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Risk Factors for Sexual Harassment in Public Places

Farida Anwar¹, Karin Österman¹, Kaj Björkqvist¹

¹Abo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland

farida.anwar@abo.fi

Abstract. The aim of the study was to investigate risk factors for victimisation from sexual harassment in public places. A questionnaire was completed by 591 female university students in Finland. The mean age was 25.2 years ($SD = 7.1$). Nonverbal sexual harassment was found to be the most common type of sexual harassment, followed by physical. The most common place of victimisation was in a nightclub or bar, and the most common perpetrator was a stranger. The most common single acts of victimisation were to be stared at with filthy looks and talked to in an unpleasant sexual way. Victimisation from sexual harassment in public places was significantly predicted by physical punishment during childhood, victimisation from peer aggression at school, victimisation from verbal and physical intimate partner aggression, and low self-esteem. When frequency of sexual harassment was controlled for, emotional distress caused by sexual harassment correlated significantly with victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression, victimisation from peer aggression at school, and a low self-esteem, suggesting sensitisation to aggression. In this sample of Finnish university students, the levels of victimisation from sexual harassment were low. Victimisation from other types of aggression and low self-esteem were identified as possible risk factors for victimisation from sexual harassment.

Keywords. Risk factors, physical, verbal and nonverbal sexual harassment, public places.

1. Introduction

Female victimisation from sexual harassment in public places has been shown to constitute a form of revictimisation and/or multiple victimisation from other types of aggression. A study conducted in Ghana found that victimisation from sexual harassment in public places was associated with higher levels of victimisation during childhood from physical punishment and peer aggression at school, as well as with victimisation from verbal and physical intimate partner aggression during adulthood (Anwar, Österman, Afari-Korkor, & Björkqvist, 2020). The present study was undertaken in order to investigate whether the same risk factors for victimisation from sexual harassment could be identified in a Nordic country, Finland, which has a high level of gender equality and strict legislation against sexual harassment.

1.1 Social Status and Sexual Harassment of Women in Finland

In the year 1906, Finland became the second country in world to establish full political rights for females (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2019). Since then, the gender gap has

continued to be reduced in many fields of life. This has been particularly effective in labour force participation (OECD Labour Force Statistics, 2010), education, childcare, domestic responsibilities, and political representation (Statistics Finland, 2018). Gender equality and non-discrimination have been declared as important principles in the Constitution of Finland (Ministry of Justice, 1999). Sexual and gender-based harassment are declared as discrimination and prohibited under the Equality Act, which is applicable to all areas of life, including workplaces and educational institutions (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, 2019). Finland is today one of the top-ranking countries on the Gender Equality Index (World Economic Forum, 2020) and among the safest countries for women, according to the Women, Peace, and Security Index (Klugman, Dahl, & Bakken, 2018).

Despite achievements towards gender equality, different forms of discrimination against females have still been observed in Finland (Husu, 2000). Gender discrimination and aggression against females still exist (Heikkinen, 2003; Mankkinen, 1995). A survey found that 37.8 % of female respondents had been sexually harassed by men, and that 17.1% of the male respondents had been sexually harassed by women in Finland (Statistics Finland, 2018). Inappropriate remarks about the body and the sexuality of women, including ambiguous jokes and offensive remarks, have been reported by every tenth woman (Piispa, Heiskanen, Kääriäinen, & Sirén, 2006). Adolescent females in Finland who were victimised from sexual harassment have on the other hand reported high levels of self-esteem (Apell, Marttunen, Fröjd, & Kaltiala, 2019). This finding suggests that teenage girls in Finland might to some extent consider sexual harassment as a compliment about their physical attractiveness.

1.2 Victimization of Children and Women from Other Types of Aggression in Finland

A law to end all forms of physical punishment directed against children in all settings including the home was implemented in Finland in 1983 (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2017). Physical punishment during childhood has been found to have a variety of adverse effects on psychological and physical health of the victims later in life (Afifi, Mota, Dasiewicz, MacMillan, & Sareen, 2012; Hyland, Alkhalaf, & Whalley, 2013; Österman, Björkqvist, & Wahlbeck, 2014). Victimization from peer aggression has also been observed in Finnish schools (Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd, & Marttunen, 2016). A stronger relationship between physical punishment at home and victimisation from peer aggression at school has been found among Finnish girls than boys (Söderberg, Björkqvist, & Österman, 2016).

