

Public Sexual Harassment of Women in Mexico

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Summary

Sexual Harassment is a complex cultural phenomenon in Mexican society. Women experience sexual harassment publicly due to the lack of laws, Machismo culture, normalization, and impoverished circumstances. The public spaces where sexual harassment occurs primarily include the workplace and public transportation. This has resulted in not only social consequences, but health and cultural consequences as well.

Key Terms

Sexual Harassment: “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, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.”¹

Mexico City: The capital of Mexico, home to 8.84 million people and the largest metropolitan area in the Western Hemisphere.²

Public Transportation: “a system of vehicles such as buses and trains that operate at regular times on fixed routes and are used by the public.”³

Workplace: “a place where people work, such as an office or factory.”⁴

Machismo: “excessive masculinity and its accompanying attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.”⁵

Maquiladora: “a factory that operates under preferential tariff programs established and administered by the United States and Mexico.”⁶

Introduction

Public sexual harassment is a part of every day life for women in Mexico. In Mexico City, 96% of women surveyed by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography had experienced some form of sexual violence in public spaces, and 58% had been groped.⁷ The United Nation’s definition of sexual harassment, as stated above, gives the parameters of what can be considered as sexual harassment as “any unwelcome sexual advance.”

The forms of harassment most frequently reported by Mexican women according to the National Institute for Statistics and Geography were offensive or sexualized comments (74%)

¹ “UN Women | UN System Coordination - Anti-Harassment.” *United Nations*, United Nations, www.un.org/womenwatch/uncoordinated/antiharassment.html. PEER REVIEWED

² “UN News Centre - More than half of the world’s population now living in urban areas.” *United Nations* <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=48240>

³ “Definition of ‘Public Transport’ - English Dictionary.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/public-transport.

⁴ “Workplace.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/workplace.

⁵ Salgado, Martha Patricia Castañeda. “Femicide in Mexico: An Approach through Academic, Activist and Artistic Work.” *Current Sociology*, vol. 64, no. 7, Aug. 2016, pp. 1054–1070., doi:10.1177/0011392116637894.

⁶ “What Is a Maquiladora in Mexico?” *Manufacturing in Mexico*, manufacturinginmexico.org/maquiladora-in-mexico/.

⁷ Senthilingam, Meera. “Sexual Harassment: How It Stands around the Globe.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 29 Nov. 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/11/25/health/sexual-harassment-violence-abuse-global-levels/index.html.

and unwanted touching and groping (58%).⁸ Sexualized comments, known as “catcalls” or “catcalling”, are the most prevalent forms of harassment occurring in public spaces. Half of adolescent girls have experienced sexual harassment in its many forms at the young age of 11.⁹ As women get older and have jobs, the combination of late working hours, crowded transportation, and male entitlement create plentiful opportunities for sexual harassment.¹⁰ However, the probability of harassment has to do with what the “perceived vulnerability” of the woman is—making single, young women more likely to be harassed as opposed to older married women.¹¹

Mexican women experience these things in a few specific places: In the streets, on public transport, and at work. However, the underlying matter regarding sexual harassment might not be where it happens, but that it is seen as “normal”, and restricts women’s freedom in their everyday lives.¹²

Contributing Factors

Lack of Laws

There are two main areas where the laws protecting women against public sexual harassment are lacking. These include: labor laws, and public transportation laws. The National Labor Legislation in Mexico does not explicitly address sexual harassment for private industries.¹³ What this means is that there isn’t specific protection for working women against sexual harassment.

Cases of sexual harassment in the workplace vary from verbal expressions to bosses and union leaders blackmailing women into sexual favors if they want to keep their jobs.¹⁴ Many programs have been initiated in private or state-level governments to protect against sexual harassment, but despite advances, only 16 of the 31 Mexican states have laws in place to punish sexual harassment offenders.¹⁵ While it doesn’t seem that the government is focused on making changes, there are many treaties, such as the Inter-American Convention on the

⁸ ‘Overwhelming Majority’ of Women Experience Some Form of Harassment, Sexual Violence in Their Daily Journeys | UN News.” *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2017/05/556512-feature-overwhelming-majority-women-experience-some-form-harassment-sexual.

⁹ Meza-de-Luna, Maria-Elena, and Sulima García-Falconi. “Adolescent Street Harassment in Querétaro, Mexico.” *Affilia*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2015, pp. 158-169. *Social Services Abstracts*, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0886109914541117>, PEER REVIEWED

¹⁰ Senthilingam, Meera. “Sexual Harassment: How It Stands around the Globe.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 29 Nov. 2017, www.cnn.com/2017/11/25/health/sexual-harassment-violence-abuse-global-levels/index.html.

