear dominant and emotionally unavailable, which leads to male victims facing intense stigma, contributing to the underreporting of male sexual violence.

BACKGROUND:

Crimes are committed against society; it is never limited to any particular gender, religion or caste. Sexual violence is also a crime that could happen to anyone, irrespective of whether they are a male or female. According to Section 75 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023⁴ Sexual Harassment refers to any physical contact and advances involving unwelcome and explicit sexual overtures; a demand or request for sexual favours; showing pornography against the will of the woman, or making sexually coloured remarks. The Sanhita specifically lays down that a man towards a woman commits such an act. The only question that arose in my mind was – why is it limited to women and not men? We can't deny the fact that such acts cannot be committed towards men. Many people argue that men enjoy such acts. So, if somebody likes getting grabbed, then nobody should complain about getting

²Akash Bharti and Aishwarya Pandey, "An Examination Of Gender Bias In Indian Laws: The Need For Reforms To Protect Male Rights And Ensure Gender Neutrality", Indian Journal Of Legal Review (IJLR), 5 (7) OF 2025, PG. 556-564, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN - 2583-2344

³RAINN, Statistics: Victims of Sexual Violence (RAINN, updated 28 August 2025) <https://rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence> accessed 21 November 2025.

⁴ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023

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grabbed. Though I agree that sexual violence against females is higher and thus several legislations have been passed specifically for women, such as the PoSH Act, 2013 or PWDVA, 2005, etc. Without gender-neutral harassment laws, male harassment cases are hardly reported and thus brings us to the need for such gender neutral laws so that no one feels unheard. As Justice Krishna Iyer has said – ‘A murderer kills the body, but a rapist kills the soul’. Thus, this paper will deal with sexual harassment against men and boys and the need for legislation to protect them from not only the crime but also the social stigma.

OBJECTIVES:

The objective of this paper is –

- (a) To analyse socio-cultural factors that influence sexual harassment against men and boys
- (b) To examine the psychological effects/impact of sexual harassment against men and boys
- (c) To evaluate the legal framework and institutional mechanisms addressing male sexual harassment in the Indian context
- (d) To investigate the challenges faced by male survivors in reporting incidents
- (e) To derive data-based insights through a structured survey
- (f) To propose actionable strategies and recommendations for improving recognition, reporting, and support for male survivors

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE:

Before being replaced by BNS, IPC contained a provision that criminalised sodomy under section 377. Except for this provision, all the other provisions regarding sexual violence pertained to women only. In *Navtej Singh Johar*⁵, The Supreme Court decriminalised consensual same-sex adult intercourse. It only applied to non-consensual acts, acts with minors and bestiality. Later, when IPC was replaced by BNS, there is no such specific provision that talks about sodomy and has been omitted. From this, we can declare that there is unequal access to justice even though our Constitution enshrines “Right to Equality” under Article 14. Under the PoSH Act, the legislation deals with workplace sexual harassment against women. It was enacted to incorporate the Vishaka Guidelines of 2007, which stem

⁵*Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* 2018 INSC 790

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from *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997)⁶. It aimed to fulfil the international guidelines under CEDAW. Whereas this act remains silent on any workplace harassment against men or LGBTQ+ employees, who also face workplace sexual harassment according to many surveys and reports. Also, as mentioned earlier, Section 377 of the IPC recognises sexual offence for men; however, it explicitly defends against men-on-men assault. There is no provision for men if they are assaulted by a woman. One cannot assume that women are incapable of committing sexual harassment against men. A survey cited in the *Economic Times*⁷ revealed that 29–43% of respondents had experienced harassment by female colleagues. These provisions violate Article 14 of the Indian Constitution. Several countries like Denmark, Canada, the United Kingdom and the USA have advanced and implemented gender neutral laws against sexual harassment. In Canada, the laws are not discriminatory because the protections are embedded in gender-neutral terms, applying to “any person” rather than exclusively to women, unlike certain Indian legal provisions. Similarly, the UK’s Equality Act 2010 adopts a gender-neutral approach in its scope, extending protection to any individual, unlike laws that specify only women. Also, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) in the United States codifies a gender – neutral safeguard, ensuring equal protection against sex discrimination for all persons. Yet India has refused to adopt gender neutral laws even though there has been a rise in the cases of sexual harassment against men and boys. It is now high time that India adopts gender neutral laws.

SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES:

What we say against men and boys in today's society cannot be just understood merely as a legal gap. What we have today came from the deeply embedded social structure that shapes gender roles, identity, and power relations. Our Indian society, like many others, functions within a patriarchal framework with rigid expectations of masculinity. This set of frameworks and forced expectations influences how the male victims are treated and perceived by society.

1. Patriarchal social structure and homogenic manhood.

⁶ *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997) 6 SCC 241

⁷ ET Bureau, ‘Even men aren’t safe from sexual harassment at workplace: Survey’ *The Economic Times* (New Delhi, 22 August 2010) <https://m.economictimes.com/special-report/even-men-arent-safe-from-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-survey/articleshow/6389438.cms> accessed 21 November 2025.

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What sociologists refer to as hegemonic masculinity, a paradigm of manhood linked to dominance, strength, violence, and emotional invulnerability, is fostered by the prevailing patriarchal structure. In this context, men are seen as guardians rather than victims by culture. Sexual harassment of a guy is in opposition to the socially acceptable definition of masculinity. To avoid being called weak or "unmanly," victims internalise shame and keep quiet. One of the main causes of persistent underreporting is this cultural conflict.⁸

2. Cultural Conditioning and Stereotyping of Gender.

Boys are socialised from an early age to repress their emotions. Phrases like "boys don't cry" and "boys don't feel pain" reveal a broader cultural perception that women are more vulnerable than men.⁹ Due to this stereotypical conditioning, Male survivors are unable to express their trauma or seek professional assistance. Furthermore, gender stereotypes trivialise the use of force or any unwelcoming approach against males by spreading the notion that they are always sexually responsive.

3. Stigmatisation of the public as well as social perception.

Male sexual victimisation frequently elicits incredulity, scorn, or derision. Victims are frequently asked about their physical prowess or capacity to "defend themselves." In close-knit societies where honour and social repute are highly valued, this stigma is exacerbated. Silence is reinforced, and reporting is discouraged by fear of public disgrace.

4. Social labelling of male victims.

Male sexual harassment survivors frequently experience social stigma associated with their sexual orientation. Male victimisation, especially when the attacker is male, is mistakenly associated with homosexuality in many conservative contexts. The public's limited comprehension of sexual violence as a misuse of power rather than a sign of sexual orientation and strict gender binary thinking are the causes of this. Victims consequently worry about being morally judged, socially outcast, or stigmatised.

Social prejudices still exist at the local level even after *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* decriminalised consensual same-sex relationships.¹⁰ Male survivors who fear that reporting

⁸ R W Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford University Press 1987).

⁹ David L Vogel and others, "Boys Don't Cry": Examination of Masculine Norms and Help-Seeking Attitudes' (2011) 58 *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 368 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21639615/>

¹⁰ *Navtej Singh Johar v Union of India* (2018) 10 SCC 1 <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/168671544/>

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abuse will raise doubts about their masculinity or sexual identity are inadvertently silenced by the stigma associated with sexual minorities. Underreporting is encouraged, and psychological damage is exacerbated by this fear of misidentification.

5. *Representation through the means of media and social narratives.*

The public's perception of gender and victimhood is greatly influenced by popular culture. Female-on-male harassment is frequently portrayed in movies, TV series, digital media, and comedic routines as amusing, flattering, or innocuous. The idea that men are incapable of feeling coercion and are always sexually open is reinforced by such portrayals. Serious conversation is discouraged, and male suffering is trivialised when harassment is normalised through entertainment.

Furthermore, there is an imbalance in public empathy because male survivors are rarely highlighted by the media in reporting narratives or awareness efforts. Because of this selective representation, sexual harassment is largely seen by society as a problem that affects women. As a result, media-driven cultural messages unintentionally support stigma, silence, and the marginalisation of male victims.

6. *Structural and Legislative Gender Asymmetry*

Legislative and social frameworks that primarily recognise sexual harassment in terms particular to gender further support societal perceptions regarding male victimisation. For example, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (PoSH Act) offers protection only for female employees.¹¹, while Section 75 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita defines sexual harassment in a way that protects women. The gender-specific wording of these laws unintentionally fosters the idea that men cannot be victims, even though they were passed to combat the pervasive violence against women.¹².

Such systemic asymmetry violates Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution's guarantee of equality and leads to unequal access to justice. Institutions reinforce cultural presumptions and deter male survivors from seeking justice when they replicate gender bias in their frameworks.