According to Finnish police records, 69 % of the victims of domestic and intimate partner violence were women (Statistics Finland, 2015). In another study, 30–32% of Finnish females reported victimisation from physical intimate partner violence (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Between 1997 and 2005, a slight increase was observed of cases when females were victimised from physical or sexual aggression, or threats of such, by males (Piispa et al., 2006). When the prevalence of physical and/or sexual violence against women by intimate partners was compared in the Nordic countries, it was found that it was highest in Finland (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2014). Significant rates of stalking by male ex-partners, acquaintances, and strangers have been reported by Finnish university students (Björklund, Häkkinen-Nyholm, Sheridan, & Roberts, 2010). This is an example of the so-called Nordic paradox: the coexistence of contradictory conditions of high gender equality and prevalence of aggression against women (Gracia, & Merlo, 2016). The Nordic paradox could be explained by the fact that females in Finland are highly aware of their rights and therefore also ready to report that they have been victimised.

1.3 Adverse Outcomes of Sexual Harassment

Sexual name-calling has been found to be associated with later somatic and negative affective symptoms in female victims (Dahlqvist, Landstedt, Young, & Gådin, 2016). Victimization from sexual harassment has also been found to be associated with a risk for negative psychological outcomes such as emotional distress (Gruber & Fineran, 2008). Discrimination of women has been found to result in psychological distress and low self-esteem (Corning, 2002). Furthermore, it has been shown that women perceive sexual harassment as more harmful than men (Hand, & Sanchez, 2000). It has been argued that victimization from sexual harassment has more notable adverse health outcomes than bullying (Gruber, & Fineran, 2008). Victimization from sexual harassment at the beginning of high school has been found to predict two other types of victimization; victimization by peers and intimate partners later in life (Chiodo, Wolfe, Crooks, Hughes, & Jaffe, 2009). This phenomenon is often referred to as multiple victimization, or re-victimization.

1.4 Risk Factors for Sexual Harassment

It has been argued that great power distance in a society between males and female is a risk factor for sexual harassment of women, both at workplaces and in public places (Fitzgerald, 1993; Gardner, 1995). The effect of alcohol consumption has also been identified as a risk factor for sexual harassment, when intoxicated males assume that a woman who has been drinking is available for sexual contact (Abbey, 2002). In comparison to the European standards, alcohol consumption has been found to be high among young people in Finland (UN Human Rights Council, 2012). Studies conducted in western countries has identified bars and nightclubs as the most common places where sexual harassment of women occurs (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas, & Wells, 2017).

1.5 Self-esteem and Victimization

Victimization from sexual harassment has been found to be associated with low self-esteem among females both in Norway (Bendixen, Daveronis, & Kennair, 2018) and in the US (Gruber & Fineran, 2008). In Pakistan, victimization from sexual harassment has also been found to be positively correlated with low self-esteem among adult females (Muazzam, Qayyum, & Cheng, 2016). Victimization from sexual harassment has also been found to be a predictor of low self-esteem among females (Malik, Malik, Qureshi, & Atta, 2014). However, the effect of sexual harassment on self-esteem has been shown to be smaller than the effect on the physical and psychological health of the victims (Gruber & Fineran, 2008).

Associations between low self-esteem and other types of victimization have also been reported. Results of a longitudinal study showed that harsh physical punishment during childhood predicted low self-esteem (Amato & Fowler, 2002). It has been suggested that low self-esteem due to physical punishment might explain the association between victimization from childhood punishment and later vulnerability to intimate partner aggression (Aucoin, Frick, & Bodin, 2006; Papadakaki, Tzamalouka, Chatzifotiou, & Chliaoutakis, 2009). Female adolescents who had been victimized from peer aggression at school have also been shown to have internalisation problems and low self-esteem (Özdemir & Stattin, 2011). It has been argued that a low level of self-esteem contributes to a continuous cycle of victimization (Egan & Perry, 1998).