¹¹ Speas, Adrienne. “Sexual Harassment in Mexico: Is NAFTA enough?” *Law and Business Review of the Americas*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, pp. 83. PEER REVIEWED

¹² “Uprooting Sexual Harassment.” *El Universal*, 8 Jan. 2018, www.eluniversal.com.mx/english/uprooting-sexual-harassment.

¹³ Lorenia Trueba de Avendano. “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.” *International Labor Rights Fund’s Rights for Working Women Campaign*, Sept. 2003, digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1485&context=globaldocs. PEER REVIEWED

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in 1998 that show the government has tried to eradicate change, but has not effectively protected working women.¹⁶

The in-effectiveness of protecting women is evident in research that shows women are still being harassed. While there are technically laws in place to protect women, sexual harassment is underreported, women are unable to recognize it as a problem, and is generally assumed as legally unsuccessful for its victims.¹⁷

One specific aspect of the Mexican workplace culture is the Maquiladora, which is “a factory that operates under preferential tariff programs established and administered by the United States and Mexico.”¹⁸ These factories are important because they bring in billions of dollars of export earnings for Mexico.¹⁹ Maquiladoras’ work force is made up of at least 50% women on average.²⁰ A recent study inside a Maquiladora showed that of these women, 52% of them were unaware of the existence of laws against sexual harassment in the work place, while 70% of them reported they had had an experience with sexual harassment at work.²¹

The other area of the Mexican public where laws against sexual harassment exist is within public transportation. In 2008, the The Sistema de Transporte Colectivo (The Mexico City Metro) decided to add women-only cars to their transportation system.²² This attempt at solving the problem was seen more as deepening the divide between men and women, and therefore creating more reason for harassment against women, rather than protecting them.²³ Two years after the women-only-cars attempt, the UN ranked Mexico number one globally in sexual violence against women.²⁴ More recently, the Mexican government has come under additional than before pressure to protect women using public transport in 2014 after Mexico City was ranked the second most dangerous transport system for women in the world, by the Thomson Reuters Foundation.²⁵

The National Institute for Women in Mexico, known as INMUJERES has taken steps towards change through the police. One of the factors contributing to the stop of public sexual harassment being so difficult are frequent reports of police not taking women’s claims of sexual

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ “What Is a Maquiladora in Mexico?” *Manufacturing in Mexico*, manufacturinginmexico.org/maquiladora-in-mexico/.

¹⁹ “Mexico’s Maquiladoras: Abuses Against Women Workers.” *Human Rights Watch*, 30 May 2012, www.hrw.org/news/1996/08/17/mexicos-maquiladoras-abuses-against-women-workers.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Lorenia Trueba de Avendano. “Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.” *International Labor Rights Fund’s Rights for Working Women Campaign*, Sept. 2003, digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1485&context=globaldocs

²² ‘Overwhelming Majority’ of Women Experience Some Form of Harassment, Sexual Violence in Their Daily Journeys | UN News.” *United Nations*, United Nations, news.un.org/en/story/2017/05/556512-feature-overwhelming-majority-women-experience-some-form-harassment-sexual.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “The Worlds Women 2010.” *Social Statistics and Indicators (Ser. K)*, 2010. UNSTATS, doi:10.18356/67cafe87-en. https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_BW.pdf

²⁵ Thomson Reuters Foundation. “Most Dangerous Transport Systems for Women.” *Thomson Reuters Foundation News*, news.trust.org/spotlight/most-dangerous-transport-systems-for-women/?tab=methodology.

harassment seriously.²⁶ In 2016 INMUJERES amended criminal laws to include gender based violence and define violence against women as discrimination. This allowed women to become legitimized when they claim to police they have been sexually harassed.²⁷

Machismo Culture

The problem of public sexual harassment doesn't only root into the lack of laws in Mexico. Eradicating laws against public sexual harassment would help protect women, but the studies of INMUJERES show that the problem runs into Mexican culture. Mexico is characterized by specific roles for men and women. In terms of public transport, a "mobile" woman is seen contrary to what her role as a wife and mother.²⁸ One woman from Mexico City stated that "the power dynamic between partners in sexual decision making is rarely equal", showing that the difference in the roles of women and men create a gap that directly effects sexual relations.²⁹ These different power dynamics are consistent with the sex roles assigned to them, which explains how street harassment is sex-oriented violence.³⁰ Women's roles are those that privilege motherhood over professional goals and personal satisfaction while the role of the man is a sexual being with the liberties to be what he wants.³¹

