

Research Article

Street Harassment and Depression: The Role of Satisfaction with Life as a Mediator in Pakistani Women

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Abstract

Street Harassment is one of the major problems in today's world and is mostly experienced by every woman. The current study was conducted to investigate the mediating role of satisfaction with life in the relationship between street harassment and depression. A correlation research design and multistage sampling strategy were used. The data was collected from 254 Pakistani women, age range 16-24 years ($M= 19.41$, $S.D=1.99$) from different areas of Lahore, Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that street harassment has a significant positive relationship with depression and a significant negative relationship with satisfaction with life. The results of this study also revealed that satisfaction with life fully mediated the relationship between street harassment and depression. The present findings would help educate the community about the harmful psychological consequences of street harassment. It will also enable us to understand why street harassment is an important social issue and requires attention.

Keywords: Street Harassment, Satisfaction with Life, Depression and Pakistani Women

Introduction

Harassment has been a serious problem in our society for many years. Harassment covers a wide range of behaviors of hostile nature. It is usually known as behavior that degrades, mortifies, or humiliates an individual, and it is typically recognized by its unlikelihood in terms of social and moral sensibility. Harassment is also the act of consistent and continued undesirable and irritating activities of one person or a group, which includes threats and demands (Gerald & Kathleen, 2002). Women and men both face harassment but mostly harassment is faced by women. Nowadays, in Pakistan, crimes against women are increasing, an NGO White Ribbon Pakistan reported that 47,034 women experienced sexual harassment and sexual violence, more than 15,000 cases of honor killing were reported, over 1,800 cases of domestic abuse, and above 5,500 cases of kidnapping of women were reported in the year of 2004 to 2016 (Gancia, et al., 2020). In Pakistan, there is a rise in the cases of sexual harassment, street harassment, and domestic violence that's why Pakistan is ranked as the sixth most dangerous country for women in the world and the second-worst country in the matter of gender equality (Khan, 2019).

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Street harassment is one of the major and prevalent issues, but it goes unnoticed and is not addressed socially and legislatively. Women in public areas become a target of catcalling, winking, honking, unwanted comments, wolf-whistling, staring, and many more (Whittaker, et al., 2015). Women revealed that they feel unsafe and have been harassed by men in public areas (Wright, 2019). In 2005, the findings of the survey of 200 women indicated that 96% of women have been subjected to street harassment in Gujranwala, a semi-urban city of Pakistan. It showed that street harassment is a significant social issue that is spreading in our society (Gillard, 2014; Fatima, 2019). In Pakistan, people perceive street harassment as something not serious or significant, but it can have disastrous consequences for women's health.

In 2014, a survey of 2000 women in the United States of America (USA) revealed that 65% of women faced street harassment, 23% of women had experienced touching sexually, 20% of women chased by unknown people, and 9% of women compelled to do something sexual. In another survey in 2008, out of 811 women, 99% of women stated that they have experienced street harassment (Gillard, 2014).

Street harassment is widespread in Pakistan. It is one of the most prevailing social issues in Pakistan. Women in Pakistan face street harassment daily. Pakistan is one of the countries where 70 percent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence from close relatives in their lifetime, and 93 percent of women have experienced sexual barbarism in public places in their lifetime which may lead to mental health problems in them (Kazi, 2017).

Life satisfaction is the cognitive element of a person's mental health and subjective well-being and therefore, it refers to the extensive evaluation of an individual's life (Pavot, et al., 2018). Evaluating life satisfaction in adulthood is very important because previous research studies reveal that this element of an individual's well-being is connected to adaptive psychosocial progress and healthy mental condition in this span of life (Cava, et al., 2014). Moreover, few other studies have revealed that when adults experience any kind of harassment, they tend to get less satisfied with life (Kerr, et al., 2011; Valois, et al., 2012).

Street harassment is an important social issue but there is a dearth to explore the psychological consequences of street harassment. Research evidence on sexual harassment found a link between sexual harassment and mental health outcomes such as alcohol addiction, stress, anxiety, and depression (Richman et al. 1999). Street harassment comes under the type of sexual harassment and as they both are similar components; street harassment would also have similar mental health outcomes. Some authentic studies (Gyawali, 2020; Mushtaq, et al., 2015; Houle, et al., 2011) have been conducted on sexual harassment but there is little scientific work related to street harassment (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008). So, the present study is conducted to find out the relationship between street harassment, satisfaction with life, and depression. The following hypotheses were developed

H1. There would be a significant relationship between street harassment, satisfaction with life and depression in Pakistani women.

