

Harassment in Sports, its Causes, Consequences and Prevention (A Review Qualitative literature)

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Abstract

The prevalence of sexual harassment has been a common experience of everyday life that happens in different forms and manifestations. All professions, areas of co-interaction, departments and various workplaces have equally been prone to it. A number of efforts have been initiated to curb this social menace but on the contrary, it has been increasing day by day. Presently, it has been one of the main social health issues mostly targeting female in majority of cases. The pace of occurrence of cases of sexual harassment in the field of sports has also been on rise despite introduction of different preventive policies and administrative measures have been in place for its prevention and control. Literature suggests that in most of the sexual harassment cases in sports arena, two-way factors remain involved in the incidents. Desire of high performance, to be on team, to seek shortcut to elite status etc. remain the common objectives of the victim side while the other side put the condition of the fulfillment of their sexual lust before the victim. Misuse of the power between the supporting-staff including coach, trainer, administrators, physio and other medical staff and the player mostly ends at sexual harassment. In

majority of the cases of sexual harassment, presence of both genders has widely been documented. Co-working environment in sports, workplace or any other settings of constant interaction between male and female make the situation ideal for the incidents of sexual harassment. To curb this menace consolidated efforts are required to bring positive change in the situation. Empowering female particularly in co-working environment, restriction on the players for sleeping in the dormitory, restriction on the separate sleeping arrangement of the officials and players, transparent and strict supervision and selection policy, close monitoring process right from the selection, training, coaching, induction in the playing side need to be enforced for the improvement of situation.

Keywords: Sports, Player, Coach, Sexual Harassment, Female, Workplace

Introduction

During the processes of everyday life, sometimes man happens to abrogate or violate the rights and privileges of the other person simply to serve personal desire and stakes. In general sense, this type of hostile behavior is termed as harassment. Any action, gesture, words or even looking pattern that causes the other person feel upset, uncomfortable, intimidated or humiliated falls in the umbrella term of harassment. The word “*harass*” came from the French referring to trouble, problem or difficulty or the state of being exhausted. In other words, harassment encompasses threatening, humiliating, exhausting and disturbing behavior imposed upon the other person. Harassment refers to the self-initiated interest served through the hostile behavior, action or gesture interfering with the self, interest or working environment of the other person of the same or opposite gender (Sølvberg et al., 2022). The meaning spectrum of the term harassment is very vast; it also encompasses behaviors of a person associated with the physical, emotional, psychological, verbal and sexual dealing with the other person without their consent and agreement. Worry, distress, anxiety, irritation, anger, hostile behavior and displeasure, all are the associated symptoms of the conduct and intended behavior of harassment (Hartill et al., 2021). In most cases of harassment, two parties remain involved in the act of harassment, and normally one party has edge over the other in terms of power, social position, job status, age, financial position etc. This edge instigates the one to fulfill their unjust and burdensome vested personal demand by the other one compelling them to comply and, in reward, giving some sort of unjust favor.

The pivot of thinking of human revolves around earning livelihood, eating & drinking, moving & walking, having rest and sleep, seeking pleasure & happiness, extension of self

and stability in life; acquiring desirable social statuses, having good relations and so on. These are a few basic aspects of one's life and either of the above factors, anyone may motivate the individual to use the shortcut for serving the personal desire. Fair and unfair; legal and illegal are the two different approaches for the attainment of the predetermined objectives and satisfaction of one's desires. Harassment is the foul way and it is mostly used for the fulfillment of the personal interest. Psychologically speaking, it has always been the status superiority that dominates one person over the other and in most cases, this factor plays the basic role for the act of harassment.

Sports provide an attractive platform to both male and female to excel and get recognition in terms of performance. Like other established fields of everyday life, sport too has firm roots in the society and perhaps sport is the sole activity which has largest volume of followers and viewers globally. Let us have a look at the figures reflecting popularity of sport, World Cup Football 2022 tournament became the most watched sport event having 5 billion spectators through different mediums (Mountjoy et al., 2021a). Similarly, the most-watched female sport event, 2020 T20 Women's Cricket World Cup was watched by 1.1 billion viewers through different digital media channels.

Nature of Harassment

The act of harassment is manifested in a number of ways and instances including power abuses, verbal attack, physical action, psychological pressure, workplace abuses and sexual activities. Consensus doesn't exist regarding the clear concept of harassment as it greatly relies upon the perception and intention of the involved parties. Irrespective of its nature and intensity, one thing is confirmed that harassment has always been an unwanted act for one side causing the side feel humiliated, uncomfortable and distressed. In addition to that, harassment has always been a source of psychological frustration, emotional stress, social depression, problems in social adjustment, physical strain, and even in extreme cases, leads the person for suicidal attempt (Powell, 2020).