7. *Institutional Power Dynamics and Social Vulnerability*

¹¹ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

¹² Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023.

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Sexual harassment is not just an act of sexual intent; it is essentially a misuse of power. Male victims may be more at risk in institutional contexts where hierarchical power structures are in existence, such as workplaces, schools, prisons, the military, and labour sectors. Economically dependent people, students, or junior employees are frequently reluctant to report harassment out of concern for social embarrassment, career harm, or reprisals. Men are further deterred from seeking institutional remedies by cultural expectations that they should be independent. Looking at this vulnerability from an intersectional perspective makes it more complicated. Class, caste, age, sexual orientation, and financial standing are some of the variables that interact with gender to influence the level of danger and silence. For instance, marginalised males in the informal labour sector or teenage boys living in dorms might not be aware of the law or have social capital. Invisibility is exacerbated by the mix of sociocultural stigma and institutional power imbalance, which turns male victimisation into a complex social issue rather than just a gender issue.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT:

Sexual harassment can have profound psychological consequences that linger long after the incident occurs. For males and boys, the trauma is often exacerbated by cultural expectations that dissuade them from expressing emotions and revealing vulnerability. Consequently, the psychological effects are not only individual but also amplified by stigma and a pervasive culture of silence. Male survivors frequently encounter trauma-related symptoms, including intrusive thoughts, nightmares, increased alertness, and emotional numbness. Many display indicators that align with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)¹³. Nevertheless, due to societal norms associating masculinity with strength, men are often less willing to seek psychological support, resulting in untreated symptoms¹⁴. Unlike physical injuries, psychological damage often arises internally through mechanisms of self-defence and feelings of shame. Victims may question their masculinity or personal strength, especially in cultures that place a strong emphasis on these traits. Additionally, due to societal labels, survivors might feel uncertain or anxious about their sexual identity, particularly when the harassment involves another male aggressor. Long-term silence and inadequate institutional

¹³Rebecca Campbell, 'The Psychological Impact of Rape Victims' Experiences With the Legal, Medical, and Mental Health Systems' (2008) 63 *American Psychologist* 702 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/19014228/>

¹⁴ Martina Delle Donne and others, 'Barriers to and Facilitators of Help-Seeking Behavior Among Men Who Experience Sexual Violence' (2018) *American Journal of Men's Health* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29161934/>

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support can lead to chronic stress, sadness, and anxiety disorders. Common outcomes include anger, social withdrawal, hopelessness, and diminished self-esteem. Repressed trauma can also lead to drug abuse and suicidal thoughts in severe situations. Cultural scripts such as "men have to be tough" reinforce emotional repression. Survivors may express their vulnerability by being aggressive, engaging in reckless behaviour, or becoming drug dependent¹⁵. Not only does it affect the person, but it can also affect relationships with others and one's career. Sexual harassment can also significantly damage intimacy and trust. Survivors can experience sexual dysfunction, problems with relationships, or social or work anxiety. Thus, the psychological harm spreads into the personal, family, and professional spheres. Stigma that is repeatedly internalized can alter how the survivor sees themselves. Survivors may feel that they are powerless or permanently damaged. This distorted self-perception ties psychiatric damage to sociocultural silence.

CHALLENGES IN REPORTING:

In India, multiple legal, social, cultural, and institutional barriers prevent the reporting of sexual harassment involving men and boys. While Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law, the laws are not entirely gender-neutral, as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act only allows women to register a complaint regarding sexual harassment at the workplace, while the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act is gender-neutral and provides protection for minors, and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act includes neutrality for some offences such as acid attacks, but there is no over arching gender-neutral legislation that covers sexual harassment of adult men in the workplace or elsewhere. This absence of legal recognition results in underreporting and a lack of reliable data. Globally, reports show that 1 in 33 men reports having experienced attempted or actual sexual assault¹⁶. Also, 1 in 5 men may encounter some kind of sexual assault (indicated by broader definitions). According to some evidences approx 90-95% of male sexual assault incidents are underreported. A survey conducted by the Economics Times, India, revealed that 29-43% of the survey takers

¹⁵ Jill M Berger, Ronald F Levant, Katharine K McMillan and William Sellers, 'Impact of Gender Role Conflict, Traditional Masculinity Ideology, Alexithymia, and Age on Men's Attitudes Toward Psychological Help Seeking' (2005) 6(1) Psychology of Men & Masculinity 73 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232434924_Impact_of_Gender_Role_Conflict_Traditional_Masculinity_Ideology_Alexithymia_and_Age_on_Men%27s_Attitudes_Toward_Psychological_Help_Seeking

¹⁶ Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoennes, Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings from the National Violence Against Women Survey (National Institute of Justice, 2000). <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf>

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admitted facing workplace harassment by some kind from female co-workers, which highlights that male victimisation should not be overlooked in any parameter¹⁷.

