



hollaback!

Street harassment in Istanbul

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Introduction

"Taciz sözlü ya da fiziksel olsun, aradan yıllar geçse dahi unutulmuyor maalesef,"-- "Whether it is verbal or physical harassment, even after many years one cannot forget it, unfortunately" (citation) one Turkish poster laments in her submission of a street harassment experience on the Hollaback! Istanbul website. A poster on the English-language version of the Hollaback! Istanbul website echoes a similar sentiment when she explains "it has been two and a half years since that incident, but I still feel fear and panic riding buses" (citation) Many other users on both the Turkish and English versions of the Hollaback! Istanbul website have described experiences of street harassment in Istanbul that have left them feeling insecure, unsafe, and uncomfortable in public spaces. Cynthia Grant Bowman (1993) notes that "street harassment...diminishes a person's feeling of safety and comfort in public places [and] restricts their freedom of movement, depriving them of liberty and security in the public sphere" Bowman further asserts that street harassment negatively impacts "the relationship between sexes" and "the construction of gender in a society" (p. 540). Thus, experiences of street harassment often have long-term effects on the beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors of victims, which can affect how they participate in, and view, their society and the members of it.

The main goals of Hollaback! Istanbul are to "give people an empowered

response to street harassment and to raise awareness about street harassment [in an effort to] ultimately end it" (citation). To assist in the accomplishment of these goals, Hollaback! Istanbul has conducted a preliminary study to gather information about the prevalence and perception of street harassment in Turkish society, specifically in Istanbul. Information gathered from this research will aid Hollaback! Istanbul to better understand the cultural, social, and political influences on the perception of the issue, as well as how victims of street harassment are affected and who the main perpetrators of street harassment are. Additionally, the findings of this study will guide Hollaback! Istanbul's actions in its mission to achieve the aforementioned organizational goals.

Methods

Three methods were used to gather the desired information. Firstly, a survey was conducted to collect information on the frequency and type of street harassment, demographics of harassers, feelings of victims, and opinions on the causes and importance of the issue. Secondly, a media analysis was performed to examine how the media presents and discusses street harassment and related issues. For this portion of the research, a protocol form was developed to analyze the various pieces of media. Lastly, a legal analysis was conducted to review governmental positions on street harassment and related matters.

Participants

For the survey portion of the research, a convenience sample was used. Voluntary participants completed the survey in one of two formats, an online survey and a hard-copy version. Tools such as email and the social media network, Facebook, were used to inform and invite participants to complete the online survey. Hard-copy versions were administered electronically through e-mail, as well as in-person by pollsters. The online participants were able to complete the survey anonymously;

whereas some of the participants who completed hard-copy versions did so anonymously and some participants provided identifiable information.

Measures

The information sought in the surveys included several items (see Appendix A). Participants were first asked to provide their age, gender, and nationality to gather demographical data on the sample. Additionally, participants were asked about the types of harassment they had experienced, the frequency of harassment experiences, and the estimated ages and genders of harassers. Survey participants were also asked about their outward reactions to harassment directed towards them and their inner reactions and feelings to harassment, as well as if they had ever received assistance from bystanders or police. Finally, to learn more about general perceptions of street harassment as a social issue, participants were asked to rate the importance of the issue, if and how a person could control whether they were harassed, and how they have reacted when they have seen others harassed.

For the media analysis portion of the research, a protocol review form was developed to detect common themes, as well summarize the articles and note significant quotes and statistics (see Appendix B). The legal portion of the research examined aspects of the Turkish Criminal code. Information sought in this section was that which is or can be involved in incidents of street harassment, including intentional injury, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and insult.

Results

A total of 141 participants completed the survey on street harassment in Istanbul. Of the total 141 participants, 62% were Turkish, 24% were Americans, 6% were non-Turkish Europeans, and the remaining 8% were from various other countries and world regions. Ninety-one percent of the sample was female, 8.9% were male and .01% did

not specify a gender. Seventy-nine percent of the sample were between eighteen to thirty years old, 11% were between thirty to thirty-nine years old, 8% were between forty to forty-nine years old, 1% were fifty years old or older, and .1% did not specify their age. See appendices C through L for graphs of these statistics.**

For the question of types of harassment experienced, the top five types were leering, being honked at, being whistled at, having kissing noises directed at them, and being sexually touched or groped. Seventy-five percent of the sample experienced leering, 60% experienced being honked at, 59% experienced being whistled at, 48% had had kissing noises directed towards them, 30% had had vulgar gestures directed towards them, 46% had had sexist comments made towards them, and 45% had had sexually-explicit comments made towards them. Additionally, 29% of the 141 participants had had their path blocked by a street harasser, 43% had been followed, 12% had experienced a harasser masturbating, 46% had been sexually touched or groped, 10% had been assaulted, and 7% reported no experiences of street harassment.

