

Perception of Sexual Harassment Amongst Youth of Srinagar, Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Sexual harassment remains a significant and pervasive issue, especially among youth, who often lack adequate awareness, support systems, and legal literacy to respond effectively. In India, despite legal measures such as the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, the problem continues to persist across various social and geographical contexts. This study investigates the perception of sexual harassment among the youth of Srinagar, a growing educational town in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. The research focuses on three primary objectives: understanding youth familiarity with sexual harassment and legal protections, assessing the role of parents and families in education, and identifying common settings for harassment, youth responses, and its emotional impact. A structured questionnaire was administered to a diverse sample of college-going youth. The findings indicate that while general awareness about sexual harassment is widespread, only a minority had received formal education on the topic. Most participants demonstrated average knowledge of legal provisions and expressed limited trust in law enforcement. Public transport, social media, and public spaces were the most reported sites of harassment. Emotional effects such as fear, anxiety, and depression were frequently cited. Furthermore, family dialogue on the issue was reported to be limited, despite being recognized as important.

The study highlights the urgent need for targeted awareness programs, youth empowerment strategies, and culturally sensitive interventions to address sexual harassment effectively. Institutional and familial support systems must be strengthened to foster safer environments for youth in semi-urban settings.

Keywords: Sexual Harassment, Youth, Legal Awareness, Emotional Impact, Gender-Based Violence

1. Introduction:

Sexual harassment remains one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based violence globally, affecting individuals across age, class, and geographical boundaries (UN Women, 2020). In India, despite the establishment of legal frameworks such as the *Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013*, the issue remains deeply entrenched and often normalized, particularly among youth (Dubey et al., 2018). Adolescents and young adults, due to their evolving understanding of social boundaries and limited access to reliable information, are especially vulnerable. Social stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of institutional support further contribute to the widespread underreporting of sexual harassment (Dani, 2022).

The youth demographic is critical in both experiencing and shaping future societal attitudes toward gender-based misconduct. Their perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment are influenced by familial upbringing, peer interactions, educational exposure, and media consumption (Shrestha & Bajracharya, 2023). Young people in India report encountering various forms of harassment—verbal, non-verbal, physical, and increasingly, digital—across everyday spaces such as schools, public transport, marketplaces, and even within friendships and romantic relationships (Pokharel, 2023).

Srinagar is a growing town located in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. It is progressively emerging educational hub for students. While it opened the window for various opportunities, it also introduced new vulnerabilities especially for youth. Cultural conservatism, hierarchical family structures, and the general discomfort around open discussions of sexual misconduct may shape how harassment is perceived and responded to by young individuals in this region (Bhattacharyya, Lev-Wiesel, & Banerjee, 2020).

Several studies have been conducted on sexual harassment nationally and globally. Despite increasing national discourse on sexual harassment, there is noticeable dearth of regional data from hilly region of Srinagar. This, study aims to explore the perceptions of sexual harassment among youth in Srinagar, Uttarakhand, with a focus on awareness of harassment and legal protections, the role of family in shaping understanding, and the emotional and behavioural impacts of such experiences. By foregrounding the voices of local youth, this research intends to contribute to a nuanced and contextually grounded understanding of the issue, ultimately supporting more effective interventions in similar socio-cultural settings.

2. Literature Review:

A) Awareness and Familiarity Among Youth Regarding Sexual Harassment and Legal Protections:

Research in India shows that awareness among children, parents, and professionals regarding child sexual abuse (CSA) and legal protections such as the POCSO Act, 2012, is uneven and often incomplete.

1. A cross-sectional study among middle school children (ages 10-16) in Eastern India found that only about 43.2% of respondents had what the authors termed “adequate awareness” of child sexual abuse and the POCSO Act; the remaining ~57% had inadequate awareness. The study also reported that older children and girls were more likely to have better awareness.
2. “Study on Awareness of the POCSO Act, 2012 Amongst the Parents of Teenage Children in South Bengaluru” (Kiran et al., 2022). 95.3% parents knew about child sexual abuse in general but only 68% knew about POCSO Act (its existence, punishments, etc). Even among parents in major city, awareness of law is less than universal. For Youth, the law’s existence might be known, but full understanding is likely less.