The history behind these roles is summarized by Concepción Fernández Caza in her statement that "a woman, possessed of a body naturally different from that of man, must face the fact that this natural difference has been converted into a historical inequality," in which she becomes "imprisoned in a sexuality essentially for others, in a body over which she has never been master."³²

These views translate into the traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity in Mexico today.³³ This is known as "Machismo culture", which refers to excessive masculinity and its accompanying attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.³⁴ Historically, what it means to be "macho", or a "macho man" in Mexico has changed over time whether it be "brutish, gallant, or cowardly".³⁵ The thing that hasn't changed however, is that a macho man is a role in society specifically different from women. Today that difference takes shape in the sexualization of women, and

²⁶ Dunckel Graglia, Amy. "Finding Mobility: Women Negotiating Fear and Violence in Mexico City's Public Transit System." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2016, pp. 624-640. *CrossRef*, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1034240. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Saxifrage, Carrie. "What I Learned in Mexico about Violence against Women That Everyone Should Know." *National Observer*, 31 Jan. 2018, www.nationalobserver.com/2017/12/26/analysis/what-i-learned-mexico-about-violence-against-women-everyone-should-know.

³⁰ Meza-de-Luna, Maria-Elena, and Sulima García-Falconi. "Adolescent Street Harassment in Querétaro, Mexico." *Affilia*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2015, pp. 158-169. *Social Services Abstracts*. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

³¹ Salgado, Martha Patricia Castañeda. "Femicide in Mexico: An Approach through Academic, Activist and Artistic Work." *Current Sociology*, vol. 64, no. 7, Aug. 2016, pp. 1054-1070., doi:10.1177/0011392116637894. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

³² Hodgdon, Tim. "Fem: "A Window Onto the Cultural Coalescence of a Mexican Feminist Politics of Sexuality"." *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2000, pp. 79-104. *CrossRef*, doi:10.2307/1052122. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

³³ Salgado, Martha Patricia Castañeda. "Femicide in Mexico: An Approach through Academic, Activist and Artistic Work." *Current Sociology*, vol. 64, no. 7, Aug. 2016, pp. 1054-1070., doi:10.1177/0011392116637894.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Gutmann, Matthew C. *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*. University of California Press, 2007.

how that plays into their roles publicly. For example, sexual harassment in the work place is part of a more overlying problem in Mexican culture that encourages male superiority.³⁶ And then in the realm of public transport, the male superiority trend manifests itself again through men expecting women to change if they want to be mobile, because it's not technically their female role to be out and about. Women will purposefully not wear certain things, because they don't want to be a target.³⁷ These reactions from women are a product of Machismo because they are the ones conforming to the men. A quote from one Mexico City male-resident illustrates this perfectly:

"Look, although there are a lot of women who are sick of being groped, they still go [travel] with their necklines and miniskirts. I say if they do not want to be groped women should go in the women-only sections, and wearing the caps like they do in Pakistan. [The way they are now] they seem wicked with signs that say: Touch me."³⁸

Normalization

Much of the research done on public sexual harassment in Mexico is from an outsider's perspective looking in. It begs the question if Mexican women actually feel like they are being harassed or— if they think they are being treated normally. Because public sexual harassment of women, especially on public transportation, is so prevalent, women have normalized it.³⁹ This presents a major problem in any tactic used to protect women because women assume that it is their job to navigate gender based violence— that is the social norm—and they have no reason to think anything differently.⁴⁰

Another factor to the normalization of public sexual harassment is that men do not see it as serious. They have normalized it as well. In fact, a recent survey showed that half of men in Mexico do not see sexual harassment, such as verbal comments, as serious enough to warrant legal action.⁴¹ Unfortunately, many officials don't either, such as the police. Despite legal pushes for laws protecting women, Mexico has recently made some contradictory choices that further the normalization of sexual harassment such as the legalization of public sex in Guadalajara.⁴² In addition to this legalization, police in Guadalajara are now supposed to look the other way most of the time, making it much more difficult to police sexual activity that is not within the boundaries of consent.⁴³

The normalization of sexual harassment in public spaces means that it has turned into a cycle. One boy, from Mexico in an interview named Maynor was 18 years old. After asking him about why men catcall, even to their own women, he said: "I don't do it because my dad doesn't

³⁶ Lorenia Trueba de Avendano. "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace." *International Labor Rights Fund's Rights for Working Women Campaign*, Sept. 2003, digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1485&context=globaldocs

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Dunckel Graglia, Amy. "Finding Mobility: Women Negotiating Fear and Violence in Mexico City's Public Transit System." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2016, pp. 624-640. *CrossRef*, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1034240. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Tom Embury-Dennis . "Mexican City Legalises Sex in Public." *The Independent*, Independent Digital News and Media, 21 Aug. 2018, www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/guadalajara-public-sex-mexico-legalise-intercourse-law-change-police-a8501161.html.

