

Sexual Harassment in Public Places of Afghanistan

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In the Name of ALLAH, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family, who give me inspiration and courage to do my best at this project. Special dedication goes to my mom and dad for their prayers, patience, help, encouragement, support, care, and endless love during my academic life.

I would also like to dedicate this work to all Afghan women who experienced and observed sexual harassment in their lives. I want every Afghan woman to know that if she thinks she is the only one who experienced sexual harassment and is upset about it, she should really read this work. You all, Afghan women, should know that I did this research with a hope that one day you all will be able to raise your voices against this unjust and unforgettable behaviour towards you. I hope and pray that one day you all will raise your voices against sexual harassment and stop blaming yourself and others to blame you for the mistakes that you have never done and for the experience you are going through.

Abstract

Afghanistan has seen many changes in the political and social arenas as a consequence of different wars. Afghan women, in particular, are the most vulnerable citizens of Afghanistan as they experience gendered violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment. Sexual harassment in public spaces is one of the most prevalent forms of gendered violence that women and girls face in their daily lives in Afghanistan. However, it is rarely the subject matter of discussion. Moreover, due to patriarchal norms and social relations, we usually do not get to hear women's voices on the topic. This thesis explores the sexual harassment of Afghan women in public spaces in Afghanistan from the perspective of the women themselves. I used three methods: in-depth interviews, autoethnography, and discourse analysis. This thesis gave women an opportunity to discuss their experiences of sexual harassment and provide recommendations that can be used as an initial step to address sexual harassment in public spaces in Afghanistan.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Afghanistan is a country that has gone through lots of political and social changes due to different wars that have impacted people's lives in different ways. Therefore, it is important to mention that most citizens of Afghanistan face difficulties in their lives because of uncertain political and social changes. However, Afghan women are the most vulnerable citizens of Afghanistan, as they often face different forms of violence and cruelty such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, early marriage, and so on. A study shows that 87.2 % of Afghan women face at least one type of the above mentioned violence (Stop Violence Against Women in Afghanistan: 2011). These forms of violence are political as well as social, which is associated with patriarchal power (Bunch, 491:1990). Sexual harassment in public spaces is one of the most disturbing forms of gendered violence that women and girls face in their daily lives in most countries of the world including Afghanistan. According to Merry, gendered violence is referred to "as violence whose meaning depends on the gendered identities of the parties. It is interpretation of violence through gender" (3: 2009). Sexual harassment is one form of gendered violence as women are harassed because of their gender. Sexual harassment can be defined as:

any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another (United Nations High Commissions for Refugees).

Based on my research, sexual harassment in public places is one of the major forms of violence that Afghan women face in their daily lives in Afghanistan. All my interviewees, including myself, faced both verbal and physical form of sexual harassment in public places of Afghanistan, which shows the seriousness of the issue of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. My

interviewees' life experiences of harassment, their ideas, and their suggestions helped me to understand the issue of sexual harassment in public places of Afghanistan better.

Despite the fact that sexual harassment is one of the major problems in Afghanistan it has not been recognized as a crime in Afghanistan. The absence of laws in Afghanistan against this behaviour increases the tendency of people to engage in sexual harassment. Afghan women are in fear of verbal and physical harassment when they step out of their homes because they know that at some point of the day they will face such abuse. Sexual harassment is commonly called teasing, which is a euphemism that undermines the seriousness of sexual harassment. According to my interviewees' experiences, even though many women in Afghanistan face sexual harassment, they are often silent due to various reasons. One of the reasons for women's silence even after experiencing harassment is the shame that is attached to sexual harassment. Women tend to be blamed for their action if something wrong happens to them. Victim-blaming, a thought that women "provoke violence" and, therefore, deserve violence (Dobash & Dobash; and Women's Coalition Against Family Violence in Saroca 2006:41-41), is a norm with a long history. When men touch women, they are telling their victims that women should not be on the streets otherwise they will face harassment. This practice shows that women do not have freedom to go outside of home. If they dare to go, then they have to expect to face different forms of sexual harassment. This qualitative research project explored many different dimensions of women's experiences of sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan.

Although all Afghans should have freedom of movement from one place to another, Afghan women are always in fear of sexual harassment. Despite the fact that Afghan women embody half the population of Afghanistan, they often lack freedom. Being sexually harassed in public places does not only hamper women's freedom, it hampers their position in the society as

well. This can be seen in the following example of Noorjahan Akbar, an Afghan women's rights activist:

I was standing by a vegetable stand and bargaining the price of fresh mint when you passed me and nonchalantly pinched my bottom. I turned red. The old man who was selling vegetables noticed but didn't say anything. He probably sees this every day (2013).

When somebody touches a woman and she feels that people choose not to notice, it shows the failure to acknowledge women's experiences of harassment. Discussing this incident, Akbar says that the shopkeeper may not have noticed how she was sexually abused as it is a very common occurrence, or he might also be one of those men who harass women. In a society when women face sexual harassment, it surely shows that there is no equality between men and women. The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan promotes the idea that women and men are equal in every aspect of life (Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, article 22, 4:2004). However, the sexual harassment of women in public places clearly undermines the constitution of Afghanistan and demonstrates that women do not have freedom to go outside and be in public freely.

Research Topic:

The title of my senior thesis is Sexual Harassment in public places in Afghanistan. In my research, I focused on sexual harassment of women in public places such as streets, shops, offices, and transportation. These areas are usually constructed as male domains, which can be one of the reasons why women get harassed. When we talk about sexual harassment, it is really important to consider who gets harassed, and what impact it has on women. As a result, women often choose to become invisible, or are made invisible by social denial of their experiences. Sexual harassment is a highly debatable topic since perpetrators do not usually accept the

responsibility for their behaviour. This statement leads us back to Akbar's experience of sexual harassment that no man who witnessed the incident accepted that the perpetrator had done anything to her. As Akbar's narrative points out, if women ever get a chance to talk to the Afghan men regarding sexual harassment, the men usually refuse the notion that women get harassed.

Research questions

1. What meanings do Afghan women give for sexual harassment?
2. How does sexual harassment impact on Afghan women, and how do they deal with it?
3. What recommendations can Afghan women suggest regarding sexual harassment?

Rationale of the Study:

We usually do not get to hear from women about sexual harassment. One of the reasons I decided to do this research is to give women an opportunity to discuss their experiences of sexual harassment in a safe environment. I wanted to hear women's voices directly and to understand through their narratives and life experiences how sexual harassment impacted on them. The purpose of my research is not only to hear women but to give some women a chance to express their ideas about how this issue of sexual harassment should be dealt with. In other words, what recommendations women have regarding the fight against sexual harassment? As women are to great extent victims of sexual harassment they should be centrally involved in developing initiatives to address sexual harassment. Therefore, this research gave a chance to young Afghan women to talk about some possible initiatives that can help Afghan society to eliminate any form of sexual harassment in public places.

In addition, there is hardly any literature on sexual harassment in Afghanistan and women find it difficult to discuss. Thus, there is a need for critically informed empathetic research that allows women to share their life experiences about sexual harassment and give us an idea about how this harassment can happen in an Islamic country that advocates women's rights in its constitution.

Significance of Study:

The study was significant as it focused on some important and controversial elements in Afghan society such as gender, abuses of power and control, and power relations. Women are the ones who overwhelmingly get harassed so this study helped us to understand patriarchal power and hierarchy in Afghan society. Thus, to become aware of women's situation in Afghanistan, it is really important to talk to women and have research on what they go through in their lives from their own perspective. It is really hard to talk about sexual harassment based on assumption, so this research can be used as evidence for the fact that women are harassed and what can be done against this unjust act of a particular group of men towards women.

Benefits of the Research:

One of the main benefits of this qualitative research is that it will help us to hear women's voices regarding their experiences of sexual harassment. This research helped us to connect participants' experiences with ideologies and discourses on sexual harassment. There is very little research on sexual harassment in Afghanistan; therefore, this research helped to produce solid data to draw on and raise the issue of sexual harassment.

This research has some main benefits. Firstly, we hear women's stories regarding sexual harassment and, secondly, we have an opportunity to hear their recommendations regarding dealing with the issue of sexual harassment. It is really important to find some solution for dealing with sexual harassment efficiently. This research is really helpful in terms of understanding the complex issues of sexual harassment and some possible solutions to deal with it. Sexual harassment is not an easy thing that can be dealt with in one night. However, we can slowly go towards developing initiatives to eliminate sexual harassment if we show that we are aware about it. This research demonstrates that women do suffer and they are really concerned about it. Therefore, this issue should not be ignored anymore.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

This section outlines some of the key theoretical concepts that are effective in understanding women's experiences of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. The following key concepts helped me to analysis my interviews, discourse analysis, and my own experience. The key concepts that I focused on in my research are the social construction of gender, honour and shame, matter out of place, panopticon, and life chances. As sexual harassment happens to women, it is important to get a sense of why it is predominantly women who are harassed in public places. If we look at the term gender, it might give us some clue about how women are socially constructed based on their sex.

Gender, which is a socially constructed concept, categorizes women and men based on their biological differences (Cranny, Kirby, Stavropolous, and Warning, 2003:3). Gender is much more related in defining who we are. Gender is not just about relationship between men and women; it is about the relationship between different bodies. Gender itself is not fixed

(Connell, 2009). Rather, it is enacted or performed in interaction with others and, therefore, it is fluid and shifts in different contexts (West and Zimmerman, 1987). However, as Cranny-Francis, Kirby, Stavropolous, and Warning discuss, in our societies gender is often perceived as fixed and related to biological differences (2003:3). By looking at sexual harassment in public places through the lens of gender, we can see how women are constructed on the basis of their gender. If we do not use a gendered analysis, we will not get a clear picture of women's and men's situation in Afghanistan.

There is a connection between how women are constructed in Afghanistan and how they are perceived and victimized by that construction. In all cultures there are certain values attached to families, individuals and societies. In Afghanistan, honor and shame are the most important constructions or values attached to women and they increase the vulnerability that leads women to keep silent after experiencing sexual harassment. The concepts of honor and shame are associated with the female's body, her sexuality, and social status (Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 9). If these values are not maintained, the honor of the families is seen at risk. According to Korteweg, honor refers to an extensive number of practices, which is highly problematic (2012: 143). The pressure of the honor of the families is placed on women's shoulders. Women have to take care and ensure the honor of the family; otherwise, losing the honor will bring shame to the entire family.