A meta-analysis has identified a bidirectional relationship between low self-esteem and peer victimization suggesting peer victimization to predict low self-esteem and vice versa (Van Geel, Goemans, Zwaanswijk, Gini, & Vedder, 2018). Similarly, self-esteem could have a bidirectional relationship with victimization from sexual harassment.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study examines different types of victimisation as possible risk factors for victimisation from sexual harassment in public places, and whether low self-esteem could serve as a predictor for victimisation from sexual harassment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

A questionnaire was completed by 591 female university students in Finland. Of the respondents, 175 were Finnish-speaking and 416 were Swedish-speaking. The mean age was 25.2 years ($SD = 7.1$). The age range was between 17 and 63 years of age. The Swedish-speaking students lived along the west and south coast of Finland, while the Finnish speaking lived in university cities spread out in the rest of Finland.

3.2 Instrument

A questionnaire was created including scales for measuring victimisation from three types of sexual harassment, physical punishment during childhood, victimisation from peer aggression at school, and two types of victimisation from intimate partner aggression. Scales measuring self-esteem and distress due to sexual harassment were also included. Victimisation from physical punishment and peer aggression were retrospective measures. The response alternatives were on a five-point scale for all measures (for all victimisation scales: 0 = never, 1 = seldom, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = very often; for self-esteem and emotional distress due to sexual harassment: 0 = completely disagree, 1 = slightly disagree, 2 = neutral, 3 = slightly agree, 4 = completely agree).

The scale measuring victimisation from sexual harassment was based on the Sexual Harassment Experience Scale (Kamal & Tariq, 1997) and adopted for Finland. Three sub-scales were constructed for measuring victimisation from physical, verbal, and nonverbal sexual harassment. Individual items in the scales and Cronbach's alphas are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Single Items and Cronbach's Alphas of Three Scales Measuring Victimisation from Sexual Harassment ($N = 591$)

Has a man done any of the following things to you?
<i>Physical Sexual Harassment</i> (7 items, $\alpha = .89$)
Touched you inappropriately while giving you something.
Tried to put his hand on yours, for example in computer teaching.
Tried to stand too close to you in a crowded place (eg. in an elevator).
Collided with you while passing by.
Tried to have body contact with you while sitting.
Tried to kiss you against your will.
Tried to rape you.
<i>Verbal Sexual Harassment</i> (6 items, $\alpha = .79$)
Passed unwanted comments on your appearance with sexual allusions that you did not like.
Said unwanted sexually oriented things to you.
Offered you an unwanted lift in a vehicle.
Promised to promote you, or give you some other compensation, if you would agree to his sexual demands.

Threatened to spread false rumours about you if you did not fulfil his sexual demands.

Threatened to harm you physically if you did not fulfil his sexual demands.

Nonverbal Sexual Harassment (7 items, $\alpha = .84$)

Stared at you with dirty looks.

Did not let you pass by.

Followed you in the street.

Whistled while looking at you.

Tried to give you an unwanted card or gift.

Tried to give you a love letter you did not want.

Tried to undress himself in front of you.

Victimisation from physical punishment during childhood was measured using the Brief Physical Punishment Scale (Österman, & Björkqvist, 2007). The scale includes four questions: “When you were a child, did an adult at home subject you to any of the following things? “(a) pulled your hair, (b) pulled your ear, (c) hit you with the hand, and (d) hit you with an object. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .87.

Victimisation from aggressive behaviour by peers at school was measured with the Mini Direct Indirect Aggression Inventory (Österman, & Björkqvist, 2010). The scale includes three items: “When as child you were a pupil at school, how often were you victimised from the following things by another pupil”: a) Physical aggression: Someone has for example hit you, kicked you, or shoved you, b) Verbal aggression: Someone has for example yelled at you, called you bad names, or said hurtful things to you, and c) Indirect aggression: Someone has for example gossiped maliciously about you, spread harmful rumors about you, or tried to socially exclude you from others. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .81.