⁴³ "City Where Police Now Ignore Most Sex in Public." *South China Morning Post*, 2 Sept. 2018, www.scmp.com/news/world/americas/article/2162400/mexico-city-where-police-now-ignore-most-sex-public.

do it—he always said that it wasn't nice to women.”⁴⁴ In Maynor's comments, he describes that the trend of catcalling and normalization of sexual harassment is a cycle. Boys do it because they see their dads do it, so why would they do anything differently unless, like Maynor, their dad taught them otherwise?

Poverty

The last thing to consider when thinking of factors of public sexual harassment of women is that poverty multiplies the conflicts of male-female roles because it is an added pressure.⁴⁵ Anything that stresses these roles can create a conflict that will only be magnified by the pressure of poverty. Poverty is actually a structural cause of the increase in violence against women, according to Mercedes Olivera.⁴⁶ A study in 2000 showed that 75% of Mexico's population was considered poor or extremely poor.⁴⁷

One manifestation of poverty as a factor of public sexual harassment is in the work force. Maquiladoras, as discussed earlier, offer opportunity to get out of poverty for many people in Mexico because there is a lack of job opportunities for men, and women can do maquiladora jobs without training. Because there are more women working, a major conflict has occurred because of the disturbance of traditional dynamics of the roles of men and women.⁴⁸ The changes in employment have not been met with a change in traditional attitudes of men and women, and therefore creates grounds for sexual harassment because men feel like their masculinity is being challenged.⁴⁹

Consequences

Social

Looking at Mexican society as a whole to see the effects of public sexual harassment makes it apparent that continuing with sexual harassment will not allow their society to grow. Sexual harassment will hinder the social, economic, and political growth of Mexico because its cycle through generations will not be stopped. The strict roles that Mexican culture has set up for men and women will only continue to cause problems.

A study by the Journal of Business Ethics took a closer look into the attitudes displayed by sexual harassment in the form of “whistle blowing”. They broke the reasons people catcalled, or blew whistles, into four groups: Power distance, Individualism, Uncertainty avoidance, and Masculinity.⁵⁰ Mexico scored the highest in the “Power distance” category, which is defined as “the degree of equality, or inequality between people in the country's society.”⁵¹ Interestingly enough, the paper goes on to explain that often this gap between people occurs

⁴⁴ Maynor Valazquez direct quote [PRIMARY SOURCE](#)

⁴⁵ Olivera, Mercedes. "Violencia Femicida." *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2006, pp. 104-114. [CrossRef](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0094582X05286092), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0094582X05286092>, doi:10.1177/0094582X05286092 [PEER REVIEWED](#)

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Boltvinik, Julio and E. Hernandez Laos 2000 Pobreza y distribucion del ingreso en Mexico. Mexico City: Siglo

⁴⁸ Olivera, Mercedes. "Violencia Femicida." *Latin American Perspectives*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2006, pp. 104-114. [CrossRef](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0094582X05286092), <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0094582X05286092>, doi:10.1177/0094582X05286092

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Peek, Lucia, et al. "NAFTA Students' Whistle-Blowing Perceptions: A Case of Sexual Harassment." *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 74, no. 3, 2007, pp. 219-231., doi:10.1007/s10551-006-9231-1. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

⁵¹ Ibid.

because of an unequal distribution of power in their country, which makes them not trust each other in situations like the workplace, for example. Between that and the highly masculine culture in Mexico, the author states that whistling, “might be perceived as just being a man, not a harasser, and doing what men do as a part of their natural personality.”⁵²

The mix of masculinity, or “machismo”, as defined earlier, combined with the power gap of distrust found in the study creates a perfect atmosphere for the cyclical effect of male dominance and sexual harassment found in Mexico. In essence, this cycle has had a consequence on the culture of Mexico because it has caused the country’s progression socially to become stuck. It is a trend throughout the world demographically, that the development of a country greatly depends on the equality and treatment of women. For example, in a different part of the world, the EU conducted a study that states “promoting gender equality and mainstreaming the different perspectives of women and men into the policy areas of education, labour market participation and pay, among others is essential not only for reasons of social justice and fairness but it is also essential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.”⁵³

Health

The general fear associated with being sexually harassed can have major health effects. The consequences of this fear can be seen psychologically through women’s self esteem, and physically through sexual abuse.