Bennett and Manderson mention that honor and shame both are locally constructed and connected to women's sexuality and their sexual purity; hence losing their purity will bring shame to their families (2003:9). Honor is a highly problematic term because it is attached to women and their sexuality, which often leads to multiple forms of violence. In addition, honor is a product of patriarchal systems, where men are the head of the family (Gill, 2009: 477). In

patriarchal systems men are the protector of the honor of the family and men have the responsibility of protecting women, which often leads to women being seen as men's property (Gill, 2009:477; Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 9). Here the idea of honor and women overlap with one another while men are considered as the protector of the honor, women are attached to honor and shame. The desire of men to retain political authority reinforces women as their property. Bennett and Manderson discuss the notion of sexual purity and virginity before marriage that often keeps women silent and forces them to accept violence in order to prevent violence (2003:9). Honor killing is something that has been practiced among people of some societies as a way of respecting or holding up the family's values. Based on Gill's definition, honor killing refers to an initiative in which women's family members kill her as they do not accept her sexual behaviour (Gill, 487: 2013). In this context, women's death is normalized and seen necessary to restate family's honor and shame. The honor killing does not only apply on women who have premarital sex or sex with multiple partners, but it is practiced on women who are raped as well. Women who survive rape are re-victimized and hold responsible/blamed for the rape. Hence, it becomes essential for women to monitor their movements or they can even get killed. In Afghanistan, it is shameful for a woman to speak up when she experiences violence such as sexual harassment, as there is an idea attached to harassment which is that good women do not get harassed. When women are bound to the idea of honor and shame, they obviously have to keep their experiences of harassment silent and invisible. The fact that women are considered as keepers of their families' honor leads them to experience violence and accept violence.

The sense of honor and shame attached to women bodies not only increases women's vulnerability to experience violence, it also leads them to start self monitoring and observing

their own behaviour. When we talk about women policing their behaviour, we can refer to Michel Foucault's concept, panopticon as it helps us to visualize women's self monitoring in terms of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. Drawing on Foucault, Mosan explains panopticon as,

an architectural design put forth by Jeremy Bentham in the mid-19th Century for prisons, insane asylums, schools, hospitals, and factories. Instead of using violent methods, such as torture, and placing prisoners in dungeons that were used for centuries in monarchical states around the world...The Panopticon offered a powerful and sophisticated internalized coercion, which was achieved through the constant observation of prisoners, each separated from the other, allowing no interaction, no communication. This modern structure would allow guards to continually see inside each cell from their vantage point in a high central tower, unseen by the prisoners. Constant observation acted as a control mechanism; a consciousness of constant surveillance is internalized (Mosan,2014).

Building panopticon is another way of exercising power as it creates fear. These prisoners might not have a gun on their head all the time, but they have a sense that someone is watching them and they can be caught doing something wrong at any point (Foucault in Mosan, 2014). The concept panopticon is a good way of understanding how woman feel when they go out of their houses and when they appear in public places. They should be conscious as they are always in fear that men follow them and notice them on the street and might do something wrong to them. Women are scared and try to monitor themselves in order to prevent being harassed and being blamed for the experience of harassment. There are two ideas that force women to monitor themselves in the public areas, first is that they can get harassed anytime and second is having the sense that they do not belong to the public space.

In terms of my thesis, Afghan women in public places can be conceptualised as matter out of place. Mary Douglas' concept 'matter out of place' is defined as something that is displaced and is not where it is supposed to be (2006:36). Douglas compares 'matter out of place' with dirt and she says that dirt is out of place because it is polluted (2006:36). I will be

using the concept 'matter out of place' in order to make sense of sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan. The concept helped me to understand how men consider women 'out of place' in public spaces and how these women are then harassed. Women in public places are often harassed and it is not only one woman who is harassed. Therefore, this suggests that women are considered 'matter out of place'. When women are harassed, they are told that they do not belong to public space. Hence, they will get harassed if they appear.

Aside from increasing women's vulnerability to violence, the way they are constructed can also close down their opportunities in life. When we construct gender as fixed, then a person's life chances will be reduced. Max Weber's concept of life chances is about opportunities that human beings get throughout their lives – their access to scarce resources such as participation in social activities like education (Breen, nd 41). When women face harassment on a daily bases, there is a high chance for them to drop out of school, work, or in general refrain from being involved in social activities. Therefore, their life chances are constrained severely. Life chance is one of the key concepts that are really helpful in understanding and analysing the lives of Afghan women and their deprivation in terms of scarce resources.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I reviewed some of the literature that helps us to understand the issue of sexual harassment. This literature review is organized thematically.

Sexual harassment:

Sexual harassment in public places is a very common form of gendered violence that many Afghan women face in Afghanistan regardless of their clothing, caste, and ethnicity. Wolayat Tabasum, an Afghan woman, conducted research on street harassment in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan (2012). According to Tabasum's main findings, "women were blamed for dressing in an attractive manner, while, [her] observation made it clear to [her] that women were harassed regardless of their dress styles" (2012: 6) Thus, most of the time when Afghan women are harassed, they are blamed for the way they dress. The harassment of women does not depend on their dressing style, but it depends on how men perceive them. Tabasum mentions that "all harassment in Afghanistan is sexual in nature" and she also points out that street harassment works to "humiliate and oppress women by objectifying them" (2012:11). The kind of harassment that Afghan women face is mostly associated with power and superiority that men feel over women. Tabasum mentions that sexual harassment can take place in different forms in Afghanistan such as "whispers, outright dehumanizing calls to women, touching that, in turn, ranges from stealing kissing to groping" (2012: 11). Most Afghan women cannot raise their voices against any of these abuses due to the social pressure that they have to be silent. Sexual harassment is due to the patriarchal society in Afghanistan that accepts such men's behaviour towards women (Tabasum, 2012: 11). Sexual harassment is not something very common or

unique to Afghan women only, women in most countries face sexual harassment. As Holly Kears indicates, the experience of women in the countries is not different than what Afghan women face in Afghanistan: Kears mentions:

Starting at a young age, as many as 80 percent of women around the world face at least occasional unwanted, harassing attention in public places from men they do not know; some women face it daily. The harassment ranges from physically harmless leers, whistles, honks, kissing noises, and nonsexual explicit evaluative comments, to more insulting and threatening behavior like vulgar gestures, sexually charged comments, flashing, and stalking, to illegal actions like public masturbation, sexual touching, assault, and rape (2010: 3).

Kears's description of types of sexual harassment helped me to better understand what constitutes sexual harassment in Afghanistan. I used Kears's description of types of sexual harassment to conceptualize Afghan women's experiences of harassment. Sexual harassment tends not to be viewed as a problem that should be tackled (Tabasum, 2012: 27). Sexual harassment often tends to render women's experience of harassment in public places. As Kears mentions,

Street harassment and the underlying fear of it escalating into something worse makes most women feel unwelcome and unsafe in public at least sometimes, especially when they are alone. It causes women to restrict their time in public alone and to be on guard while there, limiting their access to resources and leadership opportunities (2010: 4).

due to the fear of harassment women feel unsafe and unwanted in the public places, so they start to restrict themselves from using the public space and the way they use.

In Afghanistan, the term sexual harassment is hardly used by anyone even among those who are harassed. Sexual harassment of women is usually called "Khyaban azari", which means "teasing" or "annoying" in English (Tabasum, 2012: 26). Using the word teasing for sexual harassment is problematic due to the fact that the term downplays the seriousness of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment on roads is very visible to women, that is, they see it. If women raise their voices at the time they are harassed, people will become aware of it and might take action

against the perpetrators. However, most women are silenced due to the way their sexualities are constructed. In many societies women's sexualities are seen as a sense of honor for their families and their societies, therefore, if anything happens to their sexuality, their honor will be gone (Bennett and Manderson, 2003). As Bennett and Manderson mention:

the salience of Asian notions of honor and shame, and the reverence for female virginity and sexual purity prior to marriage and chastity thereafter, in uniform form countries represented (2003: 9).

If women speak up, then their sexualities will be put into question and they will be seen as impure. The ideas of "purity", "honor", "virginity" make it hard for women to raise their voices about the sexual harassment they experience (Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 9).

Social construction of gender

Gender is a socially constructed term that divides humans into two categories of male and female and sets out different rules or different norms for them (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 1). However, as Cranny-Francis, A Kirby, J, Stavropolous, P. Warning, W point out that there are more than two genders and it is important to state that gender is not simply about relationship between men and women (2003: 1). The social construction of gender is related to the way men and women are constructed and their performances are based on their gender. The classification of men and women makes women invisible. Feminist argue that terms "like 'he' and 'man' contribute to making women invisible — that is, to obscuring women's importance, and distracting attention from their existence" (Saul, 2010).

Sexual harassment is one of the main discriminations that women face. It is really hard to find connection between women, harassment, and society without looking at gender and sex.

Women are harassed due to their gender by men so sexual harassment is one type of gendered violence and gender discrimination (Kearl, 2010: xxi). It is particular social constructions of gender that are underpin the harassment that women face in society. These social constructions of gender undermine women's position in society. They ascribe women an identity that is far lower than men. As a result, sometime women choose to keep the experience of sexual harassment silent, and this sense of invisibility extends to their actual behaviour and they make themselves "invisible".

However, it is not only women who are constructed in certain way; men are also socially constructed based on their gender. Connell talks about the men's construction of masculinity in relation to violence (2009:4). Connell mentions that men are usually engaged with violence due to the fact that they have been "prepared" for it (2009:4). From their childhood, men are asked to show bravery, masculinity, and be tough, which somehow teaches them to be strong and feel powerful (Connell, 2009: 4). There is social pressure on men because they are usually constructed as strong, tough, and fearless. These constructions can help them to feel that they are superior from a very early age so they can practice their power. Their usage of power and superiority often leads them to dominate women, which can be one of the biggest reasons for sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan.

Matter Out of Place:

Mary Douglas uses the concept "matter out of place" to conceptualize something that has been out of place for some reason. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas talks about purity, hygiene, and dirt

(Douglas, 1966). She defines each of them separately and points out that the dirty and dust are 'out of place' and she brings out the idea of "matter out of place" (Douglas, 1966: 36). Douglas defines 'matter out of place' "as a violation of ordered relations" (in Saroca, 2002: 36), which can be connected to sexual harassment that Afghan women face. Douglas uses the concept "matter out of place" to show the relationship between purity and dirt. Between both of the words, dirt is something that is out of place and should be thrown away. In addition, Douglas describes that if a person has no space, he/she does not belong to the society and is marginalized and that leads him/her to not be able to do anything for his/her "abnormal situation" (Douglas, 1966: 98). It should be noted that in using the term "him" Douglas excludes women. Therefore, it shows her to be gender blind. Douglas idea of "crossing boundaries" takes us to the idea that men may have about Afghan women and why they are harassed. Douglas describes that if someone crosses boundaries that do not fit into the actual social and cultural norms, then that person is seen as "matter out of place", which is considered something that is polluted (1966: 114-140).

Drawing on Douglas's framework, Saroca writes about violence against Filipino women in Australia and how this violence is represented in Australian media (2002). Saroca talks about Filipino women and the violence that they face due to being constructed as so called "mail order brides" and she uses Douglas's concept "matter out of place" (2002: 36). Saroca points out that Filipino women are seen as 'out of place' in Australia because they cross "boundaries" of "race" and "space" which "endangers" themselves and others (2002: 36). When Filipino women marry Australian men, crossing boundaries increases their vulnerability because they are 'out of place'. Therefore, this can be connected to the situation of Afghan women. As I have suggested, when Afghan women appear in public spaces, they also cross boundaries and that is one explanation as

to why they are harassed. Afghan women are seen as 'out of place' that puts them in danger and vulnerable condition as same as Filipino women.

Moreover, public places are occupied by men so women are not supposed to use them frequently and if they do they will get harassed because they are 'out of place'. Gill Valentine's work (1989) is also useful in understanding these structured issues. Valentine mention's women's usage of space and the fear of male violence and its relationship with the space (1989). She also points out that women are conscious about the usage of space to avoid male violence (Valentine, 1989). Valentine talks about how Western women perceive public spaces and the ways they use public spaces in their daily lives and how they put certain boundaries on themselves in their usage of these space (1989). Women associate male violence with particular public environments so they fear to use certain spaces (Valentine, 1989 386). Valentine also points out that Western women experience public space differently than men, and that public spaces are highly gendered (1989:387-388). This notion of the fear of male spaces is particularly relevant to my own research on the sexual harassment of Afghan women. Valentine does not use the concept "matter out of place" but the way she describes women's fear of public spaces we can relate it to the Douglas's concept. In addition, Liz Bondin and Mona Domosh discuss how the usages of spaces depend on class, gender, and societal norms in general.

A woman seen out alone after a certain time of night or on the "wrong" street was immediately marked as an outsider to society's norms, that is, as some form of social cast (Bondi and Domosh, 1998:270).

Women are socially constructed as being responsible for their movement and the kind of reaction they get from that. When they are harassed, they are the ones who should be blamed. If they appear in the street and are harassment it is considered that they are in the "wrong street" they

are 'out of place' so the responsibility of keeping themselves pure lies on their shoulders that is why they are blamed when they are harassed (Bondi and Domosh, 1989: 270).

Chapter 3: Methodology and Ethical Issues

Research design and procedure

Data collection methods and explanation of strengths and weaknesses

I used three types of research methods for my research, in-depth interview, autoethnography, and discourse analysis.

According to Mack, Macqueen, Guest, and Namey, “in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of participant’s perspective on the research topic” (2005:29). I asked questions from six young Afghan women related to my topic, mostly about the impact of sexual harassment on Afghan women’s lives. I interviewed young Afghan educated girls, who are studying at the university. All the interviewees’ names are not used in any part of my thesis. I give them pseudonyms as following Habiba, Shakiba, Mena, Sosan, Asma, and Adiba. This method of research was done face to face, so it helped me to not only focus on their opinions but their gestures as well.

In the interviews, I explored what sexual harassment means to Afghan women. I also asked my interviewees to share some of their experiences of harassment and other women’s experiences of harassment. Furthermore, I focused on interviewees’ suggestions regarding dealing with the issue of harassment in Afghanistan.

As every method has its strengths and weaknesses, the strength and weakness of in-depth interview should be acknowledged as well. One of the biggest strength is that we will get to hear what sexual harassment means to Afghan women from their perspectives. Most of my participants had some knowledge about gender studies and violence against women, so they

could see the problem of sexual harassment as gender discrimination. The good thing about interviewing them was that I could finish all the interviews within one month. I had to spend three to four hours with each of my interviewees so that I could talk about the issue of sexual harassment in Public places of Afghanistan. As it is mentioned, one of the strength of taking interview is the sense of closeness or involvement that is developed during the research and the ability to address sensitive issues (Mack et al. 2005: 29). The sense of closeness helped me to be able to talk about my interviewees experiences.

The second method that I used for my research was autoethnography where I, the researcher, analysed my own experiences and observations regarding sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan. According to Pace:

Autoethnographers reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural, political or social understanding (2012:2).

Drawing on my experience, I critically reflected on the issue of sexual harassment in Afghanistan and wove my story through my analysis of interviews and videos. Thompson argues that there is a connection between the researcher/authors' personal knowledge and experiences and their research (2010:10). She points out that researchers are not outside the social world they study and their experiences are valuable resources in making sense of the world (2010:10).

Thompson defines this process as the constructed knower. According to Thompson:

Constructed knowers weave together what they know from personal experience with what they learn from others. They move beyond academic disciplines and their methods as the sole source of authority, and reclaim themselves as sources of knowledge ... They mingle the procedural knowledge of their discipline with their personal knowledge of themselves ... Constructed knowledge requires reflexivity. That is, knowers have to reflect on their own thoughts, moods, desires, and judgment (2010:10).

Therefore, knowing that the researcher's experience is a valuable source, I drew on my own experience and observation of harassment to critically analyse women's situation in Afghanistan. Combining my personal analytical experience of sexual harassment with the experiences of my interviewees and analysis of the discourse from the videos, allowed me to show a strong connection between the research and the topic. In addition, this research method gave me a space where I could include my own experiences to show a strong connection between me as the researcher and the topic.

The third research method that I used for my research was discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is centrally focussed on analysing discourses. Discourse is the language that is used to show what people think, speak and write about a particular topic (Thompson, 2010: 12). Discourses have to do a lot with power (Thompson, 2010: 13). There is always a subject position in discourse and, since there is always a subject position, there are power relations (Thompson, 2010:12). Subject refers to every individual and subject position is the side or site that they take on a particular topic or situation (Thompson, 2010:12-14). For example, becoming a feminist is taking a specific subject position (Thompson, 2010:12-14). Discourses vary in their power and "authority" (Thompson, 2010: 13). For discourse analysis, I analysed some of the existent discourse about sexual harassment and women's position in Afghanistan and compare them to what my interviewees say in their interviews. In addition, in 2013, two Afghan Asian University for Women's students, Masooma Maqsoodi and Zeinab Noori conducted a research workshop project in Afghanistan, in which they held workshops for Afghan school boys and girls to talk about sexual harassment. As the workshops were filmed, I used the voices of the boys to add male perspective in my thesis. These narratives help us to better understand the issue of

harassment. Adding male voices allow us to see some of the discourses attached to sexual harassment and women's experiences of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. I gave these Afghan boys pseudonym as following Ahmad, Ehsan, Kabir, and Ahmad. Since the girls did not allow video or tape recorders, I am unable to analyse what they said in these workshops.

One of the biggest strengths of the discourse analysis was that I was able to compare the interviews to wider discourses in order to build a bigger picture of what sexual harassment really means in Afghanistan, in particular to Afghan women, and how it occurs.

Selection of site, participants and recruitment

As the focus of my study was on Afghan women's experiences of sexual harassment, I selected women from Afghanistan. Recruitment in qualitative research is usually snowball, purposive or convenience. I used purposive method in my research which allowed me to choose interviewees that fit into my research and met the needs of my research. All the interviewees had signed the consent form and were given an information sheet. In order to know more about participating in the study [See appendix 1, 2 and 3 for consent form, information sheet and research question]. The participants decided where to conduct the interviews since I did not want them to face any problem and disturbance.

I contacted all the interviews before the interview so that I knew their preferred place for the interview. It was voluntary based interview so the interviewees were interviewed according to their own will.

Data Analysis:

After collecting my data, I looked for themes and coded them and did the analysis. I found some common themes in the different interviews that I took from the Afghan women. I compared their answers, and different ideas in order to understand the issue more. Then, I compared the interviews with the themes that emerged from my discourse analysis. I connected these themes to the large themes of the discourses regarding sexual harassment of Women/girls in public places of Afghanistan.

Potential and ethical consideration:

The issue of sexual harassment is something that has not been discussed extensively in Afghanistan due to the constraints on women who are the victims of harassment. For instance, if an Afghan woman is harassed and raises her voice, people usually blame her for wearing provocative clothes, huge make up, and being outside late at night. Therefore, many women prefer to stay silent instead of speaking against the harassment and abuse. Thus, knowing that it is hard for Afghan women to talk about this issue, I was very careful in terms of my participants' confidentiality and safety. Taking part in my research as a participant was totally voluntary, so the participants' willingness was pivotal. I gave all my interviewees pseudonyms. I also interviewed them in the place where they felt safe and comfortable. In addition, my Senior Thesis advisor, Professor Cleonicki Saroca, provided me with ongoing support in the field to ensure ethical protocols/practices were followed carefully. All the interviewees were given information sheets which stated that their participation is voluntary so they could drop off from the study any time they wanted. Moreover, both oral consent and written consent of the participants were taken before conducting the interviews [See appendix 1, 2 and 3 for consent form, information sheet].

The in-depth interviews were conducted at a suitable time for the interviewees. Furthermore, the interviewees were independent so they could drop out from the research at anytime they wanted to if they decided not to be part of this research.

Moreover, several other measures were put in place to minimize any possible risks. I discussed my project with a psychologist and requested her to provide counselling services in case participants experienced distress during the interviews and requested support. I treated participants respectfully and I did not put pressure on them if they refrained from answering any of my questions. I made sure to let them know that they could stop the interview any time if they did not feel comfortable to talk about the topic anymore. Self reflexivity is essential to researches and reflexive researchers should be conscious of their own reaction, thoughts, therefore the researchers should be aware of their own biases; therefore, I needed to be reflexive in all aspects of my research (Dickson-Swift-etal, 2008: 24). In all aspects of my research process, I was reflexive about how my values, ideas, and interactions with participants impact on my research. When I heard women's experiences and ideas about sexual harassment during the interviews, I shared some of my own stories and ideas as well to make the interviewees comfortable in talking and also to constantly reflect on their views and experiences. Consequently, taking all the aspects of my research into consideration, I was very careful with each process as each had its own contribution to the outcome of my research and each process took me one step further to write up my report. So after taking care of all the safety measure, all my interviewees mentioned that they felt the sense of trust and closeness during their interviews. As it is hard for most Afghans to talk about sexual harassment because it is a very controversial and hard topic to deal with, some of my interviewees talked openly about their experiences but some were a bit hesitant to talk. So, I had to make them feel comfortable to talk about it. I shared my own experiences with them in

order to make them feel that they are not the only ones who experienced harassment. Therefore, after hearing my stories, they could talk about their experiences. I also tried to make my participants to feel confident to share their stories and reassured them that safety measures were in place to keep their confidentiality secure.

The next three chapters are based on my empirical research that addresses sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan and its connection to Afghan women.

Chapter 4: Social Construction of Gender in Afghanistan

This chapter explores social constructions of gender in Afghanistan through Afghan women's narratives. This chapter and the next two empirical chapters are organized thematically based on the themes that emerged from my interviews, discourse analysis, and autoethnography.

The social construction of gender is the way men and women are constructed and expected to live based on their construction (Richardson and May: 318). Social construction of gender is the way gender is created, shaped, and presented based on an individual's sex (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 1). Both violence and gender are socially constructed which leads both men and women to have certain kinds of experiences due to their position and construction of their position. According to Richardson and May, social constructions of gender and violence lead to both tolerance or rejection of violence (1999: 308). Sexual harassment is one form of gendered violence, so due to its construction, women's experiences of harassment are either denied or normalized. In patriarchal societies, social construction of gender shapes sexual harassment such as Afghanistan. All my interviewees talked about gender as one of the main factors of sexual harassment. In the next chapter, I am going to discuss some of their gendered constructed ideas about women and how these constructions shape women's lives and their experiences of harassment. Perceptions of gender really matter and they actually shape the way human beings treat each other. Women are usually seen as weak, submissive, kind hearted, which makes it easier for men to behave with them in their desired way. Most men exercise power because they are considered to be physically and socially powerful. That is the reason men often have a sense of ownership in relation to women and consider women as their property (Bennett and

Manderson, 2003: 9). Therefore when women/girls walk on the street, some men feel the sense of ownership and that is one of the reasons why they sexually harass them.

In Afghanistan, there are certain ideas about men and women. There is a belief that having a son is better than a daughter, men are superior to women, and men have authority over women. The idea of being better, superior, and having authority over women is the way many people construct gender relations. When women are harassed, their experiences become invisible or are denied because men are constructed in a way that make them superior to women; therefore, men can behave with women in the way they want. Shekeba talks about some of the common constructions of gender in Afghanistan and gives some reasons for this construction:

We have this idea that having boys is much better than girls because they think that boys are capable of doing anything while girls are not able to do anything. When girls go out families have to provide them with food, shelter, everything, and when they get married families have to pay for everything so that is what the taboo is. And of course, in the Afghan society, boys can easily go out, work, and have a job of their own and they can get education so easily. So it is also a pressure for their families because it is an incentive for families to have sons because their son can go out and earn money but as the situation is not feasible for girls their daughters might not earn as much as boys earn or to be able to take care of the whole family. Also because there have been war going on and also because women were not able to get education so the male literacy rate is higher than female. And besides this all these gives an idea to people that men are capable of anything, they get education, they are smarter, they are intelligent because women are always at home, they only take care of children and do the house chores. Therefore, all these ideas bring the idea of superiority (Shekeba: 2013).

Here, Shekeba, brings out some important points such as there is incentive for families to have sons in Afghan society. As Johnson and Repta mentions:

Gender is both produced and shaped by institutions such as the media, religion, and educational, medical, and other political and social systems, creating a societal gender structure that is deeply entrenched and rarely questioned, but hugely influential (2012:21).

Home is a major institution so the difference between sexes starts from home, which is one of the biggest and first institutions of socialization where boys and girls are expected to learn gender appropriate forms (Western Zimmerman, 1987). The idea that sons can be better than daughters in every aspect of life starts from home due to our social systems. Gender is institutionalized, in the institution of home. Institutionalized gender means “the ways that gender is rooted in and expressed through these large social systems, through the different responses, values, expectations, roles, and responsibilities given to individuals and groups according to gender” (Johnson et al., 2007 in Johnson and Repta, 2012: 21). These various institutions give both the chance and the privilege for men to show that they are better than women or they can do better than women. In Afghan society as Shekeba mentioned, most families are happy to have sons than daughters because the sons of the families stay within the families and the daughters leave their parents’ house after marriage, which means that sons of the families become the breadwinners of the families. Therefore, this vicious cycle makes it very difficult for women to prove that girls can also be educated, support their families, and be a good breadwinner to their families (see Breen, nd: 41). In Afghanistan, sons of the families stay within the families and become the breadwinners and the daughters leave their parents house to go to their husbands house after their marriage. If girls are denied access to education, then in Weber’s term their life chances will be diminished, that is why they will not be able to provide a job and support their families. Boys are not necessarily born better than girls; however, they are made better by their families and the society itself. While families hold on to their traditional ideas that boys are better than girls in every aspect, how can girls challenge this idea and prove that they can be better too? If women are given a chance to raise their voices, then they can challenge those traditional norms. Women are constructed in certain ways and their life chances are constrained

to go beyond those sorts of construction. For example, from my childhood I heard that boys are brave, they are able to accept challenges and they are good at technology; however, I never heard anybody explain why boys are better and superior to girls. From the time a boy is born until he becomes an adult, his family reinforce this idea that, “you are brave so you should not cry, you are good at math and technology because boys are generally good at those subjects”. In contrast, a girl hears from childhood that, “you have to take care of your family’s shame and honor. She hears that you are the representative of your entire family so “if you do something wrong your family will suffer”. Therefore, these sorts of guided expectations also reinforce in a girl’s mind that constrains her from being or acting in the way that does not fit within the notion of appropriate gender. Looking at this construction of boys being better than girls, it becomes clear why girls are harassed in public places and why it is difficult for them to raise their voices. When they appear in public places, they commit mistakes, as they are not supposed to be outside the home. For instance, girls are seen as property (see Gill’s explain later on) of their families so if they do anything wrong, that brings shame to the family (Wester Zimmerman: 1987), so they are not supposed to raise their voice. As Adiba says:

the basic idea is that women should not go in the public sectors just alone or at all. So it is the societal conceptions and also it is gender violation. The superiority of men that whatever they want they can do it. They have got some kind of authority over women’s body and their behavior. My father never talked about sexual harassment but my mother she used to tell to her stories and the stories of women around her. However, one thing I always heard from her was that if you were a good women and if a person does something to you on the streets or roads and your aim is good, then you would keep walking so she would not stop and tell something to the man such as why you did that or so. Everything related to sexual things are not talked, so that is why we didn’t talk much. We sometime tried to make my mom understand, I think she understood that when my sister and I got older. When we would come from outside, when we face harassment, we would cry, so that time she kind of realized that we should talk about it.

Adiba talks about how women are perceived to stay at home and how they are treated when they go out. This idea of good women stay at home is a social construction of gender. This idea is so

deep enforced in the society that even women themselves think in as similar ways as Adiba's mom was blaming women.

Furthermore, the way women are treated is all related to how they are constructed. In Afghan society, women are not equal to men; therefore, they have to listen to the male members of their families and present themselves according to their expectations and they have to stay at home behind heavy curtains. In the previous paragraph, I mentioned that women are considered as shame or bearers of their families, therefore, they have to be careful about their movements (Bennett and Manderson: 2003). As Noria mentions:

{...} I think one of the other main problems is that in Afghanistan, men think that women are boundary makers which means that women are meant to be at home, so if any woman goes for a job or outside, then men think that she is crossing her boundary. Now, this woman is kind of a matter out of place as her place is inside the home so she is out of her place now. So this is becomes women's problem. As these women are out of their real place, then men can do anything they want to do with them. In Afghanistan, men are very conservative and I feel really bad to say this but this is the reality. Because of being so conservative, it leads to sexual harassment. Most families want their daughters to stay at home, so if someone sends her daughter out, so because other men are so conservative, they will talk bad about the girl. They use [derogatory] words for her and say that say she is bad women.

The fact that women are meant to stay at home and not to appear in public places is one of the justifications for why sexual harassment is happening in Afghanistan (Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 9). When women challenge these accepted ideas, then they are often harassed but it is difficult to raise their voices because they are wrong as they went beyond their limitation. As women are constructed as men's "property", men treat women in the way they want (Bennett's and Manderson, 2003:9). If women speak up against men's sexual harassment, then in most cases, often they will be blamed and they will lose their freedom as well and they will be monitored strictly by their parents. They will not be allowed to go out even for their education

because most parents say that they cannot change societies but, they can protect their daughters by not allowing them to go out. For example, Maryam is an Afghan girl who informed her parents that she and her classmates are sexually harassed by boys. As a consequence of her disclosure, her father stopped her from going to school (Harassment Forces Afghan Girls Out of School, 2009). He said, "I am not against my girls completing their education, but their safety is more important ... I don't want them to study outside anymore," (Harassment Forces Afghan Girls out of School, 2009). Education is a human right. Due to some inhuman acts (sexual harassment), girls' rights are violated which is why most girls do not raise this issue. In most societies, women are constructed as having lower position than men, so they should always follow what men say to them. This social construction of women is also a way for men to look down on women and treat them in the way they want to.

In addition, Meena also shared one of her stories during the interview in which we can see that how women are harassed physically in Afghanistan as well as we can see how it is hard for them to talk about their experience of harassment due to the honor and shame attached to women. Meena says:

When I went to Zadran (Kota-Sangi) a boy touched me and escaped, another time I was harassed I mean my worse experience was when a man passed by me and touched my breast. He skipped after that and I felt terrible because I felt everybody saw that as it happened on a road where there people. I was ashamed of that. Men who observe the situation, do not think they are responsible to say anything until their wives, sister or one of their relatives get harassed.

I did not share it with others as I am really ashamed. Women do have same experiences so sharing with them will not change anything. With men we cannot talk about it at all, I can never say that a man touched one part of my body because it is shame to talk about our bodies with men; however, it seems it is not a shame when they comment on women's body on street. If I say to male members of my family, they will think that the value of the family is disrespected so the honor of the family will be in danger. At the first place it is a shame for the woman and her family if she gets harassed and secondly it is a shame when she talks about it. Both talking about being harassed and its experience brings some sorts of shame to the family of the women; therefore, she has to keep silent.

Mena's story shows that women's bodies are touched by strange men, but these women cannot raise their voices because their sexuality will be questioned and there is an idea attached to women's purity being related to her sexuality. If a woman's body is touched by a man on the road, then her sexuality is being attacked which brings shame to the family, so she has to keep quiet otherwise her sexuality will be questioned.

Men know that most women, who are harassed do not raise their voices due to the patriarchal belief that good women/girls do not get harassed. There is a common idea that women are responsible for men's behaviour, so this makes it hard for women to raise their voices. As Gardner says, "in general the literature tells women in public to dress with discretion so as not to stimulate interest... or that a woman is more likely to invite attack on the street if she is wearing tight, sexy cloths" (1990: 320). Here we can see that the women are blamed for wearing inappropriate cloths and inviting attacks on their bodies. However, an Egyptian girl says, "I have put on the niqab. By God, what more can I do so they leave me alone" (*Sherbini*, 2009). 'Niqab' is something like a veil that some women use to cover themselves from head to toe. This Egyptian girl's example is applicable to Afghan women as some women in Afghanistan do cover themselves from head to toe, but they still get harassed. This example illustrates that it is not about what women wear, but it is how they are seen by men.

Most Afghan men argue that if women are sufficiently covered, they will not get harassed. This is illustrated through the way boys talk about sexual harassment in men's video. From the beginning until the end of the discussion, the boys argue that girls welcome boys to harass them by their look, appearance and the way they talk (*Maqsoodi and Noori*: 2013). Moreover, most of the boys also mention that if a woman appears in appropriate Islamic Hijab,

then she will never be harassed; however, if she appears in inappropriate cloths, then it is our responsibility to show her the way (Maqsoodi and Noori, 2013). It is not one man who has this idea, many men think that they have the right to control what women should wear and how they should behave. As Richardson and May mention, some individuals seem to be more deserving of violence than others (1999: 309). In Afghanistan some men do think that some women deserve that kind of violence because of their behaviour and clothing. The question is if women deserve some kind of violence because of their appearance and behavior in public spaces, then why are covered women, old women, or children harassed? I still remember how old I was when I was harassed by an old men on my way from school to home. I was only eight years old when I was harassed by that man. I can never forget that experience as it shaped my life and the way I present myself in public spaces. After that experience, I could never feel comfortable in public places and I never dared to go to any kind of public area alone. If men think that only women who are not covered fully and behave inappropriately are harassed, then why was I harassed when I was eight years old? I was wearing school uniform, and I certainly did not try to attract someone to harass me. As Gardner discusses, women are made to believe that their “provocative” and “tight” clothing style attempt men to attack them (1990: 320). Nevertheless, if we look my experience of harassment at the very young age, then it exemplifies that women and girls are not at the risk of harassment because of their clothing, but they are at the risk because of their gender and how gender is constructed. I am not the only Afghan girl who started experiencing harassment from a very young age. All my interviewees mentioned that they were harassed when they were only five or six years old. Some of my interviewees mentioned that their mothers, who fully cover themselves get harassed. This evidence shows that women and girls are harassed regardless of what they wear and how they present themselves in the society.

In conclusion, social constructions of gender in Afghanistan and particularly gender constructions of femininity and womanhood increase women's vulnerability to sexual harassment and perpetrators' justification of women's experiences. Afghan women are expected to confront how others see them and want them to behave. If they challenge the way people want them to be, and do not care what others particularly men say to them, then they will get harassed and they will earn the name of a bad women.

Chapter 5: Sexual harassment in Afghanistan

This chapter is about sexual harassment in Afghanistan based on women's experiences and their definition of harassment and how it impacted their lives. This chapter will explore some stories of Afghan women who experience harassment. Their experiences are best understood through concepts that are used in my literature review and theoretical and conceptual framework. In addition, this chapter will discuss some of the common discourses, and my own reflections, on both the women's experiences of harassment and the discourses attached to women.

When we talk about sexual harassment, it is really important to consider who gets harassed, what impact it has on women, and as a result why women choose to become invisible. Mostly women who are rich, belong to a high class families, and do not walk much on roads are less likely to be harassed. Therefore, even in harassment, there are factors that intersect with each other (Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 1). The experience of sexual harassment often leads women to become "invisible" (Saul, 2010). Women may isolate themselves because they want to avoid these incidents from happening with the cost of caging themselves. As Foucault talks about panopticon which leads to self monitoring so even if these women go out they will always self monitor themselves (Mason, nd). If they do not avoid going out, they will try to constrain their movements or they become self conscious, which does not let them to feel comfortable in staying in outside. Women are always in fear of being watched that is why they observe themselves that make them to experience public spaces different than men. Avoiding appearing in public places or self monitoring does not solve the problem, but it definitely gives protection to the victims of sexual harassment. Accordingly, when women chose to isolate themselves, their

participation in broader society will be low. That is why men will have more say by which they will gain power. In addition, that will definitely impact on the role of women in Afghanistan.

Sexual harassment is a widespread behaviour that most women face in Afghanistan; however, most of them do not talk about their experiences of harassment due to social pressure. My interviewee, Shekeba, mentioned that she did not share her experience before with anyone as she knew that would not bring any difference and she did not have confidence to talk about her experiences. So, Shekeba's silence shows that women are unable to talk about their experiences either due to social pressure or any other reason. The people who do not experience sexual harassment cannot feel it and those who experience it, cannot express it. Men hold power in Afghan society, so some men do not find sexual harassment as a problem.

As it has been mentioned earlier, the term sexual harassment, is not used in Afghanistan to define the experiences of women, which will be discussed latter on. Sexual harassment is problematically and mostly referred to teasing in Afghanistan. Teasing sounds playful and if the physical and verbal abuse that women face in the roads is labelled as teasing, people will often not take it as serious as they should. Since sexual harassment is related to sexuality, people usually prefer not to use the word sexuality due to the ideologies that people have regarding women's sexuality. Women can be seen as impure if people know that they were harassed sexually and that can be one of the reasons why women and people in general do not call public harassment as sexual harassment. My interviewee Sosan says:

Sexual harassment in my society it is directly connected to the physical kind of harassment because in Afghanistan exaggeration. We have some many and so many women are victim of sexual violence, but then we can only see that in the news reports that women are victim of sexual violence, but they do not define what kind of sexual harassment it is either rape or any other kind of physical violence. I think in my society, sexual harassment is connected to physical violence but not verbal. Verbal is something usual that happens every day, so verbal is not something

important but the physical one is important in my society. Whenever I hear sexual harassment, only rape came in my mind. The term sexual harassment is not defined in my society, so when a woman gets harassed on the roads, then that is only physical one come to mind.

Sexual harassment is not defined and it is not commonly used to define women's experiences of harassment. The fact that there is not any term to define women's experience itself is problematic. Women face sexual harassment massively, but their experiences are not defined, which makes it hard for them to talk about it.

As literature demonstrates, sexual harassment is one of the main concerns of Afghan women that hampers and impacts their lives (Tabasum: 2012). My interviewees used different expressions in describing sexual harassment. However, they all illustrate that Afghan women face sexual harassment severely in verbal form and physical form. According to Mena, sexual harassment means:

saying words and actually actions that can be done verbally or physically towards a woman without her agreement so it doesn't matter if the word is good or bad. It means she is not happy with these saying and touching the women, and this is harassment. Based on my idea if a boy and a girl they have agreement then that is not harassment. Any kind of action that disturbs women is considered harassment it doesn't matter if it is physically or verbally. Even the good words are considered harassment, like comments. Like you are beautiful, you know we have two types of words, if someone says you look beautiful it is not considered harassment but if someone says that you look sexy, then that is considered harassment; however, sexy also means attractive. Like saying words in a negative way, it can be good words with the negative tone.

Here, Mena mentions that harassment can be both verbal and physical, which exactly matches with the definition of UNHCR on sexual harassment (United Nations High commissions for Refugees). It is hard to figure out whether the physical harassment is more pervasive than the verbal one. The point is that verbal abuse is also experienced physically on the body. Sometime,

a woman can be harassed verbally and then she can be harassed by the same person physically. Mena mentions that even good words are perceived harassment in the context of public spaces. Sexual harassment can be understood through someone's body language and both the derogatory word or even good word. For instance, if women hear a comment from a stranger, even such as beautiful, it is hard to accept. Hearing both good comments and bad comments about women's body, beauty, gesture, and any behaviour illustrates that the women are seen as sex objects. My own experience conveys the impact of such abuse on women and girls:

One day I was going to tuition in the afternoon by walk, as it was in the afternoon, there were not so many people around, so a man was coming with his bicycle from the front towards me. When I saw him coming towards me and looking at me, I already felt really uncomfortable, my heart started beating fast as I predicted that he might harass me physically or verbally. Therefore, I tried to walk faster so that I cross him faster and feel a bit relieved. However, it did not take him so long to come near to me with his bicycle. As he was in his bicycle, he could not harass me physically, but he said "oh you look very beautiful" and some other words in a very sexual manner but I don't remember his other words as he was somehow telling it in a way that was hard for me to hear. So, he threw those comments at me and passed by me. I never saw that man again, but I still remember how frightened and exhausted I felt after hearing his comment.

Even though the man did not harass me physically, I was still very scared and felt uncomfortable. It is none of his business to call me beautiful or what so ever, but still he did. After hearing his comment, I felt that he saw me as sexual object which is so common. Most of the time women are seen as sexual objects which is the reason why they are harassed verbally and physically. No matter if it is verbal or physical harassment, it creates a hostile and uncomfortable environment for a woman that constrains her appearance in public spaces. Afghan women hear different kinds of comments when they step out of their homes; these comments are usually about their body, their clothing style, or their makeup. The body of a woman and her appearance becomes a matter of discussion when she appears in public places regardless of how she dresses up and what age she is (Tabasum, 2012: 55). She is considered a matter out of place, so she deserves to receive any kind of behaviour on the public area. As Ahmad says:

دوم این که شرایط افغانستان به شرایط امریکا فرق میکند. مثلاً در امریکا یک زن حتی برهنه هم لب دریا میشیند و کسی هم حق ندارد که او را آزار بده. اما در افغانستان حتی اگر کسی هم قبول کند که یک زن چنان جلوه ای داشته باشد، خود آن شخص در حقیقت گناه کار میشود. اگر ما او {زن} را از این کار مانع نکنیم، اذیت نکنیم و از این کارش او را پشتیبان نکنیم باز ما به جهنم میریم.

همچنان حضرت محمد (ص)، آخرین پیامبر مسلمانان، در قرآن گفته است که بهترین زن زنی است که در پناه خانه باشد. بهترین زن زنی است که حجاب خود را رعایت کند. چرا پیامبر این گف را گفته؟ به خاطر این که زن مورد آزار و اذیت قرار نگیرد. زن نباید موهایش برای مرد نامحرم دیده شود و یا صورت آرایش کرده اش را مرد نامحرم ببیند. چرا چون جاده آزاری/خیابان آزاری یک غرایض جنسی یک چیز عادی است و بنابراین، حجاب از طرف زن باید رعایت شود. چیز طبیعی است در هر کشوری وجود دارد و کمترین اش هم در افغانستان است. دلیل این که زنان مورد آزار قرار میگیرند این است که نباید آن کار را کنند {بی حجاب باشند}.

The condition of America and Afghanistan differ a lot. If a woman walks or sits on the street naked on a beach, no one has the right to say anything to her. However, in Afghanistan even if people accept that women can appear in public places with certain looks, then in reality those people committed a sin. If we do not prevent, disturb and do not make them regret them those women for appearing with certain look in public places, then we can go to hell. Prophet Mohammad Peace Be Upon, the last Prophet of Muslims says that, the greatest women is the one who remains at home, who maintain hijab. Why did Prophet say this? He said so that women do not get harassed. A women's hair or her makeup should not be seen by any men whom she doesn't belong to. Because sexual harassment is so common and normal, women should take care of their hijab. Harassment is something natural in every country; however, a bit amount of harassment does exist in Afghanistan. Women get harassed, so that she does not repeat what she has done, which means that she should not appear in public places without her hijab (2013).

Ahmad's ideas about sexual harassment and women's appearance are part of everyday life of women in Afghanistan (Tabasum: 2012). Neither the pressure of wearing hijab nor the pressure of society on Afghan women in Afghan society is unique to Afghan women. However, Afghan women are often aware of the justification that men give for harassment. Ahmad motions that it is better for a woman to stay at home and he draws on Islam. However, he is not aware or he does not want to accept that in nowhere in the Quran and none of the Prophets mentioned that a woman should be harassed just because she does not follow a proper hijab. The justification that Ahmad gave for harassment is a misinterpretation of religion, of the Prophet's words. In Afghanistan there is a belief that a good woman rarely steps out of her house and tries to remain indoor as much as she can. As Tabasum argues, "The concept zan ba pardah or true women or

pure women is closely associated with the shelter of the private shaper, the home” (2012: 37). The concept of the pure women that Tabasum uses is a common ideology and is one of the gendered constructions. The concept of pure women and the idea that good women stay at home, takes us to Douglas’s concept “matter out of place”. For Mary Douglas, “matter out place” symbolizes the item that has been displaced for various reasons, and which should be removed (1966: 36). Women’s experiences of harassment show how women are displaced from their permanent sphere (their home), when they appear in public places. As it is perceived by many men, public places do not belong to women and they should not enter, if they do, they can get harassed. Women’s experience of harassment shows that when they appear in public places, then they belong to public rather than themselves so they get harassed. And it is perceived that every man passing by has the right to harass and throw comments on them because they are not supposed to be in a public place.

However, according to my own experience and my interviewees’ experience, women of all ages and all types of dresses get harassed. Shekeba shares one of her childhood experiences of harassment that contradicts that idea that only bad women, women without hijab, or women with certain characteristics are harassed. Shekeba narrates:

[...] I was getting the flash back of the time when I was child of about six or seven years old. When I used to go to a shop, there was an old man with white beard who would always wear white cloths all the time and he looked really religious. You know if you say it from my religious lenses but he looked so much sinless so innocent. Whenever I went to his shop, he would give me some pieces of dry fruits... And he would do something to me. These days I kept remembering that scene and make sense of it and now I realized that “oh my goodness that was sexual harassment”. It was sexual harassment and I was being harassed by an old me. It happened many times and every time I came how, I kept on thinking what was happening to me and I couldn’t make sense of it as I didn’t know what sexual harassment what sex is. I couldn’t talk about it and even now I can’t explain and talk about it because I feel really weird. [Sighs]... I can’t even explain what he was doing to me, basically he would use his hands and do something to me. My friends shared this kind of story but I couldn’t share it with them back because I feeling extremely bad. I do not see that men back and I might not even be able to look at that men when I see him now, but I just think that how little I was and how small I was that I did not even know what was happening to me. If I understood a little bit I would

have shared it with my sisters at least but the thing was that my family would always send me to that shop to buy things. So if I could share it with my sisters, they could at least stop me going from that shop; of course they would not be able to go and say something to that man. But at last they would stop me from going to that shop; however, I was not able to understand what he was doing and what was going so I was even unable to share it with my sisters. “sharing is one of best ways to get confidence otherwise people would even not bother themselves to talk about it”

Shekeba was only six or seven years old when she was harassed by an old man not only once at but multiple times in the same place, while she did not even know what sexual harassment means. When the old man was harassing her, she felt some discomfort about her experience. However, she was not aware that she was being sexually harassed because she was a girl who was not aware of sexual harassment and women’s experience of harassment. My own experience and my interviewees’ experiences suggest that children are harassed because they cannot understand the difference between harassment and being adored so it is easy to use their bodies and sexuality for pleasure purposes. For example, one day I was in an ice-cream shop, and a mom came to this shop with two of her children, a boy and a girl. Both of her children were quite young approximately seven or eight years old. From the time this eight year old girl entered the shop, the shopkeeper kept on looking at her. He was staring at the girl in a very sexual way which illustrates that he was looking at her as a sexual object. While the man kept on looking at the girl as if he was going to eat her or kill her, the girl was feeling uncomfortable because she was trying to hide her face and kept on looking here and there, but her mom did not realize. Nonetheless, as I was observing the man and the little girl, I could get the sense that she was being harassed at the moment and she would be touched if her mom or we were not around. Despite the fact that the girl was almost like a child, she was still feeling bad for being looked at in that way. As I was also feeling bad for that girl, I kept on staring at the shopkeeper to make him understand that I was monitoring him, I even asked the girl to come and sit beside me to make him understand that if her mom did not realize, I did realize. This strategy worked because

he lowered his disrupting gaze and stopped looking the girl as though he felt that he felt ashamed as being observed while he was looking at the girl. Therefore, we can say that small children are more into unbearable danger of harassment because they are unable to understand, define, and share their experience with others. However, most of the time even the idea that children get harassed is not accepted by many men. When children and women are harassed, we can see that some kind of power relation is created otherwise men would not be able to harass children and women. Tabasum talks about “power” in terms of women being publically harassed, as men as a group hold the power in the society, (2013: 42). Tabasum says:

All the privileges have placed women in the second position: powerless creatures. Men’s power projection does not necessarily have to involve the active use of military forces in combat. Their power has more traditional focus, such as controlling women at home (2013: 42).

Here Tabasum talks about the traditional form of power which is most women are controlled and treated in the way men want in public and private sphere. Women are often powerless to men and children are even more powerless to men than women, therefore, they are more at the risk of being harassed. The evidence of this could be my own experiences and my interviewees’ experience.

Not only women’s or children’s experiences of harassment is denied, they are usually blamed for being harassed. Even though women are victims of harassment, they are “re-victimized” after they are harassed (Bennett and Manderson, 2003: 4). Victim blaming is a concept that means, the one who suffers due to any kind of circumstance is blamed for her suffering (Saroca, 2013). Hence Afghan re-victimized and blamed so Asma indicates that sometime even women themselves feel guilty about their appearance and their existence in public place:

One day I was going from one of my friends house to my home in the late evening with a bit of makeup and jeans. While I was walking in near to the road side, a boy passed by me and touched my breast and squeezed it. I was really shocked and I started shaking and run. I don't know how I came back to my home. I am even scared to talk about that experience now. So after I reached home while I was sweating and turned red, I felt a bit relaxed; however, I had to show myself normal and act as if nothing happened because if my family specially my brothers and father would now that my breast was grabbed and I was touched, they will blame me for because I was out in late in the late even with a bit tight cloths and make up. So, I had to keep quite in order to not to be blamed. After, I became calm, I started thinking that may be God punished me because I was out alone and I was a bit tight cloths so I even started blaming myself.

The story of Asma demonstrates that, women get harassed and even start feeling bad about themselves and also getting the pressure of being in a wrong place or out of place. In our societies women are made to believe that they are wrong and the attention that they get in public places is because of themselves. Ehsan says,

وقتی که از موتر پایان شوی یک قسمی طرف ما سیل دارند که فکر میکنی می خره ما را. این رفتار خودش انسان را تحریک میکنه که باید یک گپ ی بزنینم او را، یا یک چیزی بگوئیم... اما ما هم وقتی که از زینه بالا یا پایان میشیم {دختر} یک قسمی طرف ما سیل دارند که فکر میکنی همین لحظه تو را میخورند. حتی چشم خوده از تو خطا نمیدن. حتی اگر برگردی و پشت خوده که ببینی هنوز ان ها سیل دارند که ما کجا میریم و چه قسم میریم.

When we get out of the car, girls look at us in a way that provokes us to talk to them and tell them something. However, when we get down from stairs, they look at us in a way that show as if she they will eat us. Until the last moment, they do not take away their eyes even if you cross them and look at them back; they still look at you (Personal video, 2013).

Here what Ehsan means is that women provoke boys/men by looking at them and they welcome men to engage with them with certain kinds of interaction, so the blame goes to a woman. The idea that women invite attacks is something that Gardener discusses in her article (1990: 320). Gardner mentions how women avoid provocative clothes that invite men to attack them in order to keep themselves away from the danger of being attacked (1990: 320). However, the Afghan men's quotation shows that men do not even get provoked by cloths they get provoked from even the eye contact and stare of women. Some Afghan men believe that women themselves ask

to be harassed or to be touched by their eye and facial expressions. So, if women are blamed for harassment, then they will start keeping silent in the hope that they will not be blamed.

Chapter 6: Recommendations:

As the narratives of women demonstrate, women suffer due to sexual harassment. However, they have difficulties to talk about it and live with it. Women's situation regarding sexual harassment shows that women have pain. They face sexual harassment in their daily lives and have to live with it because it is difficult to heal this pain. In this chapter, we get to hear from women's recommendations regarding dealing with the issue of sexual harassment. These women are looking at the issue very holistically. The recommendations here are organized thematically and the recommendations draw on my interviewees' suggestions, my own insights, and some of the ideas of Afghan men. Many of these recommendations are interconnected and overlap with one another.

Law,

Afghan women face gendered based violence in different forms and one of the most pervasive forms is sexual harassment in public places. Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), International Nongovernmental Organizations (IGOs), United Nations (UN), and some other international communities constantly talk about women's rights. However, women still face problems on a regular basis. The freedom of Afghan women is really hard to be seen from their everyday lives. People from other countries might think there is freedom for women, however by realizing how sexual harassment is prevalent and a daily incident for women in Afghanistan and most probably in other countries, they will know that their freedom is limited.

Therefore, in my research I wanted to explore what makes it really hard for us Afghan women to achieve our rights and freedom despite having a lot of support from international and national communities and the constitution which states that men and women have equal rights.

As I mentioned earlier, a study shows that 87.2 % of Afghan women face at least one type of violence (Bunch, 1990). However, the constitution of Afghanistan, clearly states that

Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties before the law (The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, article 22, 4:2004).

The position of men and women is not equal in the country. As I demonstrated in my research, Afghan women and girls do not enjoy freedom of movement from one place to another. Sexual harassment or sexual assault is generally pervasive in the streets of Afghanistan. There is not a single day in which women do not face sexual harassment either verbally or physically, which contributes to showing the unequal and unfair relationship between men and women in Afghanistan. According to Ali Shahidy, an Afghan man who fights for women's rights now and who himself was previously a perpetrator of sexual harassment before says, "Street harassment is the most neglected form of violence in Afghanistan that has received neither the attention of domestic justice institutions nor the advocacy of women's rights organizations and civil societies" (Shahidy: 2012). Looking at Shahidy's explanation of harassment, we can say that even though sexual harassment is highly widespread in Afghanistan, it remains the most invisible form of violence that women deal with it every day. However, to date, Afghanistan is one of those countries that do not recognize harassment as one form of violence. As a group of Afghan women says,

It is like Taliban time for women now. We are in the same situation as then. We cannot come out of house to earn extra money or to get education. The only difference is that our honor was safe then, but not now (David and Wall, 2012: 21).

The statement of these women shows how vulnerable they are in public places because of their honor and prestige. If they go out, men will disrespect them in different ways. Most women prefer to stay home rather than going out and getting insulted every day.

According to women's rights activists, despite violence occurring due to systematic violence against women in the community and families, voices of women are unheard. One reason is "law enforcement authorities lacking political will in addressing victims' complaints" (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2012: 19). Therefore, it would be interpreted that sexual assault is justified in Afghanistan not formally but informally if the government continues with no laws working against it.

Now the question is how sexual assault can be a form of violence against women and a human rights issue? In the first article of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights it is mentioned that:

All humans beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (Clapham, 182: 2007).

Therefore, sexual harassment, which takes away women's freedom of choice, movement, and hampers their dignity, is a human rights violation. Women should be respected and should not be subjected to any kind of abuse that constrains their ability to act. Afghanistan is a patriarchal, male dominated society, where men practice power over women's body by harassing them or by oppressing them and imprisoning them in their homes (Tabasum, 2010: 52). Therefore, it is important that Afghanistan's government have a law against sexual harassment and women's oppression.

Sexual harassment does not only violate one article of the declaration, but it violates other articles of the Human Right's (HR) declaration as well, such as the 22nd article, which says:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of the states, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for and his dignity and the free development of his personality (Clapham, 187: 2007).

Consequently, based on the HR declaration, Afghan women lack "social security" and the responsibility to provide it goes to the state of Afghanistan. If women lack security which is one of the most essential rights that women are in need of in Afghanistan (Mills: 2005), the state should take some initiatives in order to provide them with security.

This issue of harassment is not a private matter, I mentioned earlier many men are engaged in harassment and many women are harassed. It is a public matter and therefore this issue should be addressed publicly. The only way that it can be addressed publicly is that if the government of Afghanistan has legal laws against sexual harassment. The law should be that no one should harass anybody. If the criminals are found, then they should be imprisoned for one month or more than that depending on the extent of physical and verbal harassment. The first outcome of imprisoning the harasser will be to teach a lesson to him as well as other men who harass women.

It might be hard to apply this law practically due to the rampant corruption and people's unfair judgment, but fear of failure of implementing the law should not be an excuse for not having law. For example, harasser might get out of prison after a while, considering the fact that people will have already known about his contemptible act, he may less likely attempt to repeat his action. In addition, the harasser might even run away once he harassed women but, once a

woman speaks up about it, some other people might help in catching him because, by then, people will know that sexual harassment is illegal and it has a punishment.

The only way to save women from sexual harassment is to punish the perpetrator of the harassment. Current laws do not include anything about sexual harassment and its penalty, which is the reason why women are suffering from it. No legal reaction against any bad action will increase the act to a greater extent. Therefore, if we want all the Afghan women to live in a safe environment and be active in the society, we need to stop sexual harassment, which is a huge form of violence. People should be able to raise their voices and their voices should be heard. And the responsibility of hearing the people's voice is on the government, so they government listen to people's voices and take some action against it.

Religious leaders,

Afghanistan is an Islamic country, and religious leaders are the most influential leaders on Afghan men. Religious leaders can really influence Afghan men to be respectful towards women. If religious leaders start to talk about sexual harassment and its bad impact on women's lives and daily activities, then Afghan men will listen to them and understand the issue better. As Kabir explains,

چیزی که همیشه در مسجد برای ما تذکر داده میشه این است که ما باید بالای زنان و دخترای خود کنترل داشته باشیم. مثلاً: همیشه ملا امام های مسجد در مورد این که زن چه قسم لباس بپوشه و بگرده حرف میزند. اما متأسفانه در مورد نکات بسیار مهمی مثل احترام به زنان و رفتار مناسب با زنان صحبت نمیکنند. در افغانستان خطبه ها و گب های ملا امام های مسجد تاثیر زیادی بالای رفتار و افکار جامعه دارد. به همین دلیل اگر ملا امام های مساجد در مورد زن به عنوان یک انسان با کرامت و برابر با مرد حرف بزنند کم کم دید مردان هم نظر به زنان تغییر خواهد کرد. و این کار باعث پایان آوردن سطح بالای خیابان از آزار هم خواهد شد

When we go to the mosque, we always hear how we should protect and control female members of our families. In the mosques they most talk about how women should dress up and how they should be kept. However, the religious leader does not talk how women should be seen and respect, which is very important. If religious leaders start talking about respecting women and

seeing them equal to men, then men will also start thinking that about respecting women and not harassing them.

When men hear from their role models (religious leaders) that women should be controlled, this shows that men have authority over women. Therefore, this gives them an idea that they can harass women and they can behave with women in any way they want. However, if these religious leaders start talking about how women should be respected, then those men who look down at women will start respecting women and may not harass them. If women are respected in a society, then that might lessen the percentage of harassment. Therefore, it is important that the religious leaders to talk about women and respect for them. The government of Afghanistan could discuss sexual harassment with the religious leaders and ask them to talk to men about women's rights. This will increase awareness in which men will get to know about one of the biggest problems of Afghan women and if some of those men or their friends harass women in the public places, then they will reconsider it.

Education

Education for both boys and girls can help the issue of harassment to be dealt with. By education I do not only mean going to school but educating boys and girls about each other's rights and about the serious issue of harassment. As I mentioned earlier in this thesis, Maqsoodi and Noori conducted workshops on sexual harassment in some boys' and girls' school in Afghanistan. This workshop gave girls a chance to share their stories and concerns, which is very helpful. Most of the time, Afghan women cannot talk about sexual harassment with anyone so these workshops will help them to learn about a serious issue and hopefully ease the way for them to start talking about their experiences. In addition, these sorts of workshops help in educating boys about the seriousness and the bad impact of abuse on women. As most of the time women cannot share

their stories with their families, the male members of their families do not know how severe this issue of harassment is. Therefore, educating both men and women of the society about their rights, women's rights, and sexual harassment will help men to understand women's problem and take a stand for it.

Media

A society where illiteracy is at a higher level, media is most influential way of conveying different messages related to health, education, elections and so on. In case of sexual harassment, once again, media can have a powerful influence on raising awareness about this issue, its impact on women's lives and ability, and how it can be dealt with. Therefore media should in a way start passing on different messages on this issue through different programs and advertisements so that people start to learn and get familiarized with all the details of this social problem.

Effective communication

There is a communication gap between men and women in Afghanistan which is one of the problems. It is difficult for many women and men to share their problems, ideas, and anything related to themselves with each other. There is often the concept of shame between these two genders that brings a huge conversation gap between them. This leads to a rising curiosity and lack of understanding about the opposite gender. As Ahmad says,

Because we are kept away from women for a long time, for example when my cousin comes to our home, my mother asks me to leave the room. However, she never said why, "I am not going to eat that girl, then why we had to leave the room." We are curious to know more about our opposite sex that is why. The main reason is the curiousness of men/boys about women. They never talk to them or interact to them that is why we harass them.

Ahmad's narrative points out that the gap between men and women is initiated from home. When Ahmad's mom tells him to leave the room when his cousin comes, this gives him an idea that boys and girls are different; this way often can lead them to have a huge gap between men and women. The curiosity and lack of communication is one of the issues that separate men and women from one another and makes men more curious about women. If men and women are allowed to interact with each other freely from childhood, then the curiosity will be less. The curiosity will be lessened by communication. Effective communication can solve so many problems among both genders.

Chapter 7: Research experience, Assessment of Study, and Future Research

Research Experience

Over all this research was really helpful for me to grow us a scholar and as an enthusiastic researcher for whom the topic of her research was much related to her life experiences. Aside from academic side of this thesis, this research helped me to understand how sexual harassment impacted young women's lives. One of the biggest challenges that I had to deal with at the very first stage was lack of access to some solid literature from Afghanistan on this topic. Therefore, it was really hard to conceptualize the topic of sexual harassment in public places of Afghanistan. However, overseas scholars have done an extensive research on the issue of harassment and violence on women so I used those literatures in my research. As I discussed with my interviewees, most of them thought they were the only ones who experienced sexual harassment. However, after hearing my own stories and observation of sexual harassment, they came to know that they were not the only ones.

One of the biggest experiences of this research was, being able to talk to young Afghan women about sexual harassment as it helped us to feel each other's pain. It is really helpful even if we are able to talk about a common problem as it gives us strength to know that we are not the only one who goes through such pain and such trauma and anxiety. Sharing stories allowed me to think beyond what I knew about the issue of harassment. It allowed me to realize that I am not the only one who is concerned about it. There are other Afghan women who equally think as I think and there are women who want to fight against the issue as I do.

It is really hard to do research on a topic as sensitive as sexual harassment and the fact that this topic was inspired my own observation and life experience, it was not easy to go

through the process. I had to read articles that made me really sad and doing interviews was not easy as well. It is always heartbreaking to hear stories of women, their suffering, and their silence. Most of the time, I burst into tears when I read the articles that I used in my research and it happened when I took interviews as well. When my interviewees were sharing their stories, as an interviewer and as an Afghan, I was ashamed to have eye contact with them. My interviewees did not want to have eye contact as their life experience was really painful to tell. One of my interviewees constantly cried when she was sharing her stories and I was crying as well and, at that moment, I felt there was a lot of sorrow that surrounded us. I felt very helpless hearing Afghan women's stories as the issue of sexual harassment is not something that can be solved by one person or by talking only. The issue of harassment needs a massive societal change and usually people struggle in adopting new strategies that brings some kind of change in society. Nevertheless, the fact that it is hard to deal with the issue of harassment is something that make us, Afghan women, worried.

Interpreting of the interviews and videos was not that hard because I had some good background knowledge about my topic and my own observation and experience in this field helped me to analyse the data easily. I had an overall idea about this topic, so I designed the questions in a way that helped me to get the most out of my interviews.

As I mentioned earlier dealing with such a sensitive and depressing topic was really hard, but my advisor give me enough academic and emotional support that helped to complete this research. She supported me to deal with the trauma involved in researching on this topic. Especially, as I myself had experienced sexual harassment, sometime, it was hard to do the research without becoming depressed, but my advisor helped me to be able to handle the level of the stress that came up during the research. In fact, she encouraged me to use my own experience

as strength to understand and analyse and she encouraged me to write this research from my own view of victimhood. Thus, all the emotional supports of my advisor made it easier for me to do this research.

Self-Reflexivity

Self-reflexivity was one of the most important elements of my research as I was really mindful to reflect on my own observation and experience in order to understand the topic better. Being self-reflexive allowed me to always draw on or see the issue of sexual harassment from my own perspective as well as that of my interviewees. While I was taking interview, I was constantly reflecting on the interviews that were helpful to understand the young women's stories even better.

Strength and limitation of the research

One of the biggest strengths of the research was that we could hear from those young Afghan women whose lives are affected by sexual harassment in public places of Afghanistan. If we could not hear these Afghan women's stories, then it would be very hard to conceptualize and imagine the situation of Afghan women in Afghanistan regarding sexual harassment. Therefore, being able to interview Afghan women gave a lot of strength to this research and made it very powerful.

Another strength of the study was that, as a researcher, I was involved in this study and I also had my voice involved as one of my methods were autoethnography. I am personally attached to the issue of sexual harassment in Afghanistan as I am an Afghan woman, who has experienced sexual harassment, so this sense of personal connection gave me the ability to understand the study more. On the other hand, this research also has some limitation. One of the

biggest limitations was not having enough resources and literature that were written by Afghans on this issue. Most of these literatures I used focused on other countries, so having literature on Afghanistan could help me to understand the issue much better. As every country has different culture and their culture and demographic conditions are different, then the literature could be a bit different too. If we had some more insights from Afghan authors, the study could be even stronger.