METHODOLOGY:

This research was conducted to understand the experiences and awareness of sexual harassment against men and boys. As this topic revolves around lived experiences and personal perception, a survey method was considered appropriate for collecting responses directly from the concerned group. College students predominantly completed the survey, but it also included participation from school students and working professionals, responding from different social backgrounds. The questionnaire consisted of approximately 13 questions, which were multiple-choice type questions reflecting the nature and frequency of incidents, whereas one question was an opinion-based question to understand the reporting of incidents. Considering the sensitivity of the subject, the responses were collected anonymously, preventing any breach of privacy. The participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents had the option to skip any question that they felt uncomfortable answering. The collected responses were compiled and analysed using percentage-based comparison to identify patterns and trends.

DATA ANALYSIS:

This section presents the data analysis of the data collected through the survey. The responses have been examined to identify patterns, trends and the level of awareness regarding sexual harassment against men and boys.

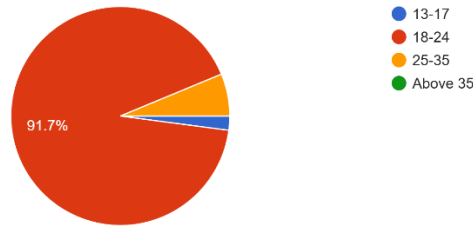
1. Age Distribution of the Respondents-

The majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 18- 24. A smaller portion fell within the age group of 25-35 and 13-17.

¹⁷ 'Nearly Half of Indian Employees Face Workplace Harassment' The Economic Times (India, 2017).
<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/special-report/even-men-arent-safe-from-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-survey/articleshow/6389438.cms?from=mdr>

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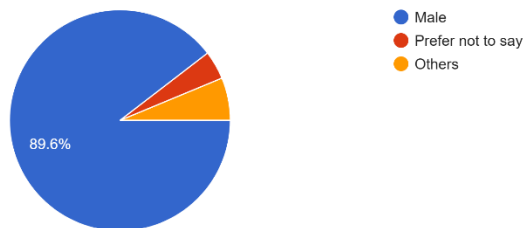
Age
48 responses



2. Gender Distribution of the Respondents-

As the survey was open to all genders, the majority of the respondents were identified as male, whereas a smaller portion fell under the other categories.

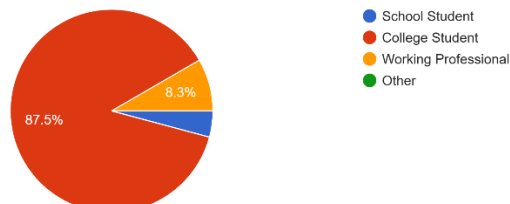
Gender
48 responses



3. Occupation of the Respondents-

The majority of the respondents were identified as college students, followed by working professionals and school students. This indicates that this survey primarily reflects the perspectives of the young academic participants.

Occupation
48 responses



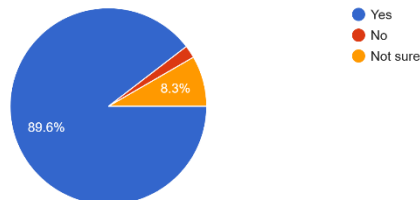
4. Perception of male victimhood:

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When asked whether men/boys can be victims of sexual harassment, the majority of the respondents, i.e. 89.6% responded with 'yes', while 2.1 % responded with 'no'. Whereas 8.3 % were uncertain about it, this reflects a lack of awareness regarding male victimhood. The responses highlight how social norms and stigma affect one's perception.