As the name itself indicates, physical harassment refers to the visible act of intimidation forcing the victim feel distressed and humiliated. Physical and sexual harassment fall within the same ambit in terms of rape, assault and sexual abuse including touching or trying to touch private part of one's body. The act or intention of defacement of the feature of the other person also falls within the scope of harassment (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2019).

Psychological harassment is somewhat non-physical and is mostly associated with verbal, gestural and sexual remarks, humiliating comments, threatening and posing fear of denial consequences etc. Since it is behavioural type of harassment, so it is always

difficult to establish and confirm as it has no physical or circumstantial evidence (Annette & Roter, 2017).

As the name itself indicates, sexual harassment refers to any sexual act of the offender without the consent and will of the victim. It has emerged as one of the worst societal problem which is globally prevalent and all ages, both genders and all sections of the community have equally been affected by it, however, adolescents are more vulnerable for experiencing different forms of sexual harassment (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Sexual harassment is associated with sexual affairs between the two parties of either open or secret nature (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Sexual harassment is a type of physical harassment in most cases and it generally includes intention, gesture, assault, facial expressions, passing sexual remarks about the structure, features, clothes, action etc. and physical act leading to humiliate and make the target feel distressed and uncomfortable (Kahsay et al., 2020).

Workplace harassment or Power harassment is the type of harassment which revolves round the vested interest of party superior in status, position or power. This type of harassment often happens in the workplace environment like factory, organization, school, college, university etc. where a number of people work together. It involves hostile behaviour of exploitations forcing the victim to obey the unjust and unfair direction of the offender and do the activity beyond the established detail of job description. Workplace harassment is the illegal victimization of the one by their superior for serving their personal interest. It may be of either type including psychological, physical, verbal, sexual or oppressive (Harthi et al. 2020).

Brief historical overview of harassment

Research based literary story academic writing focusing upon the cases of sexual harassment and abuse within sports settings started around the last quarter of the twentieth century (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). Literature has confirmed that the act of sexual harassment has been most prevalent against female and it has been the principal reason behind the likeliness of girls for quitting sports with the passage of maturity (CanadianWomen & Sport. The Rally Report 2022). It is also pertinent to state that indigenous and racialized female are the most frequent victim of this type of misconduct in sports (Eime & Harvey, 2018). The most alarming situation in perspectives of the prevalence, prevention and control of sexual harassment is that majority of the cases have not been revealed by the victims and very meager number is disclosed and reported.

Endorsing the same sort of situation, Sølvsberg et al., (2022) have reported that around 45-81% of the working female are confronted to workplace harassment whereas only 5-22% cases are disclosed. In the same context, Fasting et al. (2004) have documented that, during the academic journey and professional life, around half of the US female face different forms of harassment. Kirsty Forsdike & Grant O'Sullivan (2022) have concluded that literature discussing sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse has a brief history. Catherine Mac Kinnon, a Law Professor was the pioneer to highlight the topic of sexual harassment in her book entitled "Sexual Harassment of Working Women" (Mimaroglu & Özgen, 2008).

Socio-economic cost of harassment

Gender discrimination, poor policy, ineffective process of accountability, illegal use of authority and position are a few causative factors instigating harassment against female. Close interaction of male and female at any stage during sports or at workplace favours the chances of occurrence of harassment. Sexual orientation and gender identity put the female prone for the incidents of harassment. Harassment against female has been a universal and inescapable issue confronted to the female folk. According to the report of the World Health Organization (2021), the situation in this regard is frustrating and it is estimated that one out of each three female faces either type of harassment at any stage of her life. In most cases, the victim female of harassment passes through trauma of longer duration which has a number of ill consequences in shape of anger, frustration, social-maladjustment, stress, emotional agony, social-isolation and depression. Research has confirmed that female who have experienced harassment are likely to face stress and depression 4-9 times more than those ones who did not experience this type of curse (Gale et al., 2019). Sexual harassment against women and girls may have lethal consequences in terms of psychological, emotional, mental as well as physical health (McDonald, 2012) and these issues may continue to report around a decade after the incident (Houle and colleagues (2011). Immediate consequences of sexual harassment may include reduced ability to concentrate, disturbed mentality, scattered attention, increased work-withdrawal, irritation (Chan et al. 2008). In addition to that, sexual harassment may lead to stress, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, deficient trust on fellows and colleagues, quitting sports and reduced social interaction.