A second limitation of this study is that I could only interview educated young Afghan women who mostly live in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. I assume the results of the research or the stories would be different if I interviewed some illiterate Afghan women whose ages varied and they lived in different cities of Afghanistan. People often react or understand something depending on their education and where they grew up and lived, so having interviewees with different academic background or non academic background and from different places would be helpful to understand and analyse the topic even better. In addition, it would be good if I could interview Afghan men as well. We still hear a bit from Afghan men through the workshop. However, it would be good if I could directly interview men and could explain how they perceive the issue of sexual harassment. I could see their expressions and I could also see what they suggest for the elimination of this problem in Afghanistan.

Further Research

For further research, I want to expand this research a bit more and add more voices and stories in it. In future I want to interview some men directly to hear from them as well. As I mentioned earlier on this thesis that not all men are harasser, so interviewing different men would allow me to add those men's voices and ideas regarding sexual harassment. These men could be the

perpetrators or any Afghan man who observed sexual harassment. Moreover, I also want to interview Afghan women with different ages, locations, and academic background to illustrate if their perceptions and ideas are different or not.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter is going to conclude what has so far been discussed about sexual harassment in public space.

This research shows that women are harassed in public places of Afghanistan no matter what time they appear in public places, what they wear, and where they appear. My interviews and my own experience show that Afghan women are harassed from a very early age, which is one a proof to the fact that women are not harassed due to their appearance. Women's harassment challenges discourses that good women are not harassed because if a lot of women are harassed, it does not mean that all women are bad. Women are harassed widely, which means there is a problem with how women are seen in the context of Afghanistan by Afghan men. However, my discourse analysis illustrates that most men think that if women are harassed, then it is because of how they present themselves in the public places. In addition, discourse analysis also illustrates that women are seen as the problem rather than seeing sexual harassment as the problem. The perception and reaction of men towards women is the biggest problem that leads women to experience sexual harassment and be blamed for it.

My research shows that women are harassed in daily basis, but they are still silent or they prefer to remain silent due to the social construction of gender. Some people do not accept that women are harassed, so if women raise their voices after being harassed, then people will blame them. Therefore, there are various reasons why women do not speak up against sexual harassment. Women do not raise their voice because of victim blaming which is common in Afghan societies. If women are blamed for welcoming their harasser to harass them, then the families' honor will be questioned and even if people accept that they are harassed, their

sexualities will be questioned. The fear of being blamed and carrying families honor and dignity lead them to remain silent. One of the reasons why women are always blamed for their experiences is, they are considered out of place when they appear in public places. Most men think that women are not supposed to appear in public places, therefore, when they are harassed, they are blamed. As a result of not belonging to the public spaces, carrying families honor, and being blamed, women are always conscious about what they wear, where they go, and how they present themselves in the society. Women are conscious about their movement because they are always in fear of being watched and observed.

If sexual harassment is not seen as a problem by the perpetrators (some men), it is hard to make them understand the impact and constraints that sexual harassment experience leaves on women. Women suffer a lot and they are depressed to see their position in the society. If women constitute half of the society and if they are not happy, how the rest of the population can live happily. Despite being really unhappy with the situation, it is difficult for women to raise their voices. It is not often one man who harasses, it is many men who harass women, yet women still keep silent. Based on the experiences of my interviewees and my own experience if women raise their voices, there might be no one to listen to them or they might be kept at home by their families, which shows how women are both the victims and the sufferers of sexual harassment. Almost all of my interviewees mentioned that, they are not the personality they want to be. They have to behave and present themselves in the society in such a way so that they do not get to be blamed, however, this does not help at all as they are still harassed despite of being very - conscious and well-dressed.

My research shows that issue of harassment cannot be handled and solved over the night as some men are not ready to accept women's experiences of harassment. However, it is also not

impossible to start taking some possible initiatives that help women to at least have these experiences of harassment less often. Women do have the right of freedom of movement and staying in public places, so they should feel safe, which is only possible when some steps are taken towards eliminating sexual harassment from public places.

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Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

Study title: Sexual Harassment in Public Places in Afghanistan

Lead investigator: Fatima Sabri

Declaration by participant:

I have read, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I freely agree to participate in this study and understand that I can terminate my participation at any point during the study without any adverse consequences. I reserve the right to refuse to answer any question I do not want to answer.

I have been given a copy of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to keep.

Participant's name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Declaration by member of research team:

I have given a verbal explanation of the research project to the participant, and have answered the participant's questions about it.

I believe that the participant understands the study and has given informed consent to participate.

Researcher's name: Fatima Sabri _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Fatima Sabri
 Telephone: 01919090143
 Email: sabri.fatima@auw.edu.bd
 Fourth Year Undergrad in Asian University for Women
 Department of Asian Studies
 20B/MM Ali Road
 Asian University for Women, Chittagong 4000, Bangladesh

Dear, -----

I would like to invite you to participate in my senior thesis research project of **Sexual Harassment in Public Places in Afghanistan**. The title of my senior thesis is Sexual Harassment in public places in Afghanistan. The focus of my research is on sexual harassment of women in public places such as roads, shops, offices, and transportation. This research is for my senior thesis, which will be supervised by my senior thesis advisor professor Cleonicki Saroca. This research is funded by Asian University for women as this is part of my academic completion at the university. The purpose of this study is to discover the outcome and effects of sexual harassment on Afghan women, and to analyse that what sorts of impact sexual harassment leaves on Afghan women's lives. This qualitative research project seeks to explore many different dimensions of women and girls experiences of sexual harassment in public places in Afghanistan. This study will help us to understand the difficulties that sexual harassment brings into the lives of Afghan women, which will help us to find a solution for the harassment that Afghan women face in Afghanistan.

There will not be any direct benefit involve for you in the research, but one benefit can be that you as an individual will be able to express your ideas about this issue and you can give suggestions or recommendation regarding dealing with the issue of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. Your suggestion really matters as we might be able to communicate the outcome of this research to some national and international organizations that work for women so they take some immediate action against sexual harassment in Afghanistan. As you are an Afghan woman, you might have had the experience of sexual harassment in public place, so your experiences can help us to understand the issue better. In addition, you can feel the bad outcome of sexual harassment more as you are the one who is from Afghanistan and is an Afghan woman. So, if the issue of sexual harassment is solved in Afghanistan, then you as an individual will benefit as well. Moreover, as this topic has not been discussed explicitly, you might feel a bit good after you talk about it.

For this research, I would like to take your interview about your experiences of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. I will ask a couple of questions that will help me to analyse the issue

of sexual harassment in Afghanistan. The time of interview, venue, and date will be up to your best interest and availability, so it will be negotiable. The research report will be written in English and the transcribed version of your interview will be used in the research report. Your interview will be stored by myself and will not be shared with anyone else. As this research will not be used for further researches, so the data of the interview such as the recorded and transcribed version of the interview will be deleted or destroyed after my senior thesis is graded. The transcribed version of the interview will be stored in my personal password protected computer. The research findings will be submitted to my senior thesis advisor Professor Cleonicki Saroca, to the second reader of my senior thesis Professor Varuni Ganepola, to AUW library, and to the participants who participated in my research.

You will be interviewed in English by the researcher of this project, Fatima Sabri. Your interview will be recorded by a tape or voice recorder, but you can ask me to turn off the recorder at time you want to. For any kind of emotional or personal reason if you feel uncomfortable in talking or answering any question, you will be given enough time to feel good, and continue the interview later on. And if you feel distressed during answering any kind of question and don't want to have the recorder, the recorder will be turned off. You can leave any question that you do not want to answer.

The expected time of completing the study is April 2014. The study will be sent for evaluation by the beginning of April and will be graded by my senior thesis advisor Professor Cleonicki Saroca. This is a two semester long project, so the research report will be submitted for grading in early April and it will take at least two months to get the result for the research project. Therefore, if you are interested in knowing the outcome of research, then a copy of the research report will be sent to you by email or it can be communicated to you verbally as soon as the research report is graded. If you wish to know the outcome of research, please let me know during the interview, so that I contact you for setting a time for communicating the outcome of the research either by email or verbally.

Your participation is voluntary, so you are allowed to withdraw from participating at any point of the study without being questioned. You will be well explained about the research project verbally, in which you can ask question or share any kind of concern that you might have. If you chose not to take part in the research project, you will not be asked for any kind of explanation. So you are free to take decision of participating in the research project, which will not affect your relationship with me by any means. Your name and personal information will not be disclosed to anyone except the researcher. During writing the research report if any kind of question come up and more issues arises, then you will be contacted by the researcher. Therefore, it would good if you provide me with your phone number and email address. In addition, the finding of the research will be explained in person and your questions regarding the outcome of the research will be answered verbally. Your confidentiality will be respected and your personal information

will not be used. "Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by any third parties."

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the study at any stage, please contact:

Professor Cleonicki Saroca, Associate Professor of Asian Studies/Sociology

Asian University For Women

20A MM. Ali Road

Chittagong 4000 Bangladesh

cleonicki.saroca@auw.edu.bd

+880 312854980"

If you have any concerns about the way in which the study has been designed or conducted and wish to contact someone else at the Asian University for Women, please email the AUW Institutional Review Board (AUWIRB) through the following information

Dr. Georgia Guldan, Chair of the AUWIRB

Address: 20H 501, Asian University for Women, 20A MM Ali Road

Telephone number: +880-31-2854980

Email: irb@auw.edu.bd"

Appendix 3: Research Question to the participants

1. What is sexual harassment?
2. How sexual harassment is defined in your society and what are the terms that have been used to define sexual harassment?
3. Do you see sexual harassment as a problem?
4. Can you give some reasons for why sexual harassment is happening in Afghanistan?
5. Do women find it easy to talk about sexual harassment in your society? If no, then could you please explain it further more?
6. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment?
7. Did you tell anyone about your experience/s of sexual harassment?
8. What was their response?
9. What did you do then?
10. How did you feel about how they responded?
11. How did you feel about you being harassed?
12. What did you do as a result your experience?
13. How do you feel about these explanations?
14. Who do you feel is responsible for sexual harassment?
15. How do you feel when you see a woman being sexual harassment?
16. What do you do?
17. What are some of the reasons and explanations of sexual harassment?
18. What do you think men can do about Sexual harassment?
19. How did you protect yourself?
20. Can you think of any possible way, where women can protect themselves from sexual harassment?
21. How is sexual harassment perceived in your community?
22. How do you feel about the way people perceive sexual harassment in your community?
23. Do you think that the issue of sexual harassment is something that can be eliminated from Afghanistan?
24. What sorts of recommendations can you give to your society or government would help to protect women from sexual harassment? How can sexual harassment be eliminated? What can be done?
25. If you woke up tomorrow and it was a perfect world, what would that world look like to you?
26. If you woke up tomorrow and it was a perfect world without sexual harassment, what would that world look like to you?