B) Role of Parents and Families in Educating Children About Sexual Harassment:

Studies in India have identified common settings where adolescents experience sexual harassment, and the emotional and behavioural reactions following such incidents.

1. Mathew, Subrahmanyam & Shenai (2025) conducted a study on adolescents of Kerala about their parental communication on issues related to sexual harassment and reproductive health. Research revealed that most of the discussions were on the puberty related changes and menstruation and limited discussions on harassment or sexual assault due to shame as the most cited reason.
2. A study in Punjab by Sharma (2020) was conducted on school going students revealed that media has not proven successful in building awareness as 90% of students surveyed did **not** know relevant helpline numbers, and many were unaware of legal rights. These studies suggest that several factors

such as parental involvement, home environment, cultural norms, and media all together play interconnected roles in providing awareness amongst youth about sexual harassment related rights and procedure to seek help.

C) Places of Occurrence, Young People's Responses, and Emotional Impact:

A study was conducted by Asgola and Kaur (2017) with 200 rural adolescent girls in Ludhiana, Punjab, provided critical insight into the most frequent **locations** where harassment occurs. The results showed that village fairs (80.22%), markets (79.66%), and public transportation systems (74.01%) were the most common sites, followed by routes to school (70.05%) and roadside areas (69.49%). Even within school premises, 55.93% of participants reported facing harassment during recess. These findings indicate that harassment is not confined to isolated or unusual spaces but occurs regularly during routine activities like travelling or socializing in public areas.

This study also provided data on **emotional and behavioral responses to sexual harassment**. Where majority of respondents (81.35%) reported reacting aggressively, indicating a direct and defensive posture. However, emotional distress was also prevalent. 72.31% felt uncomfortable, 53.10% felt traumatized, and 25.98% reported feelings of humiliation. Outcomes of the study highlighted the psychological impact of these experiences on adolescents.

2. A different study conducted by Bhattacharyya, Lev-Wiesel, and Banerjee (2020) in Kolkata studied the response of adolescents on abusive experiences. This research revealed that victims of harassment were more likely to experience fear, shame and distress which traumatized them and made it difficult for them to disclose the incident. However, the adolescents with higher sense of potency were less likely to exhibit traumatic impacts. Which highlights the significance of empowerment interventions aimed to develop the coping skills amongst youth.

3. Objectives:

- a) To study familiarity and awareness of the youth of Srinagar Garhwal are about sexual harassment and related legal protections.
- b) To understand the role of parents and families in discussing and educating children about sexual harassment.
- c) To identify common places where sexual harassment occurs, how young people respond to it, and its emotional impact on them.

4. Research Area and Methodology: The present research is situated in **Srinagar**, a town in the **Pauri Garhwal district** of **Uttarakhand**. Recognized as an emerging educational centre in the Garhwal region, Srinagar is home to various government and private colleges, including departments affiliated with **Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna Garhwal University (HNBGU)**. The town attracts a significant number of students from both rural and urban backgrounds, making it an ideal location for studying youth-related social issues.

Given the high concentration of students pursuing higher education, Srinagar offers a relevant setting to explore youth perceptions regarding **sexual harassment**. The presence of diverse student populations varying in gender, socio-economic status, and academic disciplines—makes it a conducive environment for conducting a **questionnaire-based sociological inquiry**. This diversity allows for a comprehensive examination of the variations in awareness, beliefs, and personal experiences associated with sexual harassment among college-going youth.

5. Results and Discussion:

5.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This study was conducted on the youth of Srinagar Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