Harassment in Sports

Literature has severally confirmed that female is more vulnerable than male for sexual harassment as confirmed by Fasting and Sand (2015) that out of 29 victims of sexual

harassment cases reported in Norwegian court; only 02 were male while the remaining 27 were female. In another study Vertommen et al. (2017) have documented that, in comparison to male respondents, vast majority of the female respondents reported to have experienced sexual violence in sport and training during their adolescence.

As a matter of fact, on account of non-availability of the factual data, it is difficult to draw a clear picture based on facts and figures regarding the existing situation of the nature, volume and intensity of occurrence of the sexual harassment cases against female in sports. Non-reporting of the cases on part of the affected female is the main reason for this type of scenario. According to the report of the World Players Association (2021) in global perspectives, around 21% of the total female respondents, who were active sports participants, have been victim of either type of sexual harassment at least once in their sports life. Similarly, about 29.7% of the respondents complained about the ill behavior of the male associated with during their activity and 31.8% told that they were given punishment by their male coaches/trainers in terms of extreme and unnecessary doses of exercises. Findings of another online study of similar nature have revealed that during Tokyo Olympic Games 2020, almost 87% of the sexual harassment cases of different nature occurred with female athletes (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).

Irrespective of the area, ethnicity, culture and social class, female athletes have been the most frequent target of sexual harassment in sports. In India, every third female athlete out of all the participants has been victim of either type of sexual harassment by her male coach (Powell, 2020). Similarly, in another study conducted in Kenya, 64% of the university female athletes reported that they have been victim of the sexual harassment (Kirsty Forsdike & Grant O'Sullivan, 2022). Consequent upon the growing pressure of complaints against Keramuudin Kareem, President Afghanistan, Football Federation who was reported to have harassed a number of female players was banned by the Federation of International de Football Association (FIFA).

Concealing the facts and non-reporting the cases has been the main obstacle in the way of prevention and control of the gender based sexual harassment in sports (World Health Organization; 2021) Digging the issue further reveals that, predominantly it is the fear of hostile repercussion and possible retaliation from the offender party that compel the victim to remain silent and don't report the case (Inter-Agency Standing Committee. IASC. (2019). In most cases, as confirmed by (Council of Europe, 2016). future stakes of the victim prevent them to disclose or report the case.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Sports

Effective prevention and control of the sexual harassment, specifically in the field of sports, requires immediate, mid-term and long-term strategies. Involvement of the players, support network, administrator, organizers and authorities is the primary requirement of the different strategies devised in this regard (Hartill et al., 2021). The following measures are suggested for the prompt and timely prevention of the sexual harassment:

- a. Clear definition of the sexual harassment
- b. Introduction of the zero-tolerance policy for all the stakeholders
- c. Gender-equality in all administrative, financial and organizational matters
- d. Even policy of accountability from top to bottom
- e. Transparency in all matters of dealing and interaction
- f. Safe and viable working environment
- g. Effective, trusted and productive reporting mechanism
- h. Credible, victim-centered and prompt process of investigation, prosecution and conviction
- i. There should always be representatives of both genders in the support-network
- j. During training and competition, all the players should sleep together in a dormitory
- k. One-to-one training session between the coach/trainer and player be avoided and there should always be a minimum of two players during the training session
- l. No single player may be allowed to visit the residence of the coach/trainer or any member of the support-network

Discussion and Conclusion

Literature has documented that Co-working environment in sports, workplace or any other settings of constant interaction between male and female make the situation ideal for the incidents of sexual harassment (Adhia et al., 2023). The meaning spectrum of the term harassment is very vast; it also encompasses behaviors of a person associated with the physical, emotional, psychological, verbal and sexual dealing with the other person without their consent and agreement. Worry, distress, anxiety, irritation, anger, hostile behavior and displeasure, all are the associated symptoms of the conduct and intended behavior of harassment (Granrud & Leonhardt, 2021). Different types of harassment occur in everyday life. The most common types include Psychological, emotional, power, personal, physical, third party, verbal, online and sexual harassment (Russo, 2019). For

the prevention and control of harassment, empowering the female particularly in co-working environment, restriction on the players for sleeping in the dormitory, restriction on the separate sleeping arrangement of the officials and players, transparent and strict supervision and selection policy, effective reporting, pursuing and punishment mechanism, close monitoring process right from the selection, training, coaching, induction in the playing side need to be enforced for the improvement of situation (Sølvberg et al., 2022). To curb this menace consolidated efforts of all the stakeholders are required to bring positive change in the situation.

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