Women are forced into letting themselves be sexually harassed, because of the factors of normalization, machismo culture, and the lack of laws. They have no protection, which has an effect on their psyche. Making women feel sexually objectified will lead them to believe that of themselves if prolonged. If women see themselves as sexual objects, it’s easy to limit themselves to that image. A study on the psychological effects of sexual harassment victims showed that women reported difficulty sleeping, concentrating, self-doubt, shame, depression, anxiety, and non-interest in things that they usually enjoyed.⁵⁴ Doctor Cook, the doctor in charge of the study stated that the acts of sexual harassment were “defining for them”, meaning that their experiences defined their psyche.⁵⁵

Sexual abuse is a consequence of sexual harassment. If women can be sexually harassed in public, they can be sexually abused at home, or in private. Sexual harassment in public is a precursor to worse things, such as rape. The lack of laws about harassment in public, like in the legalization of sex in Guadalajara, make sexual abuse even more likely. If the government doesn’t care in public, they won’t care at home either.

Self Image

A group of students from Monterrey, Mexico, were interviewed about public sexual harassment. The girls agreed that remarks made to them in the streets were offensive, but the best way to deal with them was to ignore them.⁵⁶ Ignorance has allowed women to become accustomed to sexual harassment in public, they are numb to it. Almost none of the girls interviewed in the

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Bego, Ingrid. “Introduction: Gender Equality Policy in the European Union.” *Gender Equality Policy in the European Union*, 2015, pp. 1–18., doi:10.1057/9781137437174_1.

⁵⁴ Jagannathan, Meera. “These Are All the Ways Sexual Harassment Can Make Your Life Miserable.” *Moneyish*, 15 Feb. 2018, moneyish.com/ish/these-are-all-the-ways-sexual-harassment-can-make-your-life-miserable/.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Otis, Martha. “Subject to Discussion.” *Business Mexico*, vol. 4, no. 11, Nov 1, 1994, pp. 30. *ABI/INFORM Global (Corporate)*, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/197132246>. PEER REVIEWED

Monterrey group wanted to take sexual harassment matters to the courts.⁵⁷ In addition to the consequence of numbness, the consequence of fear has taken shape in public areas as well.

In the case of employment, for example, women don't want to speak up about a case of sexual harassment out of fear of losing their jobs. Between it being difficult to prove something like harassment, officials simply not caring, and the pressure of poverty, women deem it not important to stand up for themselves. Martha Otis states that the most frustrating thing surrounding sexual harassment is the fact that the "burden" of finding proof is the woman's, the victim's, burden.⁵⁸

All of this also has a direct effect on the image of a woman in Mexico—"The notion that women are more 'caring and nurturing' also translates into images of women as 'weak, vulnerable, and incapable of protecting themselves' while traveling."⁵⁹ This is a result of the lack of laws and roles society has set up for women, and in turn, women are changing things about themselves in order to not get harassed. In turn, women are afraid of using public transport, which therefore inhibits their mobility, such as wearing all black and avoiding skirts and low cut blouses.⁶⁰

Practices

Social Networking Apps

The idea behind this practice is to use technology to create a network of people that can help each other and build awareness of situations of sexual harassment. The goal is to build safe public places free of harassment through the power of community. Building a sense of community through technology is done by downloading an app, through different organizations, and then connecting with people by reading other's stories, sharing your own, and reaching out when you are feeling unsafe in a public situation. Organizations have developed their own applications for mobile devices such as iPhones, tablets, and Android phones. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of these apps is that it creates a "real time" response to sexual harassment. Victims are able to immediately share and get help, and have a constant support system through technology.

Some apps, like "Hollaback!" allow the user to take a photo of an aggressor, and mark the location of where the incident of harassment happened.⁶¹ Many of these applications are specific to certain regions of the world. For example, HarassMap is a non profit that focuses on women in Egypt. Harasstracker does the same thing for women in Lebanon, Safecity in India, and Callisto for university students in the U.S.. Hollaback! is actually the one of the only global platforms in the world, which can be used in Mexico.

