

# Prevalence and Demographic Differences in Harassment Tendency among University Students

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**Abstract:** The current research was conducted to measure the prevalence and demographic differences in harassment tendency among university students. A cross-sectional research design was used in this study to measure the prevalence. The non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample size. The age of the students ranges between 17 and 26 years. The 620 students (310 males & 310 females) were assessed on harassment tendency through the Harassment Tendency Scale (Mobeen & Bano, 2022). An equal number of male students (50%) and female students participated in the study (50%), and the majority (65.3%) reported moderate harassment tendency. Only a small percentage (9.7%) fell into the high tendency category, while a quarter of the students 25% had a low tendency. Independent t-test results show that female students reported significantly higher harassment tendency scores ( $M=59.95$ ) as compared to male students ( $M=42.65$ ). Rural students ( $M=53.58$ ) have a higher harassment tendency score as compared to urban students (39.21). Harassment-related experiences, particularly encounters tied to identity, have emotional, mental and physical health outcomes.

**Key Words:** Harassment, Prevalence, University of Gujrat, Non-Probability Sampling

## Introduction

Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is intended to damage, annoy, or offend. This definition is one of the most widely used and has been influential in shaping our understanding of harassment (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Harassment is a form of unwanted behaviour that can include verbal or physical abuse, intimidation, or stalking. It can be directed at anyone, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic. Harassment can have a serious negative impact on the victim's life, both physically and emotionally. Harassment can be a difficult problem to address, as it is often hidden and underreported. However, there are a number of things that can be done to prevent and address harassment (Okechukwu et al., 2014)

Victims of harassment should be encouraged to speak up and report the abuse. Employers should have clear policies against harassment and provide training on how to prevent and respond to it. Laws should be in place to protect victims of harassment and punish offenders. By working together, we can create a world where everyone is safe from harassment (Cedeno & Bohlen, 2024).

## Types of Harassment

Harassment in research is any behavior that undermines, belittles, or excludes a researcher based on their identity or characteristics. It can manifest in various forms, including:

- ▶ **Verbal Harassment:** This includes making offensive or discriminatory comments, yelling or screaming, and using derogatory language (Pilgaard et al., 2022).
- ▶ **Nonverbal Harassment:** This includes making hostile gestures, staring or glaring, and invading personal space.
- ▶ **Cyberbullying:** This includes sending harassing or threatening emails or messages, posting hurtful comments online, and spreading rumours (Etactics, 2025).

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- ▶ **Sexual Harassment:** It is a type of harassment which involves treating an individual in a certain way and making such comments, which can not only adversely affect the victim but his/her workplace environment as well. Sexual harassment refers to discrimination, and such behaviour may involve unwanted remarks, innuendos or sexual jokes, verbal abuse, terrorising or threats, crude pictures and abusive text messages and emails. These kinds of undesired actions make people feel uncomfortable, and they definitely need to be highly cautious in their attempts to distinguish between their work-related obligations and their safety (Matsayi et al., [2024](#)).

### **Risk Factors and Prevalence**

There are a number of risk factors of harassment, including individual characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, age and disability. Whereas at the workplace, the work environment, work culture, and power dynamics may also be factors. The Situational factors are Isolation and alcohol use. Harassment consists of many varieties of offensive behaviour. It is typically defined as actions that undermine, humiliate and threaten a person, and it is generally defined by unreasonability at social and moral levels. There are numerous social contexts where harassment may take place at the workplace, home, school, or even a religious institution (Liang, [2024](#)). Harassers or victims may be of the same sex. Examples of offensive conduct are not confined to and include, but are not limited to, offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name-calling, physical assault or threat, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults, or put-downs, offensive objects or pictures, and interference with work performance. 23% of workers worldwide have experienced any of three forms of violence and harassment (psychological, physical, and sexual), including 23% of women and 22% of men. 18% of workers globally have experienced psychological violence and harassment, while 9% have experienced physical and 6% sexual violence. Esteem, trust in other people and their confidence can also be affected. This can cause individuals to start retreating from their work (Gallup, [2023](#)).

One out of five women and seven out of ten men in the United States reported having been sexually harassed in the workplace. Sexual harassment has occurred in one-third of women and one-fourth of men. Even a person who has been stressed and humiliated due to sexual harassment may experience some of these psychological and health outcomes (Acquadro et al., [2022](#)). It has been said in many studies which show a higher incidence of sexual harassment in university and research administrations, which fall under hazardous working conditions, and categorical relations between employees and students, plus a culture level that places gender-based violence and the silence of the events on a normal footing (Bondestam & Lundqvist, [2020](#)).