Victimisation from intimate partner aggression as an adult was measured with the Direct Indirect Aggression Scales for Adults (Österman, & Björkqvist, 2009). Victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression was measured with the following seven items: “Has your present partner, or a previous partner, done any of the following things against you?”: (a) threatened to hurt you, (b) yelled at you, (c) quarreled with you, (d) purposely said nasty or hurting things to you, (e) called you bad names, (f) interrupted you when you were talking, and (g) angrily nagged at you. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .93. Victimisation from physical intimate partner aggression was measured with nine items: (a) hit you, (b) locked you in, (c) locked you out, (d) shoved you, (e) bit you, (f) scratched you, (g) spit at you, (h) thrown things at you, and (i) damaged something that belonged to you. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .91.

In order to measure self-esteem, the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used. The scale includes 10 items: 1) On the whole, I am satisfied with myself, 2) At times I think I am no good at all, 3) I feel that I have a number of good qualities, 4) I am able to do things as well as most other people, 5) I feel I do not have much to be proud of, 6) I certainly feel useless at times, 7) I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others, 8) I wish I could have more respect for myself, 9) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure, and 10) I take a positive attitude toward myself. The Cronbach’s alpha of the scale was .81.

Emotional distress due to sexual harassment was measured with the Emotional Distress due to Sexual Harassment Scale (Anwar, 2016). The scale includes six items: “If any of the previously mentioned things happened to you, how did it make you feel?” (a) angry, (b)

humiliated, (c) embarrassed, (d) scared, (e) afraid of what others might think of me, and (f) sad. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was .85.

3.3 Procedure

The data was collected using online questionnaires sent to female students by university email and social media. A paper-and-pencil questionnaire was also administered to female students within a university in Western Finland. The data were collected between April 2017 and March 2019.

4. Results

4.1 Correlations between the Scales

Victimisation from the three measured types of sexual harassment correlated significantly with all four potential risk factors at a $p < .001$ -level (Table 2). Self-esteem correlated significantly negatively with all three types of sexual harassment. The highest correlations were found between physical intimate partner aggression and all three types of sexual harassment.

Table 2. Correlations between Victimisation from Three Types of Sexual Harassment, Four Scales Measuring Other Types of Victimisation, and Self-esteem ($N = 591$)

	Victimisation from Sexual Harassment		
	Physical	Verbal	Nonverbal
Physical Punishment during Childhood	.32***	.33***	.26***
Victimisation from Peer Aggression at School	.43***	.46***	.40***
Physical Intimate Partner Aggression	.49***	.51***	.49***
Verbal Intimate Partner Aggression	.41***	.45***	.38***
Self-esteem	-.27***	-.29***	-.23***

*** $p < .001$

4.2 Victimisation from Sexual Harassment

Nonverbal sexual harassment was found to be the most common type of harassment ($m = 1.10$, $SD = 0.78$), followed by physical harassment ($m = 0.90$, $SD = 0.82$); verbal sexual harassment ($m = 0.76$) was the least frequent type [$F_{(2,589)} = 174.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .372$]. The most common place of victimisation from sexual harassment was in a nightclub or bar ($m = 2.1$), followed by in the street ($m = 1.4$) [$F_{(11,568)} = 118.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .696$]. The most common perpetrator of sexual harassment was a stranger ($m = 2.1$), followed by an acquaintance ($m = 1.1$) [$F_{(4,573)} = 330.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .698$]. The most common single acts of victimisation from sexual harassment was to be stared at with filthy looks ($m = 1.98$), followed by talked to in an unpleasant sexual way ($m = 1.77$), getting sexual comment on one's appearance ($m = 1.67$), being whistled at ($m = 1.60$), and being touched in an inappropriate manner ($m = 1.2$) [$F_{(19,572)} = 91.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .752$]. No correlations were found between age of the respondents and frequency of the three types of victimisation from sexual harassment. A variable for total victimisation from sexual harassment was created by adding the three types of victimisation together and dividing the sum with three. The Swedish speaking women ($m = 0.99$, $SD = .62$) had been significantly more victimised from sexual harassment than the Finnish speaking ones ($m = 0.75$, $SD = .83$) [$t_{(589)} = 3.78$, $p < .001$].