In terms of frequency of street harassment experiences, 69% of participants reported experiencing harassment on at least a monthly basis, with 21% reporting experiencing street harassment once a month, 24% weekly, 18% daily, and 6% several times a day. Eleven percent reported experiencing harassment every few months, 4% annually, 6% every few years, and 3% reported only experiencing street harassment once in their lifetimes. Seven percent of those surveyed reported never having been harassed in a public space.

Eighty-four percent of participants reported never having been harassed by a female harasser. Of the 16% who had been on the receiving end of harassment from a female in public, the most common age group estimates for female harassers were: 30-39 (6%), 25-29 (5%), 18-24 (4%), 40-49 (4%), and 50-59 (%).

Conversely, 93% of participants reported experiencing harassment from a male

harasser in a public space. The most common male perpetrators of street harassment reported by participants were found to be 25-29 years old (76%), 18-24 (69%), 30-39 (62%), and 40-49 (55%). In addition, 39% reported being harassed by males aged 50-59, 24% reported being harassed by males aged 12-17, and 16% reported harassment from 60-69 year old males. The age groups of male harassers with the lowest reported rates of harassment among survey participants were 70-79 year old males (4%), 0-11 year old males (4%), and males aged eighty and older (2%). Seven percent of survey participants reported never having been harassed by males of any age.

The most common outward reactions to personal experiences of street harassment reported by survey participants were ignoring (69%), responding verbally (50%), and responding with body language (40%). Fourteen percent of survey participants sought help from bystanders, 13% responded physically, and seven percent had reported one or more incidents of street harassment to the police. Three percent of participants reacted to street harassment by smiling and 1% responded by waving. Twelve percent of respondents found the question not applicable to their experiences. Twenty-nine percent of participants were helped by bystanders during their street harassment experiences and 9% were aided by the police. Respondents described several instances of bystander assistance that included physical and verbal interventions with the harasser or harassers, accompanying the victim to their destination to ensure the victim's safety, assisting a victim in calling the police, and an employer firing an employee that had harassed a customer. Instances of assistance from the police included the removal of a harasser from a train and the arrest and detainment of a harasser. Several participants also noted occurrences when they approached police for assistance while being harassed and described the police as uncaring, inattentive, and unhelpful.

The most common inner reactions felt among participants due to experiences of

street harassment found were feelings of annoyance (73%), anger (66%), disgust (64%), fear (47%), and feeling insulted (40%). Twenty-three percent reported feeling helpless, 19% reported feeling sad, 11% reported feeling ashamed or guilty, and 8% reported feeling confused. Eight percent of participants reported having felt neutral during street harassment experiences, while 4% reported feeling flattered and .07% reported feeling happy. Other reactions participants described included feeling unsafe, upset, surprised, lonely, insecure, flustered, uncomfortable, and experiencing violent urges as well as feelings of pity for the harassers.

Participants were asked to rate the importance of street harassment as a social problem as critically important, very important, important, slightly important or not important. Seventy-seven percent of those surveyed found the issue to be either very important (40%) or critically important (37%). Sixteen percent of participants described the issue as important, while 6% considered it slightly important and 1% found it to be not important.

Sixty-seven percent of survey participants did not think a person could control being harassed on the street. Twenty-three percent of those surveyed believed how one behaves could control their experiences, while 23% believed how one dresses could also influence whether one is a victim of street harassment. Furthermore, 17% suggested avoiding certain areas could help one control experiences of street harassment and 17% believed avoiding eye contact could also help. Sixteen percent believed how a person walks could also control experiences of street harassment. How one looks and avoiding going out at certain times were both believed by 13% of participants to help one keep from being harassed on the street.

The final question of the survey, how participants have reacted when witnessing others being harassed in public spaces, found that 50% of participants have approached the victim of the harassment. Thirty-two percent of respondents reported they have

ignored incidents of others being harassed and 16% reported approaching the harasser in such an instance. Sixteen percent had contacted police when witnessing the street harassment of others. Participants also stated that they have reacted by becoming frightened and making a scene involving other bystanders. Several participants noted that they had never seen or noticed a stranger being harassed in a public place.

