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Capability Approach to Public-space Harassment of Women: Evidence from India and Bangladesh*

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Abstract

Sexual harassment of women and girls in streets and other public spaces is often trivialized by the label of "eve teasing" in South Asia. While there exists a volume of research on intimate partner or domestic violence in South Asia, the literature on public-space harassment (PSH) is rather sparse. Based on 2021 surveys in Bangladesh and India, this paper examines the prevalence and consequences of public-space harassment using the Capability Approach. We used an online survey and snowball sampling through social media to generate both quantitative and qualitative information. We analyzed the data descriptively and coded the open-ended responses based on human capability themes. The responses to questions about twelve specific forms of harassment indicate that the experience of at least one form of PSH is ubiquitous in both country samples. We find that PSH deprives women of a range of capabilities: to lead lives free of violence, to enjoy emotional well-being, to be physically mobile, to seek educational opportunities, and to earn a living. Overall, women indicated that PSH resulted in wide-ranging restrictions on their freedom. Respondents also articulated future directions for action to reduce experiences of PSH, including education, awareness, and legal measures.

Key Words: Sexual Harassment, Human Capabilities, Gender, India, Bangladesh

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Introduction

Public-space sexual harassment (PSH) is a form of sexual violence primarily perpetrated by men and boys against women and girls. PSH is commonly experienced in public spaces such as streets and on public transportation in the form of menacing, staring, following, insults, vulgar gestures or comments, and inappropriate or aggressive touching. In feminist scholarship, PSH is conceptualized as an expression of domination by men mostly over women, and a manifestation of unequal power relations (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021). As such, PSH is a human rights violation that deprives its targets of a range of capabilities—to lead lives free of violence, to enjoy emotional well-being, to be physically mobile, to seek educational opportunities, and to earn a living. (Nussbaum 2003). Sexual harassment in the workplace was coined as a legal concept in the 1970s in the US, where it was defined as a form of employment discrimination on the basis of sex (McKinnon 1979). There are now laws against workplace sexual harassment in countries around the world and frequent media attention has been paid to the problem, including the 2017 global #MeToo movement (Williams et al. 2019). Nevertheless, in very few countries do laws against sexual harassment cover PSH and there is debate on whether legal remedies are the appropriate course of action for PSH (Htun and Jensenius 2020; Fileborn and O'Neill 2021). Although often trivialized as harmless behavior, recent research suggests that PSH is pervasive and costly to victims and potentially to society as a whole. PSH generates a range of adverse effects for its targets that can be immediate and long-term. Yet, there is limited research on its prevalence, impact on survivors' well-being, and prevention strategies in the global South.

This paper focuses on South Asia to examine the prevalence and consequences of PSH for women and girls. In recent years the increasing number of reported incidents of extreme sexual violence in the region, such as kidnappings, assault, and rape, suggests that these crimes against women may be on the rise (Verma et al. 2017). Against this backdrop of extreme violence, there are also many behaviors that women and girls experience more routinely, such as PSH, which are on the continuum of sexual violence (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021). Emerging research suggests that virtually all women and girls in South Asia, more than 500 million in total, are at risk of victimization by PSH every time they leave home. Even if they escape victimization, the vast majority of women and girls feel unsafe from sexual violence in public spaces. A 2012 household survey conducted in New Delhi found that 95% of women and girls aged 16-49 felt unsafe from

sexual violence in public spaces, which ranged from sexual assault to verbal forms of harassment (UN Women and International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) 2012). Bharucha and Khatri (2018) highlighted the pervasiveness of threats to women's safety in Mumbai, where 9% of women worried about their safety when they are outside their homes and almost all had experienced some form of harassment. Ahmad et al. (2020) report that in Islamabad, 80% of women university students who commute from their homes to university by public transport experienced or witnessed PSH, the most common of which were staring/leering, following/stalking, and verbal comments. In Bangladesh, a study of female high-school students in Dhaka showed that 76% experienced harassment, 94% of them by strangers, most of them (88%) on their commute to school on public transportation or the street (Airin et al. 2014). More recently, 94% of women commuters in a 2017 survey reported experiencing harassment, most of it on public transport (BRAC 2018; Andaleeb 2018). Women reported feeling unsafe at very high rates (95%) on all modes of public transport.

This study examines the incidence and consequences of PSH of women and girls in predominantly urban areas of India and Bangladesh based on small-scale surveys conducted in 2021. The study defines PSH as harassing behaviors in public spaces perpetrated by men and boys against females, taking place both outdoors and on public transport and indoors, such as school, workplace, and public buildings. Given the pandemic, we administered the survey online and promoted it through email and social networking platforms. Recruitment was initiated through urban academic centers in India and Bangladesh and a peri-urban civil society organization with reach to rural areas. In India, the participants were drawn from North Indian cities of the Delhi National Capital Region, Chandigarh, Patiala, Sirhind, and Fatehgarh Sahib. In Bangladesh, the survey respondents were from Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Noakhali, Comilla, and Coxsbazar.

We find that women's experiences of public harassment are widespread in our sample, about 90% in each country report having experienced at least one form of harassment and over half reporting more severe forms of harassment. While not confined to any particular space, PSH most commonly occurs outdoors (i.e. market, street, neighborhood, outdoor recreation spot). Further, the vast majority of respondents (about 9 of 10 in both India and Bangladesh) report adverse emotional impacts, such as feeling fear or anger, experiencing panic attacks, difficulty concentrating, and

negative impacts on their activities, such as reducing walking at nighttime and daytime and attending social events, or stopping these activities altogether. We interpret these adverse impacts of PSH on well-being in terms of the Capability Approach, developed by Sen (1982; 1999) and Nussbaum (2003). Our results show that PSH deprives women of five central human capabilities: the capability for bodily integrity and safety, emotional well-being, physical mobility, education, and livelihood generation. Overall, PSH imposes wide-ranging restrictions on their freedom. For example, when asked how their lives might change in the absence of such harassment, a large portion of respondents indicated that they would enjoy greater freedom. While respondents took virtually no action to address harassing behaviors, they provided ideas on what should be done to stop PSH, which centered on education, awareness raising, and legal measures to punish harassers.

Public Space Sexual Harassment: Literature Review

Conceptualization of Public Space Harassment

PSH is variously referred to as "street harassment," "men's stranger intrusions," "stranger intrusion," or "eve-teasing" in the South Asian context. PSH is difficult to pin down, since not all such behavior is perpetrated by men alone, it is not always perceived by recipients as harassing or harmful and is not always overtly sexualized behavior. However, Fileborn and O'Neill (2021) emphasize that the vast majority of PSH is experienced in gendered ways; it is a spatial manifestation of, and actively reproduces, unequal gendered power relations. While PSH is distinct from sexual harassment in the workplace and educational institutions in that it is typically between strangers, Crouch (2009: 137) conceptualizes the function and effect of all sexual harassment as serving "to keep women in their place," in a subordinate social status, and as a means of controlling their behavior in public spaces. This concept of "continuum of sexual violence" recognizes that PSH is "underpinned by the same gendered power structures" that reproduce and exist alongside other extreme forms of violence (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021: 3). Crouch (2009:137) also emphasizes the interrelated nature of sexual harassment: PSH constrains women's "freedom of movement in *space*," which in turn constrains their "freedom of movement in *status*" (emphasis added). Thus, PSH is as much a form of sex discrimination as harassment in the workplace or academia.

While on the mild end of the sexual violence continuum, PSH is conceptualized as harmful because it momentarily evokes "heterosexual intimacy," as it "draws on the language that is typically used in addressing a romantic partner," which places women as "low-status" individuals on the receiving end of the behavior, unable to reciprocate. And "their nonreciprocal nature reflects and perpetuates a manifestation of unequal power" (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021: 4). Thus, PSH may become normalized as behavior men engage in to control women and women have to endure in silence yet experience their lasting adverse consequences.

Crouch (2009) also draws attention to cross-cultural similarities in the nature and impacts of PSH: the common experience of women is fear, avoidance, and self-blame for the harassment, and harassment cuts their education short, limits their participation in evening activities and equal access to public goods (pp. 140-141). Nonetheless, where social norms restrict women's access to public spaces, as in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), PSH may be a more potent and pervasive form of control. South Asia and MENA are characterized as the region of "classic patriarchy," which Kandiyoti (1988) has proposed to challenge the monolithic notion of patriarchy in feminist scholarship and to differentiate the different set of constraints and opportunities faced by women around the world. According to the unwritten rules of classic patriarchy, female dependency and male guardianship are practiced through rigid division of labor in the household and segregation of sexes in public spaces (Kandiyoti 1988; Kabeer 1994). Under classic patriarchy, the rules of "purdah," or female seclusion, which predate Islam, include not only physical segregation of women and men but also prescribe women's dress (to cover their skin and conceal their form). In practice, the strength of these rules varies within the region and they are increasingly challenged by the growing number of women who step out of the social and familial boundaries, to participate in the labor force and pursue their education, especially in urban areas (Hossain 2017). In such a context, harassment in public spaces may take on religious overtones: harassers may believe that it is within their religious right to harass women in order to establish a strictly segregated society (Ahmad et al. 2020: 83). PSH in South Asia thus may be viewed as a set of behaviors by men and boys that respond to the perceived breach of norms of physical segregation by women, serve as a reminder to women that they are trespassing into spaces they do not belong to, and jeopardize women's safety and well-being.

Impacts of Public Space Harassment

The harm of PSH is experienced as negative emotional states (fear, particularly of further forms of violence, anger, repulsion, and violation), leading women to modify their behavior and avoid public spaces. Women fear that if they challenge the harassment it may escalate. In addition, the harassment "shapes 'women's embodiment' or how they 'live in' their own bodies, with harassment foreclosing women's capacity to act in and on the world" (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021: 5). These emotional states, in turn, can have far-reaching consequences, at the individual, family, and societal levels.

In South Asia survivors often do not disclose their experiences of PSH other than to family members or friends because PSH is considered a source of public shame that would tarnish their reputations as honorable women. The reluctance to report to the police is the outcome of both the trivialization of PSH and women's perception that it would be futile and entail time and emotional costs (Dhillon and Bakaya 2014). Women are also mostly nonresponsive to PSH when it occurs: A 2017 survey of 415 working women in Bangladesh indicates that in response to harassment 81% of women kept silent and 79% just walked away from the place of harassment (BRAC 2018). Ninety-one % of university students in the study by Ahmad et al. (2020) reported that their family advised them to ignore the harassment.

Research has established negative mental health effects of PSH in India (Talboys et al. 2017). Participants in focus group discussions suggested links between such harassment and depression and suicide. Among young women who reported being harassed, over 61% also reported feeling angry, 47% feeling shame or humiliation, and 39% fear, worry, or tension. The findings suggest an association between victimization and common mental disorders (Talboys 2015). In Bangladesh, PSH has been found to be associated with depression of urban adolescent females. Based on a survey of levels and factors of depression of 203 14-16-year-old high-school students, Airin et al. (2014) report that while overall 47% experienced depression, the depression rate was higher among those who experienced eve teasing (53%) than those who did not experience eve teasing (29%). An overview based on reports from the first decade of the millennium indicates several consequences of PSH in Bangladesh: suicides, mental illness, early marriage of daughters, fear of decline in marriageability of daughters, and escalation of violence if women/girls or their

family oppose eve teasing (Islam and Amin 2016). In addition, given the cultural norms that already inscribe the public space as a masculine domain, PSH can constrain women's and girls' ability to be in public spaces without being accompanied by a male family member, which can lead to women and girls withdrawing from employment or school. Evidence from Pakistan demonstrates these adverse education and physical mobility outcomes (Ahmad et al. 2020; Ahmed et al. 2019).

Qualitative evidence from story circles conducted among young women living in urban slums in India identifies PSH as a significant barrier to mobility, which can limit women's access to education, and ultimately, labor market opportunities (Hebert et al. 2019). Drawing upon the rich data in the India Human Development Survey of 2005, Chakraborty et al. (2018) show that in neighborhoods where there is a higher perceived threat of sexual harassment, women are less likely to work outside the home. They attribute the steady decline in women's labor force participation in India to rising concerns about women's safety, as an avoidance strategy by women. They find that this deterrent effect of perception of crime against women is stronger for younger women, in purdah-practicing communities, and where patriarchal values are strong. In turn, low levels of women's labor force participation can be costly to society in terms of low economic growth rates (Elborgh-Woytek et al. 2013).

Besides outright exclusion from labor force participation, PSH can shape the nature of women's labor market participation by acting as an external constraint on women's educational and career choices. Using survey data from students at the University of Delhi and safety data from two mobile apps, Borker (2020) finds that women university students are more willing to choose worse-ranked colleges than top-quality colleges if the travel route is perceived to be safer with respect to PSH. This is problematic as previous research from India has found a large wage premium associated with attendance at more elite colleges (Sekhri 2020). This research indicates that street harassment may be indirectly contributing to the gender wage gap. Beyond choice of educational institution itself, harassment may also result in missed school days or reduced educational self-efficacy that can additionally impact educational outcomes. Family members may also incur costs in terms of lost earnings as they seek to safeguard a female member from PSH by accompanying them to work or school.

Public Space Harassment and Capability Deprivations

We interpret the consequences of PSH using the Capability Approach, introduced, and developed by Sen (1982; 1999) as a normative, non-monetary framework for assessing well-being. While the Capability Approach is not a lens used in the PSH literature, we believe that it is a useful framework to highlight the range of negative consequences of PSH. Sen conceptualized capabilities as individuals' freedoms to lead the lives they choose as central to the definition of human well-being. While he emphasized gender inequality in capabilities of life and health in many of his writings, mostly focusing on South Asia, it was Nussbaum (2003) and Robeyns (2003) who extended the Capability Approach in gender-aware ways by identifying lists of central capabilities. Nussbaum (2003) has proposed a definite list of ten human capabilities that she argues should be upheld universally through constitutional guarantees, while Robeyns (2003) has delineated a more concrete list of 14 capabilities relevant for the global North with the goal of conceptualizing and measuring gender inequality. Nussbaum (2005) further argues that violence against women, or the threat of such violence (of which PSH can be considered a subset), can impact women's enjoyment of every capability on her list. Strenio (2020) has used the Capability Approach in interpreting the costs of intimate partner violence in the US by conceptualizing the consequences in terms of a vicious cycle and a life-cycle model of interactions between resources, capabilities, and functionings.

Our review of scholarship on South Asia indicates that PSH undermines several central capabilities. In terms of the lists of Nussbaum and Robeyns, PSH represents a direct deprivation of the central capability of bodily integrity and safety. In turn, a lack of bodily integrity can also undermine many other capabilities of women and girls. In this study, we focus on the ways in which PSH interferes with the following five capabilities:

> 1) Being safe from violence: The ability to be safe from violence is a central capability (to enjoy "bodily integrity" for Nussbaum and "bodily integrity and safety" for Robeyns).
>
> 2) Emotions: The ability to have attachments to people and things outside oneself and to experience and express a range of emotions. In particular, Nussbaum emphasizes the capability of "[n]ot having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety" (2003, p. 41), which is a pervasive effect of PSH. Robeyns (2003: 77-79) includes being

able to be mentally healthy on her list of central capabilities, which includes the ability to sleep, not worry, feel lonely, restless or be depressed.

3) Physical Mobility: According to Nussbaum, being able to move freely from place to place is part of the central capability of bodily integrity, while Robeyns identifies mobility as a separate capability. While Robeyns' references are to gendered constraints on women's mobility in the European context (such as difficulties for mothers of infants on sidewalks or public transportation), as indicated by the scholarship on South Asia, PSH works to constrain women's ability to be mobile in various other ways.

4) Education: Having the ability to obtain education and to develop one's talents and skills, which Nussbaum refers to as "senses, imagination and thought" and Robeyns as "education and knowledge," is intrinsically important as well as being an input for other individual capabilities such as being healthy, the ability to earn a living or becoming an informed voter.

5) Livelihood generation: The ability to secure one's livelihood through employment or asset ownership is an aspect of "control over one's environment" on Nussbaum's list. Robeyns identifies this capability as "being able to work in the labor market or undertake projects, including artistic ones" (2003: 72). In economic terms, the capability to earn a living is important for ensuring the livelihoods of individuals and their dependents. Previous research on workplace sexual harassment from the global North highlights ways in which harassment may impact this capability. For example, workplace sexual harassment in the United States has been associated with reduced job satisfaction, increased absenteeism and reduced productivity and earnings, high turnover, and deterioration of relations with coworkers (Hersch 2015; Shaw, Hegewisch, and Hess 2018; US Merit Systems Protection Board 2018; Willness, Steel, and Lee 2007). Distinct from workplace sexual harassment by coworkers or supervisors, however, PSH may curtail women's ability to access their workplace.

We recognize that the deprivations generated by PSH for women will not be limited only to the five that we highlight, and that deprivations in the dimensions we identified can lead to the deprivation of others. For example, emotional deprivation may hamper ability to study or to keep one's job. In turn, inability to pursue one's education will likely undermine their ability to obtain

decent employment. Similarly, restricted physical mobility will likely constrain women's ability to socialize (the central capability of "affiliation") as well as get to one's workplace. Thus, each of these five capabilities are both an instrumental capability, enabling other capabilities, and intrinsic one. Moreover, taken together, these deprivations can be far-reaching in sustaining gender inequalities in the household, workplace, and society, and in turn undermine societal well-being. As Strenio (2020) has shown, the deprivation of bodily integrity is likely to have adverse consequences over the life cycle. It is expected to undermine not only capabilities (e.g. to be educated) but also achieved functionings (e.g. result in lower quality educational outcomes), which in turn translate into lower levels of resources to enjoy economic security. Economic insecurity, in turn, can reinforce gender inequalities in the household, women's secondary status in society, and their lower contributions to societal well-being.

Violence against women in its various forms and the capability deprivations they generate have been prominent on the international policy agenda and the focus of legislative action (Htun and Jensenius 2020). All of the capabilities (except emotions) that we focus on have long been central to all international policy frameworks, such as CEDAW (1979), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), as well as conceptual frameworks of gender equality (Berik 2022). Recently, PSH has also received attention in the form of various initiatives, such as the Safe Cities program of the UN Women and ICRW (2012), which aim to reduce sexual violence in public spaces. These initiatives include awareness campaigns, effective police response, access to helplines, systematic tracking of incidents of PSH.

This study seeks to add new empirical evidence on the prevalence and consequences of PSH in South Asia, and to describe the consequences in the Capability Approach framework. Interpreting the consequences of PSH in terms of capability deprivations allows for a broader understanding of the ways in which PSH may be limiting women's freedom and allow for better alignment of resources, including prevention and intervention programs, to address the problem.

Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional online survey of women in India and Bangladesh was conducted from August-October 2021 in India and August-December 2021 in Bangladesh, preceded by a small pilot of the questionnaire with 30 women in Punjab, India. We built on the Eve-Teasing Mental Health Questionnaire (ETQ-MH) (Talboys, et al. 2015), designed to estimate the prevalence of PSH and assess associations with mental health outcomes, and expanded it to include economic outcomes. The questionnaires were adapted slightly for each location with input from local subject matter experts. The questionnaires were converted to an electronic version using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT) and administered in English. Local partners from academic institutions and a rural civil-society organization assisted in the dissemination of the online survey through use of their organizational social networking platforms. This method allowed for snowball sampling by suggesting to recipients that they forward to others. In India recruitment was initiated through the Public Health Department at Amity University in New Delhi, the National Dental College in Punjab, and the Mehar Baba Charitable Trust in Punjab. Recruitment in Bangladesh was initiated through Asian University for Women in Chittagong. Recruitment information was distributed by all partners through emails with the digital link, fliers, text via phones, and social media (Facebook, Whatsapp etc.). In India, the participants were drawn from North Indian cities of the Delhi National Capital Region, Chandigarh, Patiala, Sirhind, and Fatehgarh Sahib. The study in Bangladesh included participants from Dhaka, Chittagong, Sylhet, Khulna, Noakhali, Comilla, and Coxsbazar.

Results were analyzed descriptively in STATA16 (STATAcorp, 2019). We categorized the experience of PSH in terms of the 12-item instrument to include "Ever" where at least one of the 12 forms of harassment was reported. We identified PSH as "moderate," if the respondent marked at least one of the first seven items "yes," to indicate more common or typical forms of harassment, and "Severe" if she marked "yes" any of items 8 – 12, to indicate a more serious form of harassment. Moderate harassment comprises at least one of the following seven forms of PSH: 1) menacing staring, leering, or following; 2) insults or degrading comments based on being a woman or a girl; 3) unwelcome and persistent following and engaging in conversation despite efforts to discourage or avoid the intrusion; 4) comments meant to be funny or romantic, such as "I love you", singing lines from a love song, or comments about the looks; 5) vulgar gestures, such as acting out sexual acts; 6) vulgar comments or sexual remarks; 7) inappropriate touching, seemingly on accident, such as in a crowd or rush.

If a woman experienced at least one of the following five forms of harassment, we classified it as "severe" harassment: 1) aggressive touching, such as pinching, grabbing, pulling, groping; 2) threats or intimidation to comply with advances or risk damage to reputation, such as spreading rumors; 3) verbal threats or intimidation to comply with advances or risk bodily harm; 4) any type of harassment by a group of boys or men that made her fear for her safety; 5) unwanted sexual advance such as kissing, holding, embracing, or fondling.

Among those reporting any form of harassment we analyzed the reported consequences descriptively for each location and classified them into the following categories of capabilities: being safe from violence, emotions, physical mobility, education, and livelihood generation. We also applied these categories to open-ended questions and post-coded them qualitatively using template analysis in Excel (Microsoft Corporation, 2019)

This study was approved by the University of Utah Institutional Review Board IRB_00134270. Participation was confidential, voluntary and without incentives. Informed consent was incorporated into the online survey and participants could withdraw at any time.

Results

Demographic summary

A total of 236 women completed the survey, 116 in India and 123 in Bangladesh. Based on the sampling approach, the respondents were predominantly young, single, and educated urban dwellers. While the two samples were fairly similar, there were notable differences in demographic attributes that are presented in Table 1. Indian respondents were slightly older (+1.9 years), more likely to be married (+11.9 percentage points (pp)), less likely to be a student (-8.3 pp), more likely to be employed (+23.3 pp), and of slightly lower social and economic status. This may be due to the broader reach of the survey to less urban areas in India where 69% of respondents were urban dwellers compared to 81.3% in Bangladesh. Eighty-one percent of respondents in India identified themselves as belonging to the General Caste category that is associated with higher social status (as opposed to the lower social status Scheduled Caste,

Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class (OBC) category), and 98% of the respondents in Bangladesh identified themselves as Bengali, which is the dominant ethnic group in the country (as opposed to other minority indigenous groups).

Prevalence of harassment: Deprivation of being safe from violence

Eighty-nine percent of respondents in India and 91% in Bangladesh reported having experienced PSH in at least one of the twelve forms of behavior (Table 2, Panel A). Forty-one percent of respondents in India and 44% in Bangladesh reported having seen other women being harassed in their neighborhood.

The aggregate statistics of PSH based on the twelve separate questions reported above are internally consistent as reflected by the high Cronbach's alpha measures of 0.833 for the pooled data, 0.848 for Bangladesh, and 0.799 for India. Experiencing moderate forms of harassment was more common in both countries. There was little variation among respondents in India and Bangladesh with regard to experience of moderate PSH, which was 87.5% and 90.5%, respectively. Fifty-four percent and 67% of the respondents in India and Bangladesh experienced severe harassment. The higher incidence of severe harassment in the Bangladesh sample may be a reflection of the higher rates of urban and student population compared to India, but it suggests that when women step out more into public spaces, they are more likely to face severe harassment.

In India, 78% of participants reported harassment occurring in outdoor spaces, 54% in indoor spaces and 63% said it occurred on public transportation (Table 2, Panel B). The corresponding statistics for Bangladesh are 91%, 66%, and 68%, respectively. Outdoor spaces included the market, street, local or other neighborhood, and outdoor recreation spots. Indoor locations included schools and public buildings, and public transport included bus, auto-rickshaw, metro, train, and ride sharing cabs.

Deprivation of emotional well being

Eighty-three percent and 91% of the respondents in India and Bangladesh, respectively, who answered the questions about emotional harm as a result of harassment reported having experienced at least one of the following (Table 3): feeling sad (depression) or worried (anxiety); feeling shame or humiliation; feeling of fear or anger; panic attacks; loss of self-confidence; feeling

vulnerable; difficulty in sleeping; difficulty in concentrating; difficulties in relationships. About 43% and 54% of the respondents in India and Bangladesh, respectively, reported being fairly or very worried about being a victim of harassment in public spaces. This deprivation was most commonly expressed in response to the open-ended question where participants elaborated further on deprivations of their capability for emotions and what it would mean to gain this capability (45% of 113 responses):

> *"My thoughts wouldn't nearly constantly be preoccupied with thoughts of harassment when I'm in public or at work. I very nearly always think about my safety in every environment and when with men at work"* (Bangladesh Participant)

> *"More socialising during evenings, less worry about getting home before dark and using public transport or cabs"* (India Participant)

Most of these emotional capability deprivations are likely to have far-reaching implications for the health and productivity of individuals.

Deprivation of physical mobility

Restricted physical mobility can be inferred from responses about stopping or reducing outdoor activities due to harassment. Seventy-seven percent and 83% of the respondents reported that they reduced or stopped at least one of the following activities in India and Bangladesh, respectively (Table 3): walking at nighttime; walking in the daytime; daily activities outside the household (like taking children/siblings to school, playing with children, shopping, or running other errands); visiting family & friends; attending religious activities; attending social events (like cinema, dances, clubs, societies etc.). In addition, respondents referred to the likely effects of concerns about PSH on their future mobility: Eighty-five percent in India and 93% in Bangladesh of those who answered the questions about conjectured effects of being worried about harassment reported that they will reduce or stop doing at least one of the above activities because they are worried about harassment.

If women changed how they get to work, it reflects a higher cost of mobility due to harassment. Twenty-five percent and 24% of the respondents who answered the commute question reported that they changed how they get to work in India and Bangladesh, respectively. Only a small number

of those who changed their commute indicated that they changed their commute in one or more ways: a route or mode change or had someone accompany them, and in very few cases the change entailed time or monetary costs. Open-ended responses characterize the nature of restrictions to physical mobility and indicate how they are interrelated with other capabilities:

> *"I would have been more confident in public places and much more happier and free. I would have worn anything that i liked without any fear and would have visited any friend or relative without feeling like I am inviting tragedy. And, most of all, I would not be having the serious trust issues in relationships that i have now."* (India Participant)

> *"I could walk on the street without the fear of getting touched, without being over conscious of my dress. I could walk or travel like Just another normal guy"* (Bangladesh Participant)

> *"Would be free to do things I'm not right now. Because my family is concerned about my safety."* (India Participant)

Deprivation of education and livelihood generation

Respondents report restriction on their ability to pursue education or employment and to engage in daily unpaid chores that are important in generating livelihoods due to harassment. Forty-five percent and 64 % of the respondents reported reducing or stopping at least one of the following activities in India and Bangladesh, respectively (Table 3): studying; working (e.g. reduced work hours or quitting job); daily activities in the household (like cooking, cleaning, washing, caregiving). Fourteen percent and 19% of the respondents reported that they altered their schooling, work or career plans due to harassment in India and Bangladesh, respectively.

Twenty percent of the 113 open-ended responses specifically noted some form of education and livelihood generation or additional costs, such as needing to be escorted in public. Several noted how they would be better able to concentrate on their job.

> *"We could walk freely, or some women even might be able to work for night shifts without any fear while commuting, confidence level and personal growth will not be hampered."* (India Participant)

"It will definitely boost my confidence- I would be safe knowing I will go home safe, will work even at longer hours knowing there is no one outside who might not touch, pass comments etc., at me. And all I am saying is the bare minimum that one should FEEL while she/he is working, going for walk or going to cinema or say even a nearby icecream parlour." (India Participant)

Reduced Freedom: Deprivation of all human capabilities

We infer the overarching adverse effects of harassment on women's capabilities from the responses to the open-ended question "*If harassment no longer existed, how might your life improve?"* We consider any response that indicated that the respondent would gain more freedom in going out, dressing, making career choices, socializing etc. or would be free from negative emotions like fear, worry, tension, stress, anxiety, trauma, lack of confidence, feeling unsafe, vulnerable, constrained etc. when going out in public spaces as an indicator of PSH being antithetical to the expansion of human capabilities. The lack of freedom resonates with each the specific forms of deprivation of human capabilities that we have discussed above – being safe from violence, emotional well-being, physical mobility, education, and livelihood generation.

Among the 113 respondents who answered this question all but two provided a positive to very positive response and broadly indicated their freedoms would expand. In fact, 38% of those who wrote an answer specifically cited freedom or a similar sentiment, including:

"Ease of mind and so much more freedom, respect." (India participant)

"I can live [a] free [and] independent life without restriction" (India participant)

"It will improve a lot. We girls will finally be able to live a free life. Which seems like a dream at this moment!" (Bangladesh participant)

"Life would have been beautiful" (Bangladesh participant)

"I will feel like a free bird" (Bangladesh participant)

"I will feel more free. I won't have to worry what I wear or have to depend on someone to tag along with me every time I go somewhere." (Bangladesh Participant)

Agency

While respondents reported that they would gain a wide range of freedoms if they were to lead lives free of harassment, only a small proportion took further action. Twenty-seven percent of the respondents in India and 30% in Bangladesh reported to someone informally or formally or took some action about the harassment (Table 3). Very few (5% and 4% of the respondents in India and Bangladesh) reported bearing monetary cost of taking an action. The low levels of agency in addressing harassment is likely due to the social stigma of the experience and the expectation that not much would come out of reporting the harassment, as highlighted by the South Asian case studies. However, in open-ended responses to the question *"In your opinion, what should be done to stop harassment?"* respondents articulated several ideas for collective and individual agency. Most of the responses focused on education, of boys from a young age, awareness campaigns, confronting media representations of gender relations, and taking strict legal measures against offenders. These responses do not indicate that women are aware of laws on the books to combat PSH both countries. The Indian Penal Code was revised in 2013 to outlaw sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, and made them punishable by imprisonment and fines (Safecity India 2022). In Bangladesh there is no specific law on PSH but the behaviors that constitute PSH fall under certain provisions of Bangladesh laws, though these do not use the term sexual harassment (Dhaka Tribune 2022). A small number of respondents exhorted women to "come forward," "talk about it," "speak up," "report the case, consult, seek help. Fight for your own right" in order to confront the normalization of PSH. These responses indicate the need to promote legal literacy along with other measures to alleviate the problem, such as strengthening awareness campaigns.

Discussion and Conclusion

While PSH is often trivialized as harmless behavior, our findings support research on South Asia that shows it is pervasive and costly to victims and society as a whole. We combined qualitative and quantitative results of our India and Bangladesh samples to show that PSH is nearly universal and deprives women of central human capabilities. We identified five categories of capability deprivations resulting from PSH: restriction of women's capability for bodily integrity and safety,

emotions, physical mobility, education, and livelihood generation. In addition, respondents indicated PSH was restrictive of their freedoms overall.

Our study furthered a methodology to measure the incidence and impact of PSH on central human capabilities and contributed new evidence to the limited research on South Asia. Most importantly, we see the consequences of a deeply rooted cultural norm where men are entitled to dominate public spaces and the presence of women in public spaces, especially in evenings or unaccompanied, is perceived as provocative.

Many of the respondents identified these gender norms as the root cause of the problem and referred to the need to shift the norms that are reinforced by media. And many more called for strict legal remedies, apparently unaware that they are in place, although they may not be implemented. Multi-level prevention strategies are needed that go beyond the focus on women's safety, such as women-only sections of public transport that are widespread in India. The onus on women to assure their safety by modifying daily behaviors should be shifted to include men's behavior change. Participants suggested than men and boys be sensitized to the harmful effects of their behaviors through educational campaigns. This could include how to intervene as bystanders. They also called for stronger laws and implied existing laws are not well enforced. Paired with stricter monitoring and enforcement of laws on harassment in public and the workplace, educational strategies could begin to change these cultural norms. There is very limited research on male perspectives on PSH (Fileborn and O'Neill 2021). More research is needed to understand the perpetrators' mindset and how to engage men in social change.

Limitations of this study include its small sample size and non-representative sampling method. By design, the online survey imposes a sampling restriction as the respondents' need to have access to the internet. Since our survey was launched with the help of institutions of higher education in India and Bangladesh and conducted in English only, young women with higher education are overrepresented in our sample. While the snowball sampling method was adopted by utilizing social media to recruit respondents, which is expected to diversify the respondent pool, the samples have limited geographic coverage of India and Bangladesh. Although the sample sizes are similar for India and Bangladesh, the Bangladesh sample has much wider geographic coverage of the country as compared to the geographic coverage of the sample from India. This difference may be

attributed to the vastly different geographic sizes of the two countries, as India is about 22 times larger than Bangladesh in terms of land area. Given these sample limitations and the small sample size, we refrain from drawing inferences about the magnitudes of the impacts of public space harassment to the population at large. Despite these limitations, the insights provided by the data are valuable for highlighting the multidimensional nature of human capability deprivations of PSH of women. Respondents articulated how their lives would improve if they led lives free of harassment, indicating that they would "gain freedom." While respondents did not take specific action to address the problem of PSH, they articulated forms of collective and individual agency to combat it. Their awareness is promising in supporting future public policy, which goes beyond individual acts of fighting harassment.

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Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

	India			Bangladesh		
	N	**Mean (SD)**	**Min (Max)**	**N**	**Mean (SD)**	**Min (Max)**
Age	116	25.21 (6.58)	18 (57)	123	23.33 (4.68)	19 (55)
	N	**Count**	**%**	**N**	**Count**	**%**
Marital status	116			124		
Married		25	21.55		12	9.68
Single		91	78.45		112	90.32
Highest level of education	116			124		
Higher Education		107	92.24		117	94.35
Secondary Education		8	6.9		7	5.65
No education		1	0.86		0	0
Currently attending school/classes/work	116	97	83.62	124	114	91.64
Main work status	116			124		
Student		66	56.9		95	79.84
Employed		42	36.21		16	12.9
Annual household income	116			122		
Below poverty		1	0.86		1	0.82
Low income		12	10.34		6	4.92
Middle income		82	70.69		102	83.61
Upper income		21	18.10		13	10.66
High social status or dominant group	116	94	81.03	124	121	97.58
Neighborhood (total)	116			123		
Urban		80	68.97		100	81.30
Semi-urban		27	23.28		14	11.38
Rural		9	7.76		9	7.32

Note: High social status category in India represents the General Caste category and the other category includes Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe or Other Backward Class (OBC). High social status category in Bangladesh represents the dominant group Bengali and the other category is not-Bengali indigenous groups.

Table 2: Prevalence of Public Space Harassment Experiences among Women in India and Bangladesh

	India			Bangladesh		
	N	Count	%	N	Count	%
Panel A						
Prevalence and Type of Harassment						
Any form of harassment	96	85	88.54	105	96	91.43
Moderate Harassment (1. to 7.)	96	84	87.5	105	95	90.48
Severe Harassment (8. to 12.)	96	52	54.17	105	70	66.67
Ever been the target of:						
1. Menacing, staring, leering or following	94	69	73.4	104	81	77.88
2. Insults or degrading comments on account of being a woman or a girl	96	52	54.17	104	75	72.12
3. Unwelcome and persistent following and engaging in conversation despite your efforts to discourage or avoid the intrusion.	93	40	43.01	102	57	55.88
4. Comments meant to be funny or romantic, such as "I love you," singing lines from a love song, or comments about your looks	96	60	62.50	103	74	71.84
5. Vulgar gestures, such as acting out sexual acts	96	34	35.42	104	36	34.62
6. Vulgar comments or sexual remarks	95	31	32.63	103	55	53.40
7. Inappropriate touching, seemingly on accident, such as in a crowd or rush	95	61	64.21	103	78	75.73
8. Aggressive touching, such as pinching, grabbing, pulling, groping	96	24	25	102	40	39.22
9. Threats or intimidation for you to comply with advances or risk damage to your reputation, such as spreading rumors	95	15	15.79	102	36	35.29
10. Verbal threats or intimidation to comply with advances or risk bodily harm	94	6	6.38	102	25	24.51

11. Any type of harassment by a group of boys or men where you feared for your safety	95	21	22.11	102	38	37.25
12. Unwanted sexual advance such as kissing, holding, embracing, or fondling	96	26	27.08	102	23	22.55
Seen other women being harassed	96	39	40.63	102	45	44.12
Panel B						
Location of harassment						
Outdoor	59	46	77.97	76	69	90.79
Indoor	59	32	54.24	76	50	65.79
Public transport	59	37	62.71	76	52	68.42

Note: All the variables reported in this table are qualitative binary variables, where 1 represents "yes" and 0 represents "no." The count and % represent the statistics for the "yes" category.

Table 3. Consequences of Public Space Harassment

	India			Bangladesh		
	N	**Count**	**%**	**N**	**Count**	**%**
Deprivation of emotional well being						
At least one of the following:	63	52	82.54	80	73	91.25
Feeling sad (depression)/worried(anxiety)	61	44	72.13	77	62	80.52
Feeling shame or humiliation	58	30	51.72	74	49	66.22
Feeling of fear or anger	61	48	78.69	78	70	89.74
Panic attacks	59	15	25.42	75	27	36
Loss of self-confidence	59	18	30.51	74	40	54.05
Feeling vulnerable	58	26	44.83	76	57	75
Difficulty in sleeping	60	25	41.67	75	38	50.67
Difficulty in concentrating	60	26	43.33	75	50	66.67
Difficulties in relationships	58	16	27.59	74	21	28.38
Fairly or very worried about harassment	63	27	42.86	85	46	54.12
Deprivation of physical mobility						
Reduced or stopped:						
At least one of the following:	60	46	76.67	75	62	82.67
Walking at nighttime	58	35	60.34	73	48	65.75
Walking in the daytime	56	24	42.86	75	42	56
Daily activities outside the household (like taking children/siblings to school, playing with children, shopping or running other errands)	55	20	36.36	69	35	40.72
Visiting family & friends	56	21	37.5	69	33	47.83
Attending religious activities	54	16	29.63	66	24	36.36
Attending social events (like cinema, dances, clubs, societies etc.)	53	28	52.83	67	34	50.75
Due to worries about PSH, would reduce or stop:						
At least one of the following:	48	41	85.42	71	66	92.96
Studying	47	2	4.26	69	16	23.19
Working (e.g. reduce work hours or quitting job)	46	3	6.52	66	15	22.73

Walking at nighttime	47	32	68.09	65	49	75.38
Walking in the daytime	46	18	39.13	65	24	36.92
Daily activities in the household (cooking, cleaning, washing, caregiving)	46	6	13.04	66	24	21.21
Daily activities outside the household (like taking children/siblings to school, playing with children, shopping or running other errands)	45	10	22.22	64	25	39.06
Visiting family & friends	45	12	26.67	63	17	26.98
Attending religious activities	42	9	21.43	60	14	23.33
Attending social events (like cinema, dances, clubs, societies etc.)	45	15	33.33	61	29	47.54
Helping friends or neighbors	43	9	20.93	60	15	25
Higher cost of mobility						
Commute change	67	17	25.37	88	21	23.86
Route change	12	8	66.67	19	10	52.63
Mode change	13	9	69.23	19	12	63.16
Someone else accompanied	13	8	61.54	21	12	57.14
Commute change increased monetary cost	54	7	12.96	71	15	21.13
Commute change increased time cost	56	12	21.43	70	17	24.29

Deprivation of education and livelihood generation

Reduced or stopped:

At least one of the following:	60	27	45	80	51	63.75
Studying	59	15	25.42	80	35	43.75
Working at a job (e.g. reduce work hours or quitting job)	55	16	29.09	72	24	33.33
Daily activities in the household (cooking, cleaning, washing, caregiving)	58	13	22.41	68	24	35.29
Altered work or career plans	88	12	13.64	64	12	18.75

Agency (action about harassment)

Took action	62	17	27.42	84	25	29.76
Bore monetary cost of action	58	3	5.17	82	3	3.66