4.3 Frequency of Victimization from Sexual Harassment, Four Other Types of Victimization, and Self-Esteem

On the basis of the total victimisation scores from sexual harassment (when the scores of the three subscales were added together) two groups were formed (high vs. low) with the mean as demarcation point. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with sexual harassment group (high/low) as independent variable and the four scales measuring other types of victimisation and self-esteem as dependent variables. The multivariate analysis was significant (Table 3). The univariate analyses showed that respondents belonging to the high sexual harassment group scored significantly higher on physical punishment during childhood, victimisation from peer aggression at school, and victimisation from verbal and physical intimate partner aggression, and lower on self-esteem (Fig. 1). The highest *F*-values were found for victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression, and victimisation from peer aggression at school.

Table 3. Results of a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with Sexual Harassment Group (High/Low) as Independent Variable and Four Scales Measuring Other Types of Victimization, and Self-Esteem as Dependent Variables (*N* = 591), cf. Fig. 1

	<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> ≤	η_p^2
Effect of Sexual Harassment Group				
Multivariate analysis	38.12	5, 580	.001	.247
Univariate analyses				
Physical Punishment during Childhood	36.59	1, 584	.001	.059
Victimisation from Peer Aggression at School	96.19	"	.001	.141
Verbal Intimate Partner Aggression	108.99	"	.001	.157
Physical Intimate Partner Aggression	51.09	"	.001	.080
Self-esteem	40.48	"	.001	.065

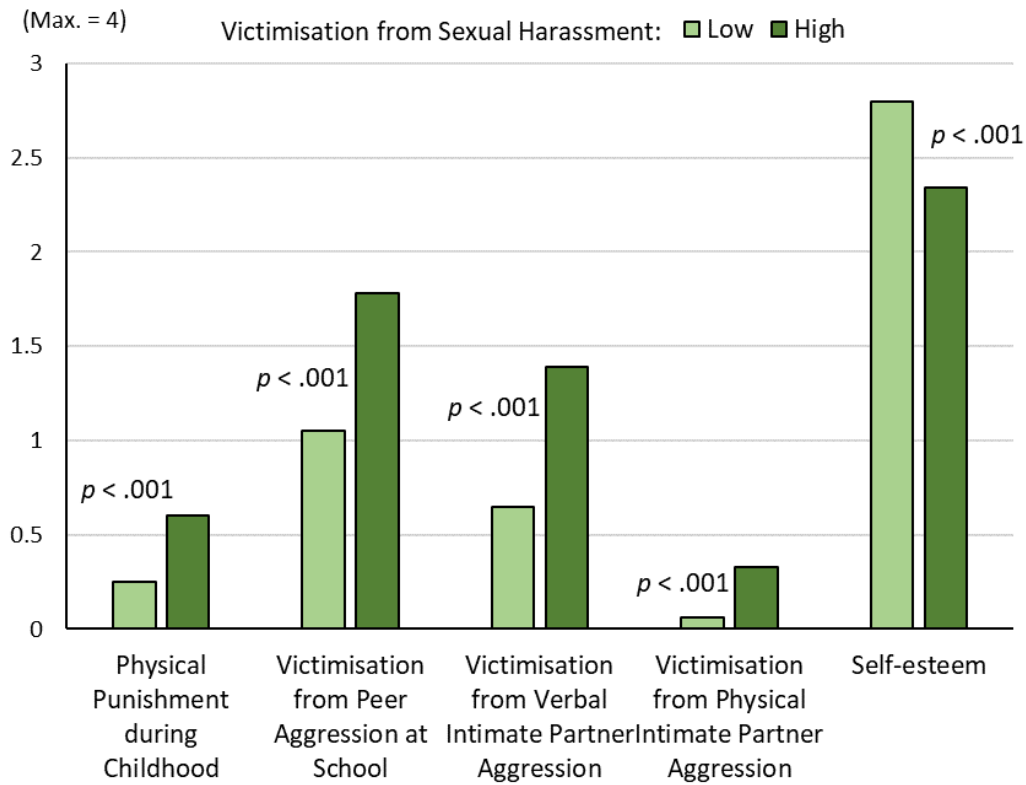


Figure 1. Mean values for four types of victimisation and self-esteem for women in the high vs. low victimisation group ($N = 591$), cf. Table 3.