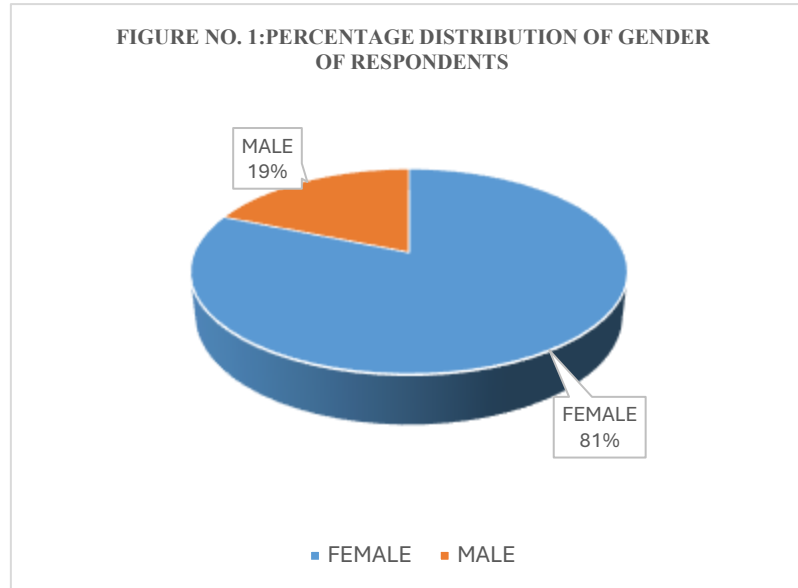


Figure No. 1 shows the gender representation of the respondents in the study. Data was collected from female (81%) and male (19%). This predominance of female respondents suggests that the study largely reflects the perspectives and experiences of females.

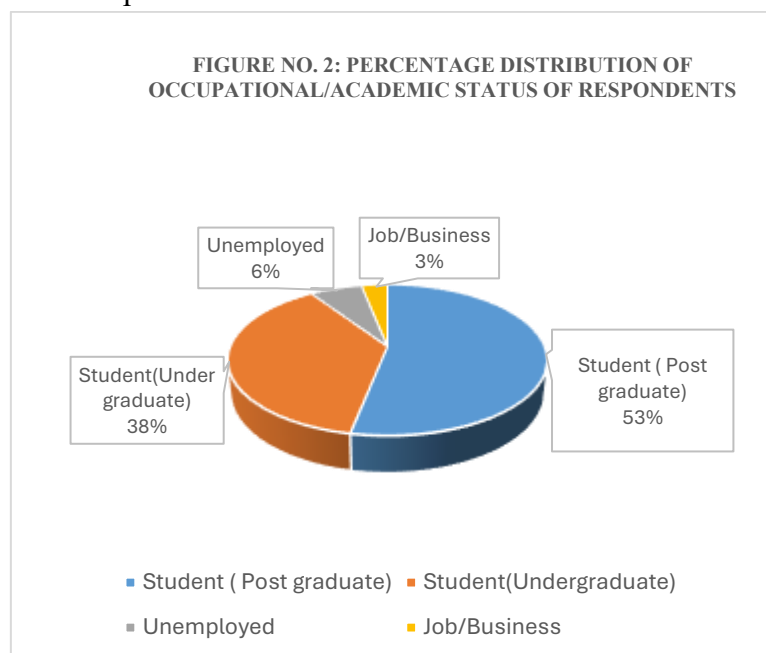


Figure No. 2 reveals the percentage distribution of occupational and academic status of respondents. It shows 53% of responses belongs to Post Graduate students followed up by 38% from Undergraduate students and 6% and 3% from Unemployed and Job /Businesspeople respectively.

5.2 Familiarity and awareness related to Sexual Harassment and related legal Provisions

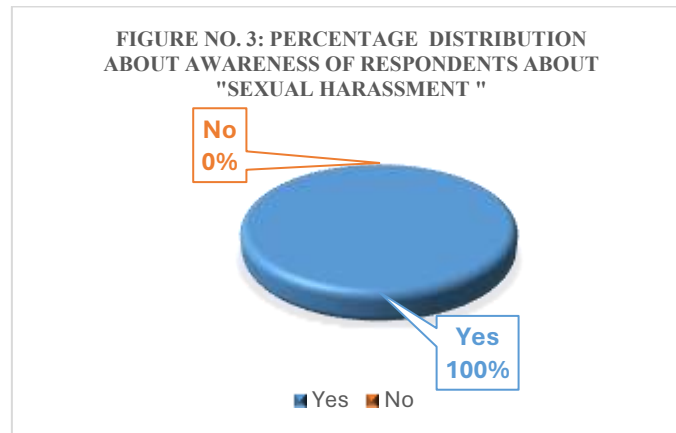


Figure No. 3 shows the percentage distribution of respondents' awareness about Sexual Harassment. All of them are found to be aware about it.

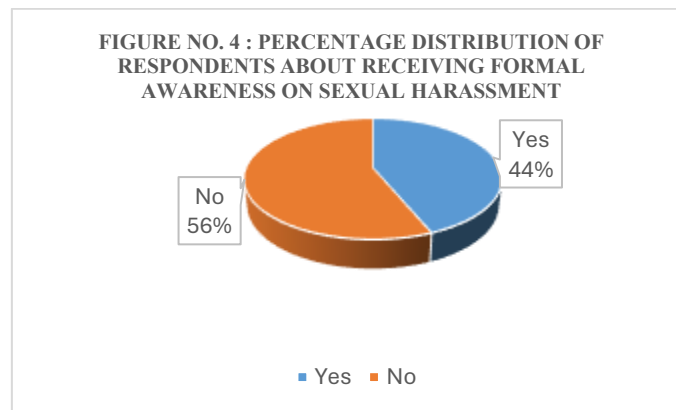


Figure No. 4 reveals the percentage of respondents receiving formal awareness about Sexual Harassment. The data collected reveals that only 44% have received any formal awareness about it. While 56% received awareness about it from informal sources.

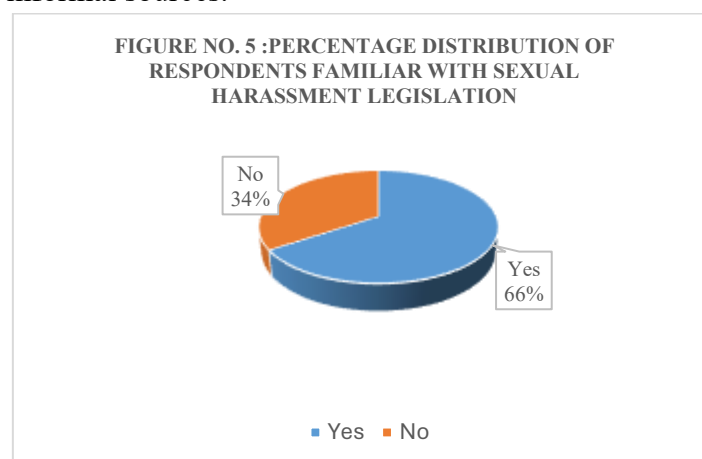


Figure No. 5 depicts the percentage of respondents familiar with legislations related to sexual harassment. The data collected reveals that majority of them have agreed to be familiar about the legislations related to sexual harassment.

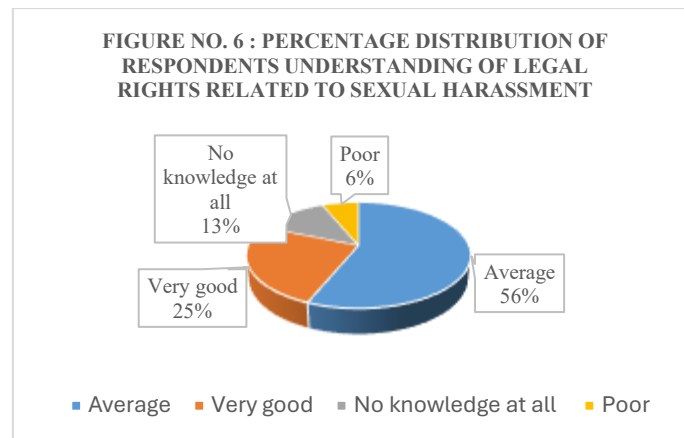


Figure No. 6 shows the understanding of the respondents about legal rights related to sexual harassment. Majority of them (56%) are found to be with average understanding about it. While 25% with very good, 6% with poor and 13% with no knowledge at all.

When the youth were asked about their faith in law enforcement against sexual harassment cases, most of them were found with no faith in the proper law enforcement.