### **Effects of Harassment**

Harassment in research can have a devastating impact on individuals, leading to decreased productivity, mental health problems, and even forced career changes. It can also create a hostile and unproductive work environment for everyone involved. There are a number of things that can be done to prevent and address harassment in research. Institutions should have clear policies against harassment, and they should provide training on how to prevent and respond to it. Individuals should also be aware of their rights and how to report harassment (NIOSH, [2015](#)).

### **Rationale**

There is a great need for harassment studies in Pakistan. Harassment is a pervasive problem in the country, affecting women and girls in all spheres of life. It is important to conduct research on harassment in order to understand the extent of the problem, its root causes, and its impact on victims. Harassment, particularly sexual harassment, is a widespread and persistent problem in Pakistan, impacting women in diverse settings, encompassing workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces. Conducting thorough research is indispensable for comprehending the scope and nature of harassment, pinpointing its underlying causes, and crafting effective prevention and response strategies. So, the current study was conducted to see the prevalence and demographic differences of harassment tendency.

### **Objectives**

- ▶ To investigate the prevalence of harassment tendency among university students.
- ▶ To study the demographic differences in harassment tendency among university students.



## Literature Review

There is various research conducted to explain the prevalence and nature of harassment tendency. A Cross-Sectional study was done to explore the gender disparity, incidence and consequences of sexual harassment across three estimation procedures. Of 2,349 Norwegian workers in a representative sample, 1.1% of participants described themselves as victims of sexual harassment, but 18.4% volunteered having been harmed by sexually harassing acts within the past 6 months. In using latent class cluster analysis as a prevalence estimating technique, 2.2 percent might be considered as targets of frequent sexual harassment and 19.1 percent might be considered as targets of unwanted sexual attention. Even though more women than men self-identified as victims of sexual harassment, men said they practised the same type of sexually harassing behaviours as frequently as women. It was found that sexual harassment was highly correlated with both mental health issues and low work satisfaction in men and women (Nielsen et al., [2010](#))

A survey on Sexual harassment (SH) among workers and a student body of a larger Swedish university: who are exposed, what, by whom and where: a cross-sectional prevalence study among women, 24.5% of employees and 26.8% of students reported being exposed to Sexual harassment. Those respectively were over 7.0 and 11.3 percent of the men among staff and students, and over 33.3 and 29.4 percent of staff and students who said they were not binary (Agardha et al., [2022](#))

Additionally, studies on the prevalence and factors correlated with harassment of US women reveal that 47.7% of women physicians indicated they had ever experienced gender-based harassment, and 36.9% experienced sexual harassment. The percentage of harasser occurred more frequently in medical school (31 percent of gender-based and 20 percent of sexual harassment) or during internship, residency, or fellowship (29 percent of gender-based and 19 percent of sexual harassment) compared to practice (25 percent gender-based and 11 percent sexual). Twenty-four-point five percent of female workers and 26.8% of female learners had previously been exposed to SH. This was compared to 7.0 and 11.3 percent of male staff and students and 33.3 and 29.4 percent of non-binary persons among staff and students (Frank et al., [1998](#)).

Another study, conducted by the Alliance against Sexual Harassment (AASHA) in Pakistan, surveyed 1,000 working women in both the formal and informal sectors. The study found that 79% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment at work. The harassment included verbal abuse, unwanted physical contact, and sexual advances. The study also found that the incidence of sexual harassment was higher in the formal sector, with 93% of respondents reporting having experienced it. This may be due to the fact that women in the formal sector are more likely to be in positions of power, which can make them more vulnerable to harassment. The study's findings are alarming and highlight the need for more action to be taken to address sexual harassment in the workplace in Pakistan (AASHA, [2010](#)).

## Methodology

Data in order to make inferences about the population of interest (university) at a point in time was collected (studied) on the basis of a cross-sectional research design (Hall, [2008](#)).

## Target Population

The sample was the University of Gujrat students. The respondents were available at the university. Respondents who fulfilled the criteria of inclusion were taken.

## Sampling Technique

Data were collected by a convenience sampling technique. The kind of non-probability sampling method is convenience sampling. In this form of sampling, the researchers have been targeted as part of the sample simply because they are the most readily available to the researcher (Andrade, [2021](#)).