4.4 Predictors of Victimization from Sexual Harassment

Victimization from physical and verbal sexual harassment in public places was significantly predicted by physical punishment during childhood, victimization from peer aggression at school, victimization from verbal and physical intimate partner aggression, and low self-esteem (Table 4). The pattern was the same for victimization from nonverbal sexual harassment, with the exception that victimization from physical intimate partner aggression did not predict victimization from nonverbal sexual harassment.

Table 4. Results from a Regression Analysis with Five Predictors of Victimization from Sexual Harassment ($N = 591$)

	Victimization from Sexual Harassment in Public Places					
	Physical		Verbal		Nonverbal	
	β	$p \leq$	β	$p \leq$	β	$p \leq$
R	.60		.63		.56	
R^2	.36		.40		.32	
F	65.73		77.67		54.15	
$p \leq$.001		.001		.001	
Predictors	β	$p \leq$	β	$p \leq$	β	$p \leq$
Physical Punishment during Childhood	.12	.001	.12	.001	.06	.080
Victimization from Peer Aggression at School	.23	.001	.25	.001	.22	.001

Victimisation from Verbal Intimate Partner Aggression	.30	.001	.28	.001	.34	.001
Victimisation from Physical Intimate Partner Aggression	.10	.023	.15	.001	.06	<i>ns</i>
Self-esteem	-.12	.001	-.13	.001	-.10	.007

4.5 Emotional Distress Due to Sexual Harassment

The mean value for emotional distress due to sexual harassment was 0.72 (*SD* 0.71). On a scale from zero to four this is equivalent to less often than seldom. Emotional distress due to sexual harassment correlated significantly positively with frequency of victimisation from sexual harassment and the four scales measuring victimisation from aggression, and negatively with the scale measuring self-esteem (Table 5). When frequency of sexual harassment was controlled for with partial correlation analysis, the correlations were still significant for victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression, victimisation from peer aggression at school, and significant but negative with self-esteem.

Table 5. Correlations between Emotional Distress due to Sexual Harassment, Four Scales Measuring Victimisation from Other Types of Aggression, and Self-Esteem (*N* = 591)

	Emotional Distress due to Sexual Harassment			
	Bivariate Correlations		Partial Correlations ^{a)}	
	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> ≤	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i> ≤
Sexual Harassment	.67	.001	-	-
Physical Punishment during Childhood	.25	.001	.05	<i>ns</i>
Victimisation from Aggression at School	.45	.001	.22	.001
Verbal Intimate Partner Aggression	.41	.001	.09	.032
Physical Intimate Partner Aggression	.29	.001	.00	<i>ns</i>
Self-esteem	-.27	.001	-.12	.003

^{a)} Controlled for frequency of sexual harassment

5. Discussion

The results of the study showed that sexual harassment of women occurs in Finland, although the reported levels were in general very low. The mean frequency of victimisation was “seldom” (1.10) for nonverbal sexual harassment, and less often than seldom for physical (0.90) and verbal harassment (0.76). Finland has one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world (World Economic Forum, 2020), and it is one of the safest for women to live in (Klugman et al., 2018).

In the present study, nonverbal sexual harassment was found to be the most common form, followed by physical and verbal forms. The most common single types of sexual harassing behaviours were to be stared at with filthy looks, talked to in an unpleasant sexual way, getting sexual comment about one’s appearance, and being touched in an inappropriate manner. Female respondents of another study conducted in Finland have reported victimisation from similar acts of sexual harassment (Piispa et al., 2006).

The results showed that not all public places are completely free from sexual harassment of women in Finland. Nightclubs and bars were the most common places for sexual harassment to take place. Similar results have been found in other western countries (Graham et al., 2017). It

has been argued that intoxicated males at social drinking gatherings consider a female easily available for sexual contact if she is intoxicated (Abbey, 2002). Excessive alcohol consumption could be a risk factor contributing to victimisation of sexual harassment of women.