Impact

One specific impact they have had is the amount of public attention these apps and their organizations have received. Shortly after the #metoo movement in 2017, news outlets featured companies like Safecity, Callisto, and Hollaback!. Attention from the press meant attention for

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Dunckel Graglia, Amy. "Finding Mobility: Women Negotiating Fear and Violence in Mexico City's Public Transit System." *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 23, no. 5, 2016, pp. 624-640. *CrossRef*, doi:10.1080/0966369X.2015.1034240.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Holla On The Go." *CNNMoney*, Cable News Network, money.cnn.com/gallery/technology/mobile/2014/06/27/apps-social-activists/2.html.

the cause. Hollaback!'s app was featured on a CNN Business article claiming it as one of the "5 Apps to Change the World".⁶² Many news outlets would also simply list organizations that were working towards ending public sexual harassment, like the New York Magazine article "Sexual-Harassment-Reporting Apps Help Stop Abuse in Global City Streets".⁶³

Gaps

Globally, 75% of women do not report abuse or harassment at the time it happened.⁶⁴ The organizations that have apps have reported that their apps have increased on the ground response by 50%.⁶⁵ One of the problems however, is that these organizations have not done very specific research at all. The statistic above for example that came from Hollaback!'s 2017 annual report, saying the apps have increased ground response to sexual harassment by 50%, does not say how the number was measured. However, what is included in many of these annual reports are numbers on users and reports. For instance, the organization SafeCity reported that they had 10,000 plus reports of sexual harassment.⁶⁶ They also go on in their report to share multiple success stories first hand from their users.

Because of the lack of data that organizations creating a social network are doing, they have created an informational gap. Lack of information means that these organizations are not conducting the research they could be to know how they could improve. This creates a gap of stagnancy because their impact isn't being measured.

Jhumka Gupta, an epidemiologist at George Mason University, says that there are limits to what these platforms can do, despite the fact that they have given women control. He states, "I do credit these [websites and apps] for bringing public awareness to the issue. The next step is engaging communities and engaging men to stop harassment."⁶⁷ The gap that Gupta illustrates is focused on the idea that there is a disconnect between the network of people online, and the cultural phenomenon of actually stopping sexual harassment from happening. Connecting with the actual communities that these apps are used in could possibly advance organization's cause even further.

One gap that is substantial for Mexico specifically is that a lot of these platforms, like Jdoe, HarassMap, and SafeCity, are only for certain regions in the world, and they are tailored to those regions as well. Hollaback! is, as mentioned above, one of the only global platforms reaching Mexico. An advantage to organizations for a specific region, like SafeCity for India, is that the organization can connect more thoroughly with the community it is involved in. SafeCity, for instance, has been able to partner with universities in India, and get involved with government organizations to also promote safety for women in public situations.⁶⁸ One of the contributing factors discussed earlier to public sexual harassment was lack of laws and

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Weiser, Sonia. "These Digital Maps Help Women Find the Safest Routes Home." *Daily Intelligencer*, Intelligencer, 12 Oct. 2018, nymag.com/developing/2018/10/safecity-walkfreely-ushahidi-sexual-harassment-abuse-reporting-maps.html.

⁶⁴ "Do You Feel Safe in Your City?" Why Does Bonded Labour Still Exist in India? – Radar Slavery, www.onourradar.org/safecity-toolkit/.

⁶⁵ "Hollaback!'s Impact." *Hollaback!*, www.ihollaback.org/app/uploads/2016/11/impactf2.pdf

⁶⁶ "2016-2017 Annual Report on Safecity." *Red Dot Foundation*, safecity.in/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Annual-Report-2016-17.pdf

⁶⁷ Singh, Maanvi. "Apps Let Women Say #MeToo About Street Harassment." *NPR*, NPR, 11 Jan. 2018, www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/01/11/577154367/apps-let-women-say-metoo-about-street-harassment.

⁶⁸ Safecity. "Partners." *Safecity*, safecity.in/partners/

government regulation in Mexico. If a platform was able to connect with the Mexican government the way many platforms like SafeCity did in India have done, it's possible that the recognition could provide a powerful way to make women in Mexico feel safe in public transportation and in the work place.

Campaigns Against Public Sexual Harassment

There have been multiple campaigns or social movements initiated in Mexico over many years that have attempted to bring awareness and give a voice to the women of Mexico that feel unsafe in public situations due to the threat of sexual harassment. While they have taken many different forms, social media platforms have been used to promote the campaigns as an attempt for the movement to go viral.