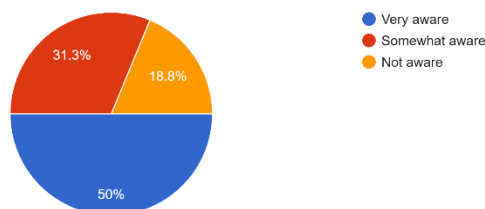
Do you think men/boys can be victims of sexual harassment?
48 responses



5. Awareness regarding sexual harassment:

When asked how aware they are of what legally constitutes sexual harassment, 50% of the respondents responded with 'very aware', while 31.3 % were somewhat aware, whereas 18.8% were not aware at all. The varied responses reflect that awareness remains inconsistent, highlighting a greater need for greater discourse and sensitisation.

How aware are you about what legally constitutes sexual harassment?
48 responses



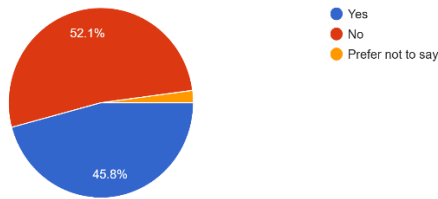
6. Experience of any form of sexual harassment:

In response to the question regarding the experience of sexual harassment, 45.8 % of the respondents stated that they had experienced some sort of harassment. Among those respondents, 55.6% of them faced physical harassment like touching, grabbing, etc., whereas 29.6% faced verbal harassment, and some faced online harassment, stalking and other categories of harassment.

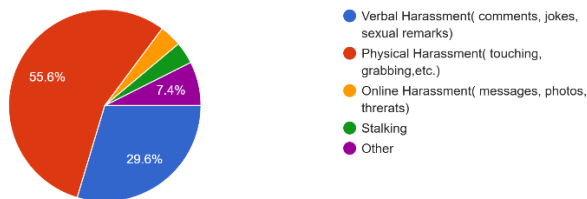
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Have you experienced any form of sexual harassment
48 responses



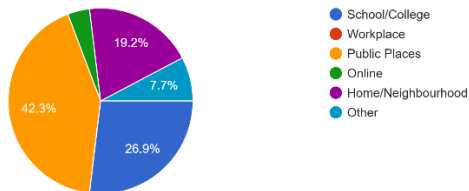
If YES : What type of harassment did you face?
27 responses



7. Nature, Context and Reporting of Incidents:

Among those who reported experiencing harassment, the incident most commonly occurred in public places, followed by school/college, then home/neighbourhood and so on.

Where did the incident occur?
26 responses



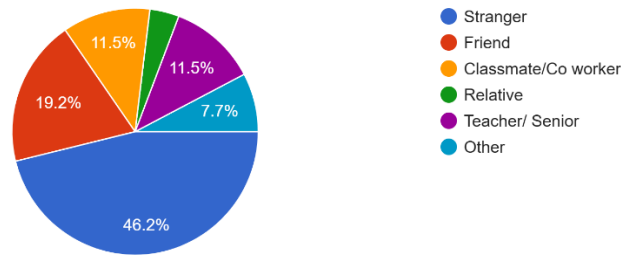
Regarding the identity of a stranger, 46.2 % of the respondents stated that the harasser was a stranger, while 19.2 % stated that it was a friend, followed by a classmate/coworker, then a teacher/senior and then a relative and so on.

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Who was the harasser?

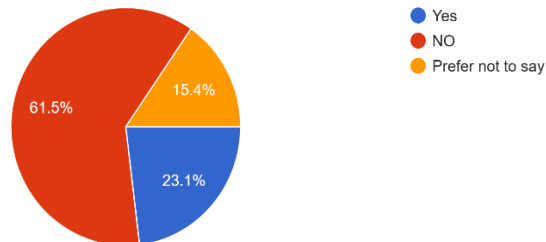
26 responses



In terms of reporting behaviour, 61.5 % of the respondents stated that they did not report the incident to anyone, while 23.1 % did, and 15.4 % preferred not to disclose their response. Out of those respondents who did not report it, 54.5 % stated that they felt ashamed/ embarrassed while 27.3 % felt that it wouldn't be taken seriously, whereas the rest had the fear of being mocked or they were not aware of where to report. This pattern reflects the broader issue of underreporting in cases involving male victims.

Did you report the incident to anyone?

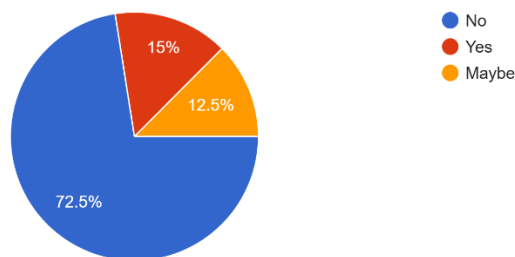
26 responses



8. Public Perception of Male Sexual Harassment Victims:

Do you feel society takes male sexual harassment seriously?