Fifteen pieces of media were analyzed for the media analysis portion of the research. As street harassment is generally considered an issue affecting women in greater numbers than man, the pieces of media analyzed concerned various women's issues including women's rights, violence against women, gender equality, and street harassment. Of the fifteen pieces of media examined, fourteen were online news articles and one was a fictional novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul* written by acclaimed Turkish author Elif Safak. The most common themes found in the analyses were male dominance, politics (police/governmental involvement, proposed and passed legislation), events that took place in Istanbul, domestic violence, activism, and female empowerment. Twelve of the articles described events that took place in, or a discussion of women's issues related to, the city of Istanbul specifically. Eight of the articles spoke of police intervention in terms of the need for more police protection of women or a lack there of. Only three of the articles were directly written on or about street harassment incidents.

The aspects of the legal system that were studied included the following articles of the Turkish Criminal Code: Article 86-Intentional Injury, Article 102-Sexual Assault, Article 105-Sexual Harassment, and Article 125-Insult. These articles were examined in an effort to understand how the Turkish judicial system and government punishes persons convicted of crimes that could and commonly do occur during street harassment incidents. Intentional injury was described by the code as the act of causing "physical pain, and the [impairment of] a person's health or ability to perceive" Punishments

prescribed for those convicted of such a crime included an unspecified judicial fine and a prison sentence for a term of four months to three years. In cases involving intentional injury against family members, mentally or physically defenseless persons, public officers, the penalty is increased by one half. Cases involving intentional injury perpetrated by a public officer or the use of a weapon also have penalties increased by one half.

Sexual assault is defined by the Turkish Criminal Code as the "violation of the physical integrity of another person, by means of sexual conduct" Persons convicted of sexual assault can face a two to seven year prison sentence. Those found to have inserted a foreign object or organ into the victim are sentenced to a seven to twelve year prison term. Convicted offenders of sexually assault who have assaulted a physically or mentally defenseless person or a family member, misused a position of power, or used a weapon in their assault should have their sentences increased by one half. This portion of the Criminal Code also mandates that those who have impaired the physical or mental health of a victim shall receive a minimum ten year prison sentence. Those who have left their victim in a vegetative state or fatally assaulted the victim should be sentenced to life imprisonment.

Persons convicted of sexual harassment, which unfortunately is not defined by the Turkish Criminal Code, can be forced to pay a judicial fine or face imprisonment for three months to two years. Those convicted of misusing power in workplaces and educational settings as a means to sexually harass a victim shall have their prison sentences increased by one half. Furthermore, those who have caused the victim to leave school or work shall have their prison sentence increased again by one half. Lastly, those found to have sexually harassed a family member should have their prison sentences also increased by one half and an additional one half should be added to the sentence if the victim has had to separate himself or herself from the family.

The act of insult is defined as the "attribution of an act or fact to a person in a manner that may impugn that person's honor, dignity or prestige, or the direct attack on someone's honor, dignity or prestige by swearing" Those convicted of insulting another person can receive a judicial fine or a prison sentence from three months to two years. To prove culpability in cases in which the victim is not present, the insult must have been witnessed by at least three people. If the insult is directed at the performance of a public officer's duty to the public or the subject matter of the insult is deemed sacred to religion, the penalty should not be less than one year. Lastly if an insult is committed in public, the punishment for the person convicted should be increased by one-sixth. (CITATION)

Discussion

The findings of the survey were revelatory of a number of important aspects of street harassment. Firstly, over half of the participants reported experiencing harassment from adult males in each of the following groups: 18-24, 25-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50-59. This finding caused great interest among the researchers as it could reveal a cultural acceptance and tolerance of harassing others in public due to the fact that adult, fully matured males were found to be the most common perpetrators of street harassment rather than children or teenagers still mentally maturing and learning social norms and values. Further research and study is needed to show that culture could promote or accept street harassment.

Another important finding was that 63% of the participants reported being harassed in public spaces on at least a monthly basis if not more often. Coupled with the fact that 75% reported feelings of annoyance, 66% reported feeling angry, 64% reported feeling disgusted, and 47% feeling scared, the frequency of street harassment could be greatly negatively affecting the daily activities, social interactions, and public life of residents of Istanbul. Additionally, the finding that 77% of participants believed street

harassment as an issue is either very important or critically important is revealing of the belief held by participants that the issue is affecting Turkish society in a negative way and action needs to be taken to prevent and eliminate it.