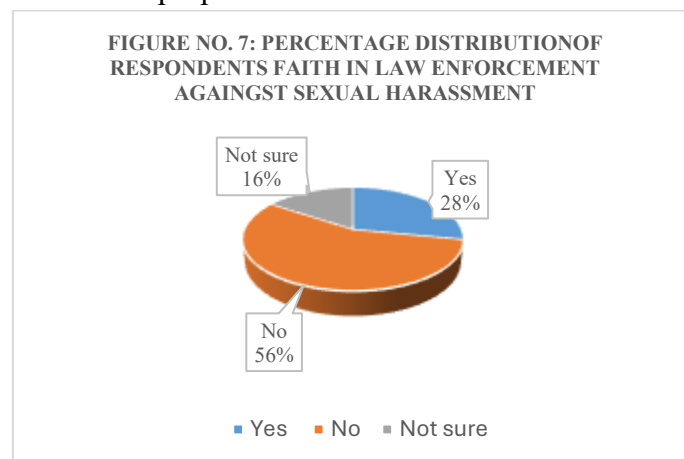


Figure No. 7 have shown the youth's faith in law and order in the society. 56% of them have no faith while 28% and 16% came up with faith and not sure about it respectively.

5.3 Role of Family in Education against Sexual Harassment

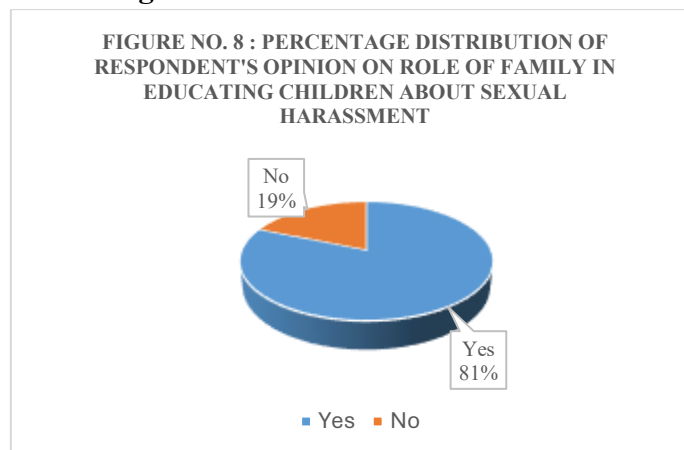


Figure No. 8 reveals that 81% of the respondents accept that family plays a significant role in educating children about sexual harassment. While 19% stood up for an insignificant role of family in educating against

sexual harassment. Hence, it can be easily concluded that majority of the youth in Srinagar believes that family plays an important role in educating children about sexual harassment.

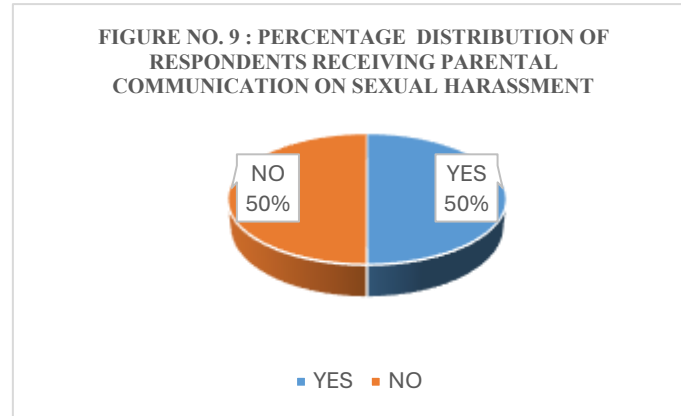


Figure No. 9, reveals the responses of youth in Srinagar about communication with their parents regarding sexual harassment.

When the data was collected, it was found that 50% of them haven't received any parental communication regarding sexual harassment. While another 50% have agreed to have received the education about it from their parents.

5.4 Common Places of Sexual Harassment, Responses & Emotional Impact on the Youth

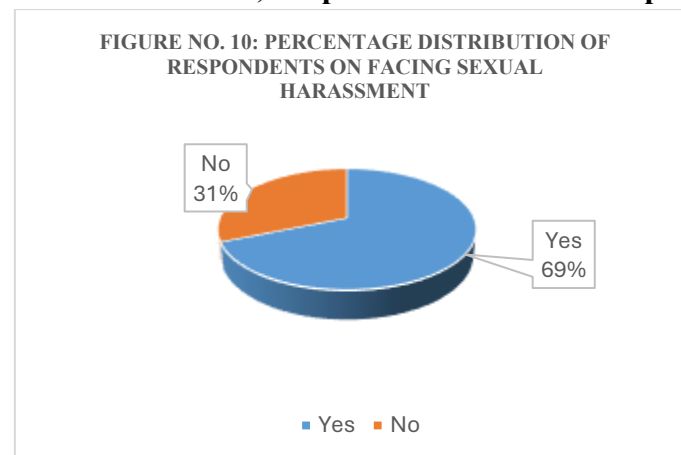


Figure No. 10 reveals that 69% of the respondents have faced the act of sexual harassment in their life. While 31% denied facing any such circumstances in their lives. From this data it may be concluded that majority of the youth have been the victim of sexual harassment.

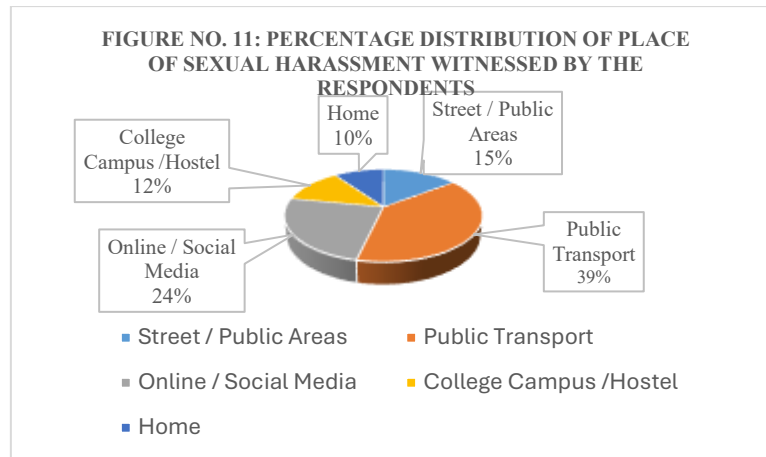


Figure No. 11 highlights the common places where the respondents have faced the incidents of sexual harassment. From the collected data it is revealed that majority of them have faced it in Public Transport followed up by social media platforms, streets/ public areas, College campus/ hostel and at home. Public transport has come up to be the highly unsafe area allowing the cases of sexual harassment.

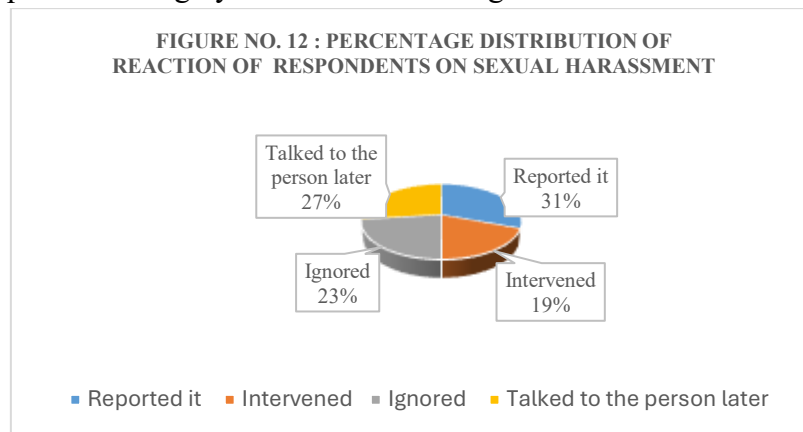


Figure No. 12 shows the respondent's reaction to the sexual harassment incidents they face or witness. Most of them (31%) accepted reporting of such incidents to the authority. While 27% revealed that they talked to the person later followed up by 23% of respondents ignoring it and 19% intervening it. When the youth of Srinagar Garhwal were asked about emotional impact of sexual harassment on them, most of them agreed facing fear (26%) after such incidents.

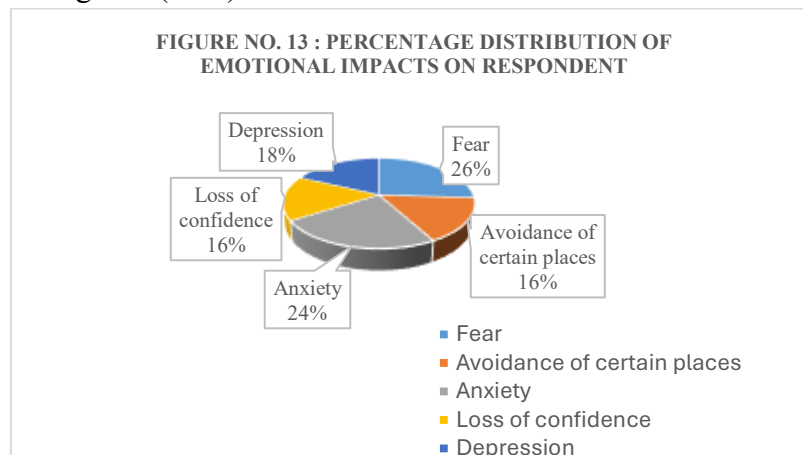


Figure No. 13 reveals that 24% mentioned facing anxiety followed up by 18% reporting depression and 16% loss of confidence and avoidance of such places. This data clearly shows the negative and serious

impact of such cases on the youth causing psychological issues.

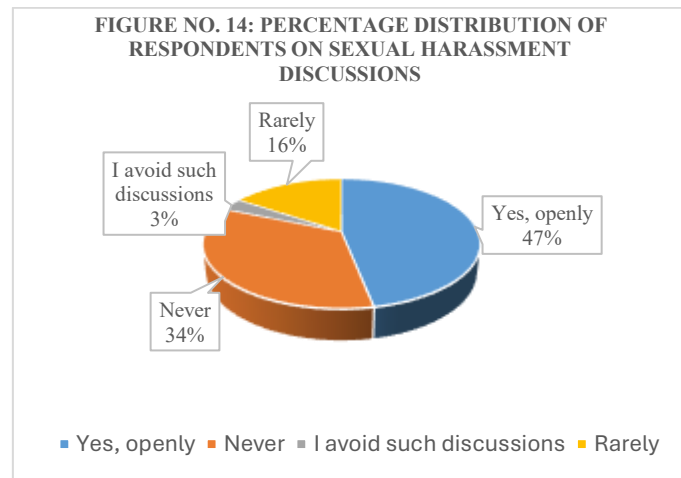


Figure No. 14 shows the percentage distribution of respondents' choices of discussing sexual harassment cases. 47% of the youth accepted discussing such incidents openly followed up by 34% who have never discussed or are not comfortable discussing it with others. Another 16% have mentioned rarely discussing such incidents and 3% who avoid such discussions. From this data, it may be concluded that youth's response on openly discussing such incidents can be divided into 2 categories. Where one category finds themselves comfortable while another finds themselves hesitant in such cases.

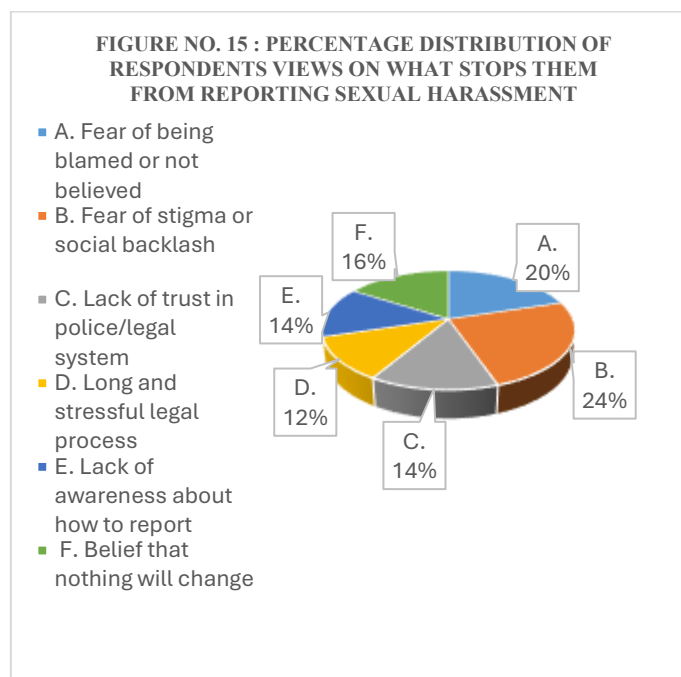


Figure No. 15 reveals the respondents view on what stops them from reporting the cases of sexual harassment they face or witness near them. Most of them (24%) avoid reporting the cases of sexual harassment fearing the social stigma and backlash. Another 20 % don't report such cases due to fear of being blamed or not believed by others. 16% believe that nothing will change the situation, 14% are not aware about the process of reporting such incidents and another 14% lacks trust in police and legal system of India. 12% of the youth of Srinagar do not report such incidents due to long and stressful legal issues.