40 responses



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When asked whether the respondents take male sexual harassment seriously, 72.5 % of the respondents stated 'no', while 15 % stated 'yes', whereas 12.5 % were not sure about it.

Overall, the analysis of the survey reflects that a significant portion of the male respondents have faced some sort of sexual harassment, whether physical, verbal or online. The data further indicates that such harassment usually occurs in public places and educational settings, and in most of the cases the harasser was identified as a stranger or someone known to the victim.

The survey highlights a high rate of non-reporting, largely influenced by feelings of embarrassment, shame or social stigma. It reflects that there is a greater need for awareness, sensitivity, and institutional support that concerns sexual harassment against men and boys.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Throughout this research paper, we have seen how sexual harassment has remained underreported due to societal stigma, gender stereotypes and legal gaps. Thus, addressing this issue becomes essential, and it requires multi-dimensional reforms.

1. Move Towards a Gender-Inclusive Legal Framework

Legal protection should not depend on gender. While the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act was enacted to address serious workplace inequalities faced by women, there is a need to broaden the conversation and consider inclusive remedies for male victims as well.¹⁸ Legislative reform or supplementary provisions can ensure equal access to justice without weakening existing safeguards.¹⁹

2. Ensure Effective Implementation of Child Protection Laws

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act already recognises that boys can

¹⁸ Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

¹⁹ Ministry of Women and Child Development, *Handbook on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act* (Government of India 2015).

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be victims.²⁰ However, social stigma often prevents reporting. Schools, parents, and community leaders must actively encourage safe disclosure and create an environment where boys feel believed and supported.

3. Strengthen Awareness Initiatives

Public understanding of sexual harassment must evolve beyond gender stereotypes. Awareness campaigns should directly address the misconception that men cannot be victims. Educational institutions, media platforms, and civil society groups can play a crucial role in normalising dialogue around male victimisation and consent.

4. Institutional Sensitivity and Capacity Building

Organisations should conduct periodic sensitivity training for HR personnel, teachers, administrators, and grievance committee members. Such training must emphasise empathy, confidentiality, and trauma-informed approaches, ensuring that complaints by men and boys are handled with seriousness and dignity.

5. Develop a Transparent Grievance Redressal Framework

Institutions should adopt clear, accessible, and time-bound complaint procedures applicable to all genders. Independent complaint committees, anonymous reporting channels, and strict anti-retaliation safeguards can significantly improve trust in redressal systems.²¹

6. Provide Psychological and Legal Support

Survivors often experience isolation, shame, and confusion. Access to professional counselling, peer-support groups, and legal assistance should be institutionalised so that victims are not left to navigate the aftermath alone.²²

7. Promote Data Collection and Research

Reliable, gender-disaggregated data on sexual harassment cases is essential for

²⁰ Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012.

²¹ Sexual Harassment Act 2013

²² Legal Service India, *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace*<https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-4907-sexual-harassment-of-women-a-detailed-study-of-its-criminal-liability-at-workplace.html>

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informed policymaking. Research initiatives can help identify patterns, institutional gaps, and long-term psychological impacts, enabling more effective reforms.

CONCLUSION:

The issue of sexual harassment against men and boys continues to remain overlooked due to embedded gender norms and structurally limited legal intersections. This study demonstrates that societal expectations surrounding masculinity, coupled with stigma and institutional inadequacies, significantly contribute to the underreporting and psychological stress among male survivors. The empirical findings indicate that sexual harassment against men and boys is neither rare nor insignificant but systematically marginalised.

From the socio-legal perspective, it indicates that a lack of explicit gender-neutral laws and limited recognition of male victimhood creates substantial gaps in protection and redressal. The recognition of male survivors is not an attempt to undermine protections available to women; instead, it aims to strengthen the broader commitment to equality, dignity, and justice to all individuals irrespective of the gender they belong to.

Addressing these gaps requires a multi-dimensional approach, including gender inclusive legal reforms, awareness initiatives, institutional sensitivity training and gender-neutral grievance redressal frameworks. Recognising male survivors is an essential step towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all. A truly just legal system must move beyond gendered assumptions and ensure protection and dignity for every survivor.

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