## Sample Size

The sample size of the current study was N=620 (310 males and 310 females) students.



### **Inclusion Criteria**

- ▶ Only undergraduate students, male and female, were taken as a sample.
- ▶ Students with an age range of 17- 26 were included in the study.

### **Exclusion Criteria**

- ▶ Undergraduate students who are unwilling to provide their consent for study or who are unavailable when data collection is taking place.
- ▶ Students who have any physical or psychological disabilities were excluded from the study.

### **Measurements**

#### **a. Consent Form**

An informed consent form was given to the students who participated in the study. Students were informed about the objectives of the study, and it was ensured that their data would not be shared with any other person.

#### **b. Demographic Information Form**

The demographic information consists of basic demographic information like age, education, gender, department, semester and residential area.

#### **c. Harassment Tendency Scale** (Mobeen & Bano, [2022](#))

The Harassment Tendency Scale (HTS) is an index of the Harassment tendency. The scale has been created by Mobeen & Bano ([2022](#)). The HTS scale contains 27 questions regarding harassment and a five-point scale of responses. The indicator can serve as a quick password to determine the degree of harassment. Harassment tendency on the basis of 8 harassment dimensions or factors. There is cyber harassment, sexual harassment, psychological harassment, street harassment, hostile environment, workplace harassment, power harassment and gender discrimination. Good test-retest reliability ( $r=0.954$ ,  $p=.000$ ) reflects that the scale is a good measure of harassment tendency.

### **Procedure**

In the present study, out of a total population of 620, a cross-sectional research design was used, and by using a convenience sampling technique, a sample size of the University of Gujrat was selected. Data was obtained by completing a questionnaire after taking the full written informed consent of the students. The purpose of the research, the material and procedure were examined and accepted by the Departmental Research Review Committee. The study was conducted in accordance with the four ethical considerations that are of crucial necessity: respect for the rights and dignity of the individual, his competence, responsibility, and integrity (Hemberg & Hemberg, [2020](#)).

Take the consent of the respondent before the respondent first takes the permission: To consent to the collection of data. They were introduced to the benefits of the research and given more instructions. In addition, the respondents were assured of confidentiality that would preserve their anonymity, and no one would learn of their identity. Only the willing respondents have been used in this study. Following the demographic data, the Harassment Tendency Scale (HTS). The participants were also enticed to read the items very carefully and select the proper answers that fit their mental stature and responses. Permission to use the scale in the current study was received via mail through the author. The researcher expresses appreciation to respondents who complete the data collection effort at the end of it. The researcher also gave the email and contact number in case someone is interested in the discovery of the research.

### **Analysis of Data**

Data analysis was done by manual use of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) version 25. Descriptive and t-test were used for analysis.

### **Results**

The results demonstrated the prevalence and demographic differences in harassment tendency among university students.



**Table 1***Socio-demographic Characteristics of Students (N=620)*

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
17-21	493	79%
22-26	127	20%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	310	50%
Female	310	50%
<b>Department</b>		
Sciences	405	65%
Social Sciences	215	34%
<b>Semester</b>		
1 & 3	333	53%
5 & 7	287	48%
<b>Residential area</b>		
Rural	299	48.2%
Urban	321	51.8%

Table 1 shows that an equal number of male (n=310, 50%) and female students participated in the study (n=310, 50%). The results show that the majority of the students are in the age range of 17-21 years. Most of the students belong to the science departments. Results show that almost an equal number of students were in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> semesters and 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> semesters. 51% of students belong to urban areas, whereas 48% students reside in rural areas.

## Results

**Table 2***Prevalence of Harassment among University Students According to a Rated Scale(N=620)*

Percentile	Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Below 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Low	155	25%
25 <sup>th</sup> to 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Moderate	405	65.3%
Above 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	Severe	110	9.7%

Table 2 indicates that out of 620 students, the majority reported a moderate harassment tendency. Only a small percentage fell into the high tendency category, while a quarter of the students had a low tendency.

**Table 3***Mean Comparison of Gender of Students (N=620)*

Variables	Male (N=310)		Female (N=310)		t (618)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Harassment Tendency Scale	42.65	9.45	59.95	13.54	23.45	.000	2.10

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,  $p$ = Significance

Table 3 shows that females reported significantly higher harassment tendency scores (M=59.95) as compared to male students (M=42.65). The difference was highly significant ( $p < .001$ ) with a large effect size.