These campaigns include:

- “Hijas de Violencia” 2016
- “Stop Telling Women to Smile” 2012
- “The Pink Taxi” 2009
- “No Es De Hombres” 2017
- “The Seat Experiment” 2017
- “Machismo Has to Die” 2016
- “#MiPrimerAcoso” 2016

All of the above listed campaigns exhibit women leading social movements because they have realized they've been oppressed, and they are standing up through themselves publicly. These campaigns went viral enough that they received global attention such as with UN Women, BBC, The Huffington Post, and The New York Times. Many of the campaigns were also used as hashtags for social media campaigns, like #noesdehombres in 2017. This campaign was a series of videos that turned into a social media movement much like the #metoo hashtag that went viral.

Impact

The impact of social movements and campaigns are difficult to measure because the main goal of the campaign is awareness, or in other words, for as many people to see the movement or use it (such as a hashtag) as possible. For example, the 2016 group called “Hijas de Violencia” which translates to “daughters of violence” made videos in Mexico City that combined punk rock with performance art to end street harassment among women.⁶⁹ The videos went viral quickly and received 9 million views on Facebook.⁷⁰ An interview done with one of the performers in the group, Ana Karen, when asked about how the videos have impacted her life stated:

”I’ve gained a greater consciousness of my own right to walk and to navigate public spaces comfortably and also now we know that when we’re walking and someone harasses us, it’s not our fault and it’s not our responsibility. It’s totally changed the way we look at ourselves and how we fit into the social context.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ Delgadillo, Natalie, and CityLab. “Fighting Street Harassment in Mexico City With Punk Rock, Performance Art, and Confetti.” *CityLab*, 11 Feb. 2016, www.citylab.com/life/2016/02/mexico-city-street-harrassment-catcalling-hijas-de-violencia/462048/.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Direct quote from Ana Karen <https://www.citylab.com/life/2016/02/mexico-city-street-harrassment-catcalling-hijas-de-violencia/462048/> PRIMARY SOURCE

Another example of the impact of a campaign is that of “No Es De Hombres”, in 2017. It was done in combination with “The Seat Experiment” which consisted of putting a seat with a nude, anatomically correct male’s lower body on the seat of male-only metro cars. This was done as a social experiment where the reactions of men were filmed. The seat also had a small plaque explaining the symbol of stopping sexual harassment that the seat was. The plaque reads, translated from Spanish, “It is uncomfortable to sit here, but that is nothing compared to the sexual violence that women suffer on their daily journeys.”⁷² Then the videos were made into campaigns that went viral.⁷³ However, in this case, the campaign was extremely controversial and received a lot of attention.

Gaps

Unfortunately, the only measurable thing about impact of social movements is how many views or shares they had in media outlets. Besides that it’s up to the public to decide how much they want to care. All of these campaigns occurred specifically in Mexico and were able to get the attention that they desired, which is apparent in the numbers they’ve received, but the gap occurs in the inability to actually measure whether they made a difference in stopping the public sexual harassment of women in Mexico. Even if the campaigns’ only goal is to get people thinking about the issue, it is difficult to measure because how would one go about doing that? That being said, people were certainly talking about these campaigns, even globally, as mentioned before.

Training Programs for Mobilization

Many organizations have set up training sessions that essentially educate people on how to become leaders in their communities. These leaders then know exactly how they should behave in order to stop sexual harassment. These training sessions are usually set up periodically as workshops, like monthly or weekly. Usually the workshops focus on building skills such as bystander intervention techniques, building a movement in a community, and how to address harassment.

One of the ways people are taught to do this through STOP’s program is to hand out “Cards Against Harassment”. Essentially, they are a series of printable cards that you can hand out if you feel you are being harassed. The cards have witty comments about how it is not acceptable to harass someone else.⁷⁴

Impact

Recently, there has been a spike in interest about workshops such as these, especially with Global Site Leader Program, in 2017, they saw a 70% increase in the amount of workshops they did in that year.⁷⁵ About 500 people in Mexico have been trained through this program, successfully completing the course.⁷⁶

⁷² Baker, Vicky. “Mexico City Metro’s ‘Penis Seat’ Sparks Debate.” *BBC News*, BBC, 31 Mar. 2017, www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-39449506.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ Stoeber, Char, et al. “Talk Back to Your Harasser with These Cards!” *Stop Street Harassment*, 11 June 2014, www.stopstreetharassment.org/2014/06/cardsagainstharrassment/.