H2. There will be the mediating role of satisfaction with life in between street harassment and depression in Pakistani women.

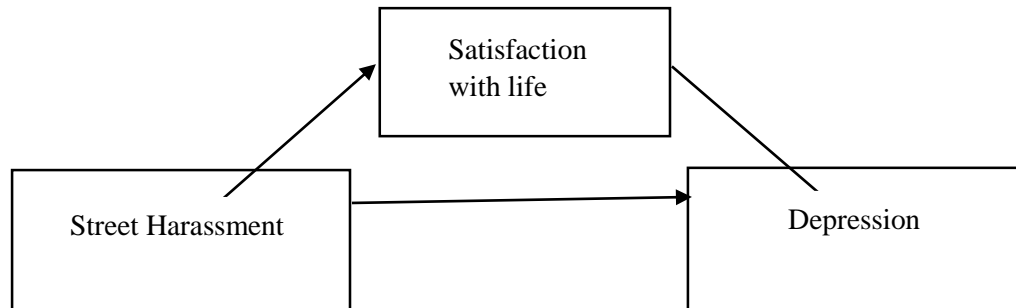


Figure 1. Proposed hypothetical model

Methodology

The sample of this study is comprised of 254 Pakistani women with the age range of 16-24 years ($M= 19.41$, $S.D=1.99$), from different colleges and universities of Lahore, Pakistan. In this study, the correlation research design was used to find out the relationship between street harassment, satisfaction with life and depression. A multistage purposive sampling strategy was used to select data. Firstly, the screening of the participants was done and only those participants were selected, who have experienced street harassment and did not have any diagnosed psychological illness. Then, the researcher contacted the selected participants, and they were requested to fill the questionnaire. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Department of Psychology, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan. The data was collected after taking permission from the respective authors of the scale and the participants were informed about their rights of withdrawal, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Street Harassment was assessed by using Street Harassment Index by Fairchild and Rudman (2008) translated by Kausar and Yaseen (2021). Only one subscale Street Harassment Index-Frequencies was used in this study. This scale has 9 items which are rated on 5-point scale ranging from 1 (once) to 5 (every day). The Cronbach alpha reliability of this scale on the current sample is .81. Satisfaction with life was assessed by using the Satisfaction with Life Scale by Diener, et al. (1985), translated by Hayat, et al. (2016). This scale measures the subjective well-being of a person. This scale has 5 items which are rated on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The Cronbach alpha reliability of this scale on the current sample is .86. Depression was assessed by using Depression Anxiety Stress Scale developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and translated by Zafar and Khalily (2015). This scale has 21 items which are rated on 4-point scale ranging from 0 (did not apply to me at all) to 3 (applied to me very much or most of the time). This scale has 3 subscales with 7 items in each subscale and the subscale of depression was used in this study. The Cronbach alpha reliability for depression in the current sample is .81.

Data were analyzed by using SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data and inferential statistics was used for hypotheses testing. Pearson Product moment correlation was carried out to investigate the relationship between street harassment, satisfaction with life, and depression. Mediation analysis using Hayes Process was used to investigate the mediating role of satisfaction with life in the association between street harassment and depression. Hayes et al., 2018 bootstrapping approach was used to observe street harassment as an independent variable and depression as a dependent variable.

Results

Demographic Characteristics

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=256)

Characteristics	F	(%)
Areas in which experience harassment		
In markets	36	9.0
In college/ university	14	3.5
On roads	121	30.3
In residential area	85	21.3
Do you use public transport?		
Yes	188	47.0
No	68	17.0
What were you wearing when you experienced harassment?		
Shalwar kameez (National dress)	140	35.0
Pent shirt/ Trouser shirt	13	3.3
Abaya/ Full gown	103	25.8
When you experienced harassment, you were alone or with someone?		
With someone	119	29.8
Alone	137	34.3

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the research participants. The findings revealed that the mean age of women was 19 years and 45.5% were students at bachelors’ level. Findings indicated that women are experiencing harassment in all most every place they have been visiting like markets, universities, roads, and even in their residential areas. Moreover, 35.0% of the women reported that they were wearing shalwar kameez when they experience street harassment and 25.8 % got harassed even in full gowns.