**Table 4***Mean Comparison of Residential Area of Students (N=620)*

Variables	Rural (N=321)		Urban (N=299)		t (618)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Harassment Tendency Scale	53.58	15.67	39.21	7.88	14.37	.000	1.14

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,  $p$ = Significance

Table 4 shows ample and statistically significant differences in harassment tendency scores between the two groups. Rural students, on average, have a higher harassment tendency score compared to urban students, and the effect size was also large.

**Table 5***Mean Comparison of Department of Students (N=620)*

Variables	Science(N=405)		Social Science(N=215)		t (618)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Harassment Tendency Scale	60.05	10.72	62.06	11.66	-1.02	.771	-0.18

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,  $p$ = Significance

Table 5 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups of subjects. Social sciences students had slightly higher scores on harassment tendency (M=62.06) as compared to the science group (M=60.05). The value of Cohen's d shows a very small effect size.

**Table 6***Mean Comparison on the Basis of Semester of Students (N=620)*

Variables	Semester 1 & 3 (N=333)		Semester 5 & 7 (N=287)		t (618)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Harassment Tendency Scale	60.56	12.29	61.57	10.88	-.79	.509	-.09

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,  $p$ = Significance

Table 6 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in harassment tendency between the two groups. Cohen's d value is also very small, which shows that the effect size is very low.

**Table 7***Mean Comparison on the Basis of Semester of Students (N=620)*

Variables	17-21(N=493)		22-26(N=127)		t (618)	P	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Harassment Tendency Scale	60.60	11.39	61.81	11.50	-1.06	.772	-.07

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation,  $p$ = Significance

Table 7 shows that there is no statistically significant difference in harassment tendency between the 17-21 and 22-26 age groups ( $p$ =.772). The value of Cohen's d also shows that the effect size was very small and had a negligible effect.

## Discussion

The results of the current research provide very important information about the prevalence and demographic variation of harassment among the student population. The purpose of the first part of the study was to quantify the prevalence of harassment among university students. The majority reported a moderate level of harassment tendency compared

to a small percentage that fell into the high tendency category. At the same time, ¼ of the students had a low tendency. The breakdown of these reports is particularly revealing, as it indicates that while low-level harassment is present, a larger proportion of students experience moderate levels of harassment. This finding is aligned with the study (Babar & Saleem, [2021](#); Athanasiades et al., [2023](#)), which suggests that the problem is not merely one of isolated minor incidents but a more deeply embedded issue requiring serious attention.

The second objective of the study was to measure the demographic differences. Female students reported a significantly higher harassment score compared to male students, with a large effect size. This result is consistent with a vast body of literature on gender-based violence and harassment in educational and social contexts. The data reinforce the need for institutions to implement gender-specific support systems and preventative measures (Agardh et al., [2022](#); Athanasiades et al., [2023](#)). Rural students exhibited a higher mean score than urban students, a difference that is both statistically significant and has a large effect size. This suggests that students from rural backgrounds may face unique challenges or lack the necessary support systems when transitioning to a university setting. It could also point to different cultural norms or reporting behaviours (Pilgaard et al., [2022](#); Crouch et al., [2025](#)). The comparison of sciences and social sciences departments and semesters was non-significant, whereas the mean difference indicated that a slightly greater difference in harassment tendency in social science and in semesters 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of the undergraduate program. The difference in age group results was non-significant, while the 22-26 age group had a slightly higher mean score on harassment tendency of the university students.

The results of this study have several important implications. First, they provide clear evidence that harassment is a pervasive issue that disproportionately affects certain student populations. Second, the findings suggest that interventions should be tailored to specific groups, such as programs designed to support female students and those from rural backgrounds. Future research should explore the specific reasons for the higher harassment scores among rural students. It would also be beneficial to conduct qualitative studies to understand the lived experiences of students and the types of harassment they face, as this could inform more effective intervention strategies. The study's limitations include a sample size from a single institution, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other university populations. Nevertheless, these results provide a strong foundation for developing targeted policies and support services to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all students.

## **Conclusion**

The objective of the present study was to provide an estimation of the prevalence of harassment tendency among students in the university. Hence, it was established that there was a moderate level of harassment tendency experienced by students, and females and rural areas encountered a higher level of harassment tendency.

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