A significant difference in the frequency of victimisation from sexual harassment was found between Swedish- and Finnish-speaking respondents with Swedish-speakers having higher means. This might have a geographical explanation since the Swedish-speaking respondents live in the coastal region of Finland, while the Finnish-speaking ones live in the central regions. The coastal region is closer to the rest of Europe and might be more influenced by other cultures.

5.1 Predictors of Victimisation from Sexual Harassment

It was found that physical punishment during childhood, victimisation from peer aggression at school, and victimisation from verbal and physical intimate partner aggression all significantly predicted victimisation from physical and verbal sexual harassment in public places. The pattern was the same for victimisation from nonverbal sexual harassment, with the exception that victimisation from physical intimate partner aggression did not predict victimisation from nonverbal sexual harassment. Respondents who had been victimised from physical punishment during childhood, and peer aggression at school, were found to have been victimised from sexual harassment more than the average. Sexual harassment could thus qualify as a type of revictimisation. Respondents victimised from physical and verbal intimate partner aggression were also victimised from sexual harassment more than the average. In this case, victimisation from sexual harassment could constitute a form of multiple victimisation. Similar patterns of revictimisation and multiple victimisation have previously been found in Ghana, with the same research instruments (Anwar et al., 2020). The effect was the highest for victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression, and for victimisation from peer aggression at school, and somewhat smaller for victimisation from physical punishment during childhood and physical intimate partner aggression.

The results also showed that respondents who had been more than average victimised from sexual harassment had a lower self-esteem than others. Thus, low self-esteem could be considered a risk factor for victimisation from sexual harassment. Low self-esteem was also identified as one of the significant predictors for all three forms of sexual harassment. It has been argued that low self-esteem contributes to a continuous cycle of victimisation from different types of aggression (Egan & Perry, 1998). A bidirectional relationship between self-esteem and victimisation from sexual harassment is also possible.

In contrast to the adult females in the present study, a previous study found that adolescent Finnish females who had been subjected to sexual harassment reported high levels of self-esteem (Apell et al., 2019). This could be due to the fact that adult who has reached a certain level mental maturity are better able to differentiate between a compliment and an act of sexual harassment. The women in the study by Apell et al. (2019) were considerably younger than the women in the current study.

5.2 Emotional Distress Due to Sexual Harassment

Scores of emotional distress due to experiences of sexual harassment was also very low, at an average between 0 and 1, meaning that they had experienced emotional stress less often than “seldom”. After controlling for frequency of sexual harassment, it was found that the correlations between emotional distress due to sexual harassment and victimisation from verbal intimate partner aggression, and victimisation from peer aggression at school, were significant. The finding suggests a sensitisation towards aggression in the victims, and it is in accordance

with previous findings from Ghana obtained with the same method (Anwar et al., 2020). Victimization from peer aggression in schools has been found to be predictive of other types of aggression later in life (Chiodo et al., 2009). Consequently, this continuous cycle of victimisation or revictimisation might increase the vulnerability to emotional distress due to sexual harassment as an adult. When controlling for frequency of sexual harassment, it was also found that victimisation from physical punishment during childhood was not correlated with emotional distress due to sexual harassment in adulthood. This could be explained by the fact that physical punishment of children is illegal and relatively rare in Finland (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2017).

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Since the study was not longitudinal, it was not possible to ascertain whether victimisation from sexual harassment had occurred prior to, at the same time, or after the victimisation from intimate partner aggression. The correlations only show an association between the phenomena. However, it is possible to conclude that childhood victimisation in the form of physical punishment at home and peer victimisation at school took place prior to victimisation from sexual harassment as an adult and could thus be regarded as risk factors for sexual harassment.

5.4 Conclusions

Victimization from different types of aggression and low self-esteem have been identified as possible risk factors for victimisation of females from sexual harassment in public places in Finland. Sexual harassment of females in Finland still occurs in some public places, but in this sample of university students, the problem did not seem to be huge.

Ethical Considerations

Data were collected with informed consent and under strict anonymity. The study adheres to the principles concerning human research ethics of the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013), guidelines for the responsible conduct of research of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012), as well as the general data protection regulation of the European Union (European Commission, 2016).

Competing Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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