Correlation Matrix

Table 2

Intercorrelation of Street Harassment, Satisfaction with Life and Depression (N = 254)

Variables	1	2	3
1. Street Harassment	-	-.55**	.46**
2. Satisfaction with life		-	-.53**
3. Depression			-
<i>M</i>	19.18	12.84	12.98
<i>SD</i>	6.39	5.89	4.58

Note. ** $p < .01$

Table 2 shows the relationship between street harassment, satisfaction with life and depression. Results showed that street harassment has a significant negative association with satisfaction with life ($r = -.55, p < .01$). Furthermore, findings also revealed that street harassment has a significant positive relationship with depression ($r = .46, p < .01$) whereas satisfaction with life has a significant negative relationship with depression ($r = -.53, p < .01$).

Mediation Analysis

The current analysis confirmed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) assumptions, as well as Hayes and preacher’s (2013). Therefore, in the current research, Haye's (2018) bootstrapping approach was used to investigate the mediating role of satisfaction with life in the association between street harassment and depression.

Table 3

Regression Coefficients, Standard Error, and Model Summary Information for the Street Harassment, Satisfaction with Life and Depression (N=254)

Antecedents	Consequents							
	SWL(M)			DEP(Y)				
		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>P</i>
SHS(X)	<i>a</i>	-.52	.08	.000***	<i>c'</i>	.06	.08	.43
SWL(M)	---	---	---		<i>B</i>	-.36	.09	.001***
Constant	<i>i</i>	21.21	1.70	.000***	<i>I</i>	10.40	1.77	.000***
		$R^2 = .38$				$R^2 = .31$		
		$F(1, 254) = 42.41, p = .000***$				$F(2, 253) = 15.10, p = .000***$		

Note. SHS= Street Harassment, SWL= Satisfaction with life, DEP= Depression and *** $p < .001$

Figure 2 indicates significant total effect of street harassment on depression ($\beta = .25, SE = .06, p < .001$). Furthermore, Table 3 depict significant effects of street harassment on satisfaction with life ($\beta = -.52, SE = .08, p < .000$) and satisfaction with life on depression ($\beta = -.36, SE = .09, p < .001$). Findings revealed that satisfaction with life fully mediates the association between street harassment and depression, as after controlling the satisfaction with life, the direct effect of street harassment on depression is reduced ($\beta = .06, SE = .08, p > .42$) but c' path is not significant.

Table 4

The indirect effect of Street Harassment on Depression through Satisfaction with Life (N=254)

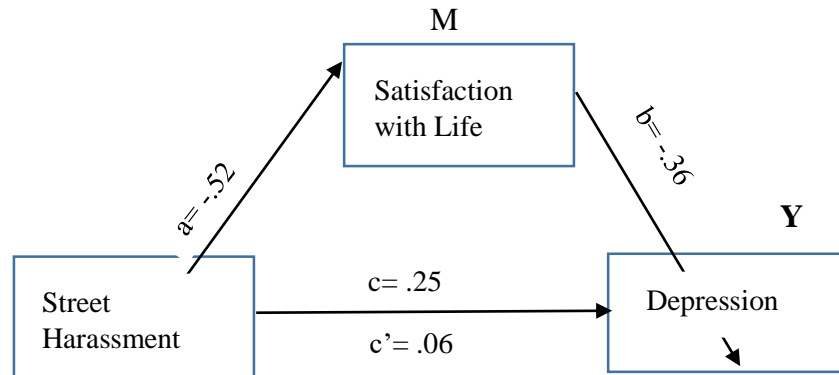
Indirect Path	Unstandardized Path	Standardized Estimate	Lower Level	Upper Level
SWL	.19	.06	.06	.32

Note. SWL= Satisfaction with Life

Indirect effects were investigated over 5000 bootstrap samples by taking estimates at a 95% confidence interval. Findings depict that the total indirect effect (the difference between the total and the direct effect/c-c') of street harassment via satisfaction with life is statistically significant.

Statistical Model

Figure 2



Discussion

Street Harassment is one of the major issues and women all over the world experience it in today's world. Street harassment is a very common form of harassment that women experience but this phenomenon is not extensively studied (Stop Street Harassment, 2014). This study was conducted to explore the mediating role of satisfaction with life in the association between street harassment and depression. The results of this study revealed that most university-going urban women experiencing street harassment. Moreover, it is revealed that it is not their dress that provokes men and made them vulnerable to street harassment because the majority wear the full gown and proper national dress when got harassed. The findings suggested that there is a significant positive relationship between street harassment and depression. The findings are consistent with previous literature which shows that street harassment had a significant positive relationship with mental health issues (Gyawali, 2020; DelGreco & Christensen, 2019; Gale, et al., 2019; Mushtaq, et al., 2015; Willness, et al., 2007)

The findings also indicated that there is a significant negative relationship between street harassment and satisfaction with life. The results are in line with previous studies which found that women who experienced harassment have lower satisfaction with life (Oriol, Miranda, & Amutio, 2019). In the light of the previous findings, it can be stated that street harassment is one of the major problems that young women face in their daily life, and it eventually affects their mental health resulting in depression and anxiety (DelGreco & Christensen, 2019; Mushtaq, et al., 2015).

The results of the present study also suggested that satisfaction with life fully mediates the relationship between street harassment and depression. Pakistan is a male dominating society and women are not given much importance in the family that's why they are not satisfied with their

life, if their satisfaction with life increases there will be a decrease in their mental health problems. In Pakistan, women are not treated equally, they don't even have access to basic human rights. In recent times, violence against women is increasing day by day and according to a survey conducted by Human Rights Watch, approximately 70 to 90% of women in Pakistan experiences domestic violence regularly (Bibi, et al., 2014). The cases of sexual harassment, rape, street harassment, and domestic violence are increasing in Pakistan that's why it is ranked as the sixth most dangerous country for women in the world (Khan, 2019). Most women in Pakistan are treated as objects and they experience different kinds of violence such as sexual harassment, rape, street harassment, honor killing, early marriages, marriage without consent, domestic abuse, and gender discrimination (UKEssays, 2018). All these issues result in dissatisfaction with life which usually affects the mental health of women.

Satisfaction with life is a significant mediator variable between stressful life events and behavioral problems in young adults (McKnight et al., 2002; Suldo & Huebner, 2004). McKnight et al. (2002) suggested that positive perception of young adults about their lives may work as a significant intervening variable that will help in understanding the relationship between environmental experiences and behavioral response of adolescents. Likewise, Proctor et al. (2009) indicated that satisfaction with life is greater than just a secondary phenomenon, and they also focused on the role of satisfaction with life as a mediator and moderator variable between the environmental factors like sexual harassment/ street harassment and behavioral problems in young adults.

Limitations and Future Recommendations

The main shortcoming of this study is that data was only collected from urban areas and not from rural areas although women from rural areas also experience different forms of street harassment. Another limitation of this study is that some of the participants were hesitant to fill the questionnaire as they feel that the questions were very intimidating. In the present study, the correlation research design was used and only the relationship between the variables was investigated, so this study didn't provide any evidence of the causal relationship of street harassment.

It is recommended to explore the phenomenon of street harassment through qualitative research to have an in-depth understanding of street harassment and its effects on mental health. The culturally sensitive indigenous scale should be developed for the assessment of street harassment because culturally insensitive measures may lead to erroneous findings. Government policies and legislation must be developed and implemented to control this specific issue.

Parents' counseling is very crucial in making them understand that how their positive attitude can build the self-confidence of their daughters. The parents must counsel that their daughters are as important and worthy as their sons, and they should be given their proper rights so that they feel happy and satisfied with their lives.

Conclusion

To sum up, satisfaction with life is crucial. Women must put substantial efforts to enhance their wellbeing and mental health. They must not only know their rights but learn to fight for their well-being. Parents encourage their daughters to be courageous, confident, and expressive to encounter any form of harassment so they may live their lives fully.

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