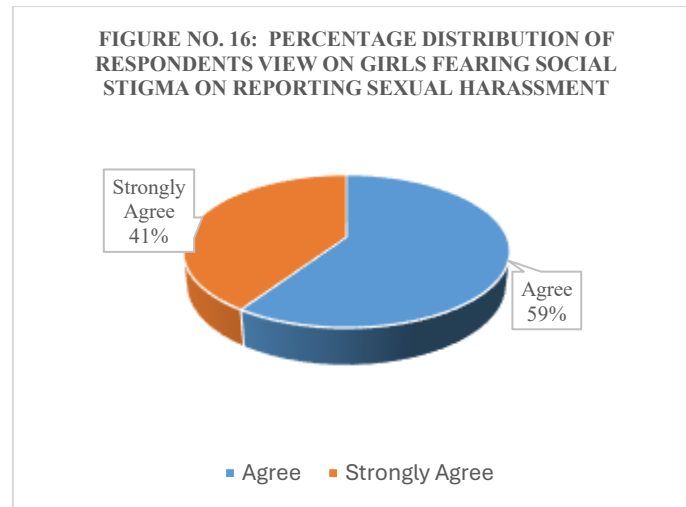


Figure No. 16 depicts the gender view of the respondents fearing social stigma. 59% believes that girls mainly avoid reporting sexual harassment issues due to the fear of social stigma and backlash. It clearly shows that many girls hold back from reporting sexual harassment because they're afraid of being judged or facing backlash. This shows a deeper problem in our society. we're still not doing enough to protect victims or hold the offenders truly accountable.

6. Discussion and Conclusion:

This study was conducted with an aim to explore the awareness, perception and experiences related to sexual harassment and legal rights amongst the youth of Srinagar, Uttarakhand. With a respondent base predominantly composed of females (81%), the findings primarily reflect the perspectives and realities faced by young women in the region.

The data revealed that 53% of respondents were postgraduate and 38% undergraduate students, indicating the major section of respondents to be educated. All respondents were found aware of the concept of sexual harassment. However, only 44% were found to be formally educated or trained in this area. Rest 56% received education about it from the informal sources. Which highlights the lack of strengthened awareness programs.

Although many respondents reported being familiar with laws related to sexual harassment, 56% came up with an average understanding of it. Furthermore, 56% of the youth expressed a lack of faith in law enforcement and justice mechanisms, pointing to systemic mistrust and institutional failure in addressing such sensitive issues.

81% of the respondents agreed to the significant role of family in educating children on sexual harassment issues. However, only 50% accepted to have received any kind of parental communication related to sexual harassment issues. It points out the significant need of parental proactive and open communication with their children regarding sexual harassment issues.

69% of respondents agreed to have experienced sexual harassment incidents. When investigated about the locations, public transport, social media platforms and public areas stood up as most common settings. Despite the frequency, only 31% of victims reported the incidents to authorities, with others choosing to remain silent or respond informally. This data highlights the concern over underreporting due to fear, social backlash or lack of trust in the legal system.

Another finding revealed that only 47% were comfortable discussing such experiences, whereas 34% were not, indicating the presence of hesitation amongst the youth related to such conversations.

Significant reasons for underreporting were found to be fear of social backlash (24%) and being blamed or not believed (20%). These concerns were more pronounced among female respondents, underlining the gendered dimensions of sexual harassment and the societal pressures that often silence victims.

To conclude, the findings of this research unveiled the significant need for awareness campaigns, legal literacy, and stronger institutional support to address the issue of sexual harassment. Encouraging open family communication, rebuilding trust in legal systems, and dismantling gender-based stigma are essential steps toward creating a safer and more supportive environment for the youth. A need for collaborative actions from family, policy makers, educational institutions is encouraged by this study.

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