⁷⁵ “Hollaback!’s Impact.” *Hollaback!*, www.ihollaback.org/app/uploads/2016/11/impactf2.pdf

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Gaps

One of the main disconnects discussed earlier in the technology network of apps that organizations have created is that there isn't a way to directly get through to the community to make a change. Training programs to encourage the mobilization of people by educating leaders is an attempt to fill that gap. In fact, many organizations that have apps, later launched training programs to connect the whole community. Or, how many "Cards Against Harassment" have been handed out? The programs however, have unfortunately failed to research or provide any data that would indicate that the gap is being filled, or that they are making a difference.

The main gap that concerns this method is the lack of data that is collected on the impact of the workshops. The method is primarily working towards training leaders that will mobilize themselves and others. Specific data on the number of people they are reaching out to, and what steps past the program they have taken are not available.

Another gap is the effectiveness of a single person or a few people in a community. Ending sexual harassment in public spaces within Mexico requires changing an entire cultural element, in this case the element of Machismo. It's possible that there are simply too few of people to make a difference, and even though they are supposed to reach out and build other people like them, maybe they won't actually do that. Sometimes life gets in the way and that begs the question on how invested are these trainees?

Breaking the cultural trend of Machismo Through Boys' Education

This approach focuses on the idea of a cultural cycle. The cultural cycle of Machismo, discussed earlier, is something that this method tries to break. The idea is that in order to change something that wouldn't ever change by itself, you have to start at the link where it could change, in this case, that link is young boys. If boys do what their fathers do, they're going to copy the machismo behaviors that objectify women. Organizations have wondered if by teaching boys that things that have been normalized, like catcalling, are actually offensive and derogatory towards women, and that it is "cool" to respect women, they could change the cycle.

Impact

One organization that exemplifies this method is "Coaching Boys Into Men", which initially started in the United States and has expanded internationally, including Mexico, since then. The program uses an approach from other male authority figures, in this case sports coaches, to teach boys healthy relationship schools including that violence "never equals strength."⁷⁷ Due to the major influence of coaches in boys' lives, the program had major success as shown in a study conducted by the American Journal of Preventative Medicine.⁷⁸ Dr. Miller of the study stated that, "The rates of abuse perpetration actually increased among youth who didn't participate, whereas perpetration did not increase among the male athletes whose coaches delivered the program."⁷⁹

Because of the success of the program, CBIM has since partnered with global organizations such as FIFA, Nike, and The International Center for Research on Women

⁷⁷ "Coaching Boys Into Men - Respect. Integrity. Nonviolence." *Coaching Boys Into Men (CBIM)*, www.coachescorner.org/

⁷⁸ Miller, Elizabeth, et al. "One-Year Follow-Up of a Coach-Delivered Dating Violence Prevention Program." *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2013, pp. 108–112., doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2013.03.007. [PEER REVIEWED](#)

⁷⁹ "Coaching Boys into Men Program Prevents Teen Dating Violence." *Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh*, www.chp.edu/research/about/research-news-releases/043013-program-prevent-teen-dating-violence.

(ICRW) in order to develop adaptations to the CBIM program and analyze the results of CBIM in communities around the world.⁸⁰

Gaps

This approach fall short of the goal to end sexual harassment in Mexico, specifically with the program CBIM in that it is really only tested among athletes that have coaches. It is possible that in places where things like coaches or being an “athlete” are more of a luxury, such as in impoverished areas, that this program wouldn’t be very effective because coaches don’t really exist. In Mexico, 43.6% of people are considered impoverished, as of 2017.⁸¹

Key Takeaways

- Women in Mexico experience public sexual harassment in two main spaces: the workplace, and public transportation—which has caused sexual harassment to be a part of every day life for them.
- The general lack of laws, masculine dominant “machismo” culture, normalization of sexual harassment, and poverty in Mexico are all contributing factors to the sexual harassment seen publicly and have made it a cultural cycle.
- This cycle has had consequences on the social development of Mexico, the general health of women, and women’s self image.
- There are many different approaches to help women have a voice to stop public sexual harassment. They include mobile applications, boys’ education on how to treat women, training programs for reaction, and even social media campaigns against sexual harassment. The impact of these different attempts has not effectively been measured, and is very difficult to measure, in order to see what has been most effective.

⁸⁰ “Coaching Boys Into Men Goes Global.” *Futures Without Violence*, 14 Aug. 2018, www.futureswithoutviolence.org/coaching-boys-into-men-goes-global/.

⁸¹ “Mexico Says Poverty down to about 44 Percent of Population.” *Fox News*, FOX News Network, www.foxnews.com/world/mexico-says-poverty-down-to-about-44-percent-of-population.