The findings of the media research revealed that the issues most reported on in the media are those which involve male dominance and domestic violence. The state of women in home-life received much greater attention than that of women in the public sphere of life. Therefore, it was difficult to detect any common perceptions and beliefs in the media about the issue of street harassment. A reoccurring theme among the articles was the need for more police intervention and protection in violence against women. Fortunately, one article (CITATION) reported the establishment of a taskforce in Istanbul dedicated to the protection of women, which, if implemented well, could be perceived as a positive step towards improving gender equality in Istanbul and Turkey in general.

The legal analysis was also informative of the political and judicial attitudes towards street harassment. With nine percent of the participants reporting receiving help from the police and no participants describing any legal action taken against harassers, it appears that perpetrators of certain types of street harassment could be prosecuted, but generally are not. Three of the types of street harassment polled by the researchers could be considered as insulting a person: vulgar gestures, sexist comments, and sexually-explicit comments. Thus, a victim of these acts may be able to seek justice by filing criminal charges against the person who harassed and insulted them. Additionally, incidents of assault and sexual touching/groping by street harassers could be defined as sexual assault and prosecuted as such. Furthermore, depending on the degree and type of assault, those assaulted during incidents of street harassment could also seek justice through the legal system under the intentional injury article. However, from the lack of any court case incidents in the survey findings and the media analyses it seems as though very few victims of street harassment ever seek legal action against their

harassers. If victims of street harassment sought legal action when necessary and harassers were prosecuted, perhaps it could help reduce the amount of harassment people face in public places in Istanbul.

Strengths & Limitations

Several limitations existed within this research, many of which were due to time and resource constraints contributed to many limitations. Firstly, as the participants surveyed were part of a convenience sample gathered by the researchers, most of whom are educated women close in age and socioeconomic status, the sample lacked a wide range of diversity. Therefore, certain aspects of the survey have minimal external validity due to the sample not representing the overall population of Istanbul. With nearly 80% of respondents being between the ages of eighteen and thirty, the majority of the participants were from the same age group and the opinions of those older were not as well reported. Furthermore, an overwhelming majority, ninety-one percent, of the participants were female, which left the male voice largely unheard.

Additionally, the information collected with the intention of gauging the socioeconomic statuses of participants was determined to be insufficient for this purpose. Thus, it was not possible to consider how socioeconomic status may relate to the perceptions and prevalence of street harassment. Furthermore, a number of the questions were found to be confusing to some participants. In particular, the question of whether one could control being harassed in public received answers stating contradictory beliefs in this regard, including several respondents who selected that people both could not control their reception of street harassment and that they could control it by various factors.

An additional limitation in the survey research was the lack of statistical analyses performed. Due to the aforementioned time and resource constraints of the researchers,

the completion of statistical tests was not possible and unfortunately the results lack statistical significance. A final limitation that occurred in the survey research was researcher bias. The primary designers of the survey and a significant portion of the participants were Americans (non-Turkish) and as a result the design of the survey and interpretation of the results may reflect more American and Eurocentric perspectives. To reduce this limitation, however, the original survey design was reviewed by Turkish members of Hollaback! Istanbul and translated into Turkish.

Within the media analysis portion of the survey, one limitation was the small amount of media analyzed, which was also due to researcher time and resource constraints. Also, the only media reviewed was in English, thus, reflecting researcher bias again by not containing Turkish-language pieces of media. As aspects of the intent and meaning of a writer's work can be expressed differently in different languages and, consequently, lost in translation, the lack of Turkish-language media limited the findings of this portion. A limitation of the legal portion of the research was that sexual harassment is not clearly defined by the government. Thus, it is difficult to determine whether many incidents of street harassment could be considered instances of sexual harassment and if harassers could be prosecuted for such a crime.

Two final limitations found in all three methods were the heteronormative and ethnocentric focuses of the research. The research did not include questions or examination of the harassment of ethnic minorities, non-homosexuals or transgender persons. The research was also primarily intended to focus on the street harassment of women and is, therefore, not revealing of street harassment directed towards other groups.

Despite the numerous limitations, a number of strengths existed within the research. Firstly, no other similar studies on street harassment in Istanbul have been conducted. Thus, the findings of this research can hopefully encourage more in-depth

and expert research to be performed on the issue.

An additional strength of the study was the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative data found provided concrete figures to help the researchers assess and understand the prevalence and effects of street harassment. The qualitative data provided richer and more descriptive data, which supplemented the findings included in the quantitative data.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Although the research included several limitations and areas for improvement, important information also emerged. People, women especially, are regularly experiencing incidents in public that make them feel angry and agitated, as well as unsafe and uncomfortable in their surroundings. As staying home in fear of experiencing harassment on the street or in other public places is not and should not be an option for individuals, living in a city where one does not feel secure in their environment can likely have adverse psychological and social effects on a person, such as feeling disempowered and disconnected from their community. If individuals do not feel a sense of belonging or accountability to their communities, they will likely have less motivation to engage in civic activity and contribute to the progress of their society.

A number of recommendations can be offered for future research conducted on this topic. Firstly, a larger and more diverse sample is absolutely necessary for seeking statistically significant results and drawing evidence-based conclusions about the effects, prevalence, and perceptions of street harassment. Secondly, a study that aims to analyze one aspect of street harassment would provide more in-depth findings rather than a study that attempts to examine several various factors of the issue. Lastly, a study with less time and resource constraints conducted by culturally sensitive and knowledgeable professional researchers would provide more credibility to future research on the topic.

Appendix A

Hollaback! Istanbul Street Harassment Survey

Age: ____ Neighborhood of Residence: _____ Gender: _____
City, country: _____ Occupation: _____

1) Have you ever experienced any of the following types of street harassment?(circle all that apply):

- Leering
- Kissing noises
- Sexually-explicit comments
- Masturbating
- Other: _____
- Honking
- Vulgar gestures
- Blocking path
- Sexual touching/groping
- Whistling
- Sexist comments
- Following
- Assaulting
- None

2) How frequently do you experience street harassment in Istanbul?

- Several times a day
- Annually
- Daily
- Every few years
- Weekly
- Once
- Monthly
- Never
- Every few months

3a) The people who have harassed you are:

- Male
- Female
- Mostly male, some female
- Mostly female, some male
- N/A

3b) Please estimate the age groups of the people who have harassed you are (circle all that apply):

- 0-11
- 12-17
- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80+

4) In which neighborhoods have you experienced harassment?

—

5) How do/did you react when you experience/d street harassment? (circle all that apply)

- Smiling
- Waving
- Ignoring
- Responding verbally
- Responding physically
- Responding with body language
- Reporting to police
- Seeking help from bystanders
- Other: _____ -N/A

6a) Did you receive any assistance from bystanders?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

6b) If yes, how did they help you?

—

7) If you have reported an incident to the police, how did the police handle the situation?

—

8)How does/did your experience being harassed on the street make you feel? (circle all that apply)

- Flattered
- Happy
- Neutral
- Annoyed
- Ashamed/Guilty
- Insulted

-Scared -Angry -Sad -Helpless -Confused -
Disgusted
-Other: _____

9) Please rate how important of a social issue you think street harassment is:

-Critically Important -Very Important -Important
-Slightly important -Unimportant

10a) Do you think a person can control whether they are harassed on the street?

-Yes -No

10b) If yes, which of the following are ways a person can control being harassed on the street? (circle all that apply)

-How they look -How they dress -How they walk -How they behave
-Avoiding going out alone -Avoid going out at certain times -Avoiding certain areas
-Avoid making eye contact

-Other: _____

11) How do you react when you see someone harassed on the street? (circle all that apply)

-Ignore it -Approach the victim -Approach the harasser
-Contact the police -Other: _____

Appendix B

Başlık/Title:

Yazar(lar)/Author(s):

Tarih/Date:

Kaynak/Source:

Tip/Type:

Özet/Summary:

Temalar/Themes (yuvarlak içine alınız/circle all that apply):

Aile içi şiddet/domestic violence

feminizm/feminism

race/ethnicity

heteroseksüellik/heterosexuality

homoseksüellik/homosexuality

biseksüellik/bisexuality

aseksüellik/asexuality

sosyoekonomik statü/socioeconomic

işyeri/workplace

eğitim/education

politika/politics

spor/sports

eğlence sektörü/entertainment industry

news reportage

köşeyazısı/opinion

tarihsel/historical

kadın yazar/written by woman

erkek yazar/written by man

İstanbul

İstanbul dışı/outside of Istanbul

aktivisim/activism

erkek egemenliği/male dominance

kadın güçlendirme/female empowerment

Diğer/Other:

Alıntılar/İstatistik veriler

Quotes/Statistics: