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Sexual Harassment of Primary School Students by Teachers: A Field Study in Erbil City

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Abstract

Reporting sexual harassment against students is influenced by several complex and interrelated factors, including child characteristics, family support, school response, and prevailing social and cultural attitudes. In Erbil city, within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, public primary schools often do not report cases of sexual harassment perpetrated by teachers against female students, for reasons that remain unclear. The objective of this study is to explore the types of sexual harassment committed by primary school teachers against their female students and to identify the factors contributing to the lack of formal reporting of such incidents. This qualitative study examines 31 cases of sexual harassment involving primary school female students and their male teachers in Erbil city. A purposive sampling method was employed, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with individuals who had witnessed or possessed detailed knowledge of the incidents. The findings reveal that the main barriers to reporting sexual harassment cases include the absence of a clear and unified formal system for reporting such incidents to educational authorities, as well as fear of adverse community and socio-cultural responses. School administrations and many parents of the affected students preferred to address the incidents internally to protect the reputation of both the students and the school.

Keywords:
Sexual harassment,
Online harassment,
Primary school
administration,
Child well-being,
School reporting system



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1. Introduction

The relationship between teachers and their students is based on trust. When parents and caregivers hand their children over to schools, they expect their children to be learning in a safe environment. However, some teachers sexually abuse their students by crossing the boundaries of their professional relationships with personal and sexual relationships, which is probably because young children find it hard to recognize the personal relationship boundaries and differentiate between the innocent and evil intentions of the male teachers when they break the accepted boundaries. Child sexual harassment has been formulated by the 1999 WHO Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who, by age or development, is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.” (World Health Organization, 1999, p. 15).

Johnson et al. (2001) provide more details on the types of sexual harassment, which may vary from sexual intercourse to verbal sexual abuse. Showing an adult’s genitals to a child, forcing and/or convincing a child to show his or her body's private parts, touching a child’s private parts, sex jokes, making a child watch sexual activity, and using the child in pornographic films and magazines are a few forms of child sexual abuse (Johnson, et al., 2001). Further, sexual harassment of a young child may not be recognizable or comprehensible by young minds, and cannot give consent to any sex act under the age of eighteen.

Sexual harassment is a strong factor negatively affecting a student’s physical, psychological, and sexual well-being, especially when young children are the victims. It can have harmful effects on their well-being throughout their lifetime. While child sexual harassment by strangers is familiar among people, 60% of children are sexually abused by their family members and familiar and trusted people in their lives, and 30% to 40% by relatives. Sexual harassment of students in schools, including harassment by educators, seems to fall within the 60% (Murray et al., 2014), which can happen between students of the same sex or the opposite sex, between school faculty against students, by students against school faculty, etc. Further, female students are more likely to face sexual abuse by teachers than boys, which globally occurs at a similar rate (Knoll, 2010).

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), sexual harassment in education - in primary school, secondary, high school, and higher education - seems to increase or at least is more disclosed informally among teachers and in a small community, probably informal talks on sexual harassment in schools spread on social media. Teachers’ sexual harassment of primary school students is one of the types of power misuse by teachers against young children aged between 6-12, especially by male teachers against female students. Unfortunately, neither official nor unofficial accurate data could be found on the sexual harassment of female students by male teachers in primary schools in Erbil governorate in KRI, which is the focus of this study. In an interview with a senior teacher in the Education Supervision Section of the General Directorate of Education (GDE) in Erbil city, who did not like their name to be mentioned, they mentioned that, to their knowledge, no reported case of sexual harassment in public primary schools existed in the GDE - Erbil. Nevertheless, they strongly believed that there were unreported cases of that type. They further clarified that parents and/or caregivers of sexual harassment victims do not usually file any type of formal complaint or do not take formal action against their perpetrators, usually male teachers, due to the lack of trust between the victims’ families and the school administration and/or the actions of the General Directorate of Education (GDE). Families may believe that filing a complaint with the school could lead to the case becoming public, thereby damaging their daughters’ reputations. The members of the Education Supervision Section further believed that School administration often hides the case because they may think that the existence of sexual harassment cases may negatively affect the reputation of the school and the principals’ administration of the school. They may also consider the cultural perspective, which negatively affects the reputation of the female students and may

jeopardize their safety under the care of their guardians. However, Schools should be legally responsible for recognizing, reporting, and responding to sexual harassment cases by male teachers. All those relevant materials point to a serious problem of exploitative and abusive sexual behaviors of education staff that continue to happen without being reported to the officials in many circumstances. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education in KRI has not issued a code of conduct specific to the education institutions to protect school students from sexual harassment and the misuse of teachers' power over them. Only the general legal acts cover the legislation that protects children from sexual harassment in schools.

The main objective of this research is to explore the types of sexual harassment committed by male teachers against female students in public primary schools and to identify the barriers that hinder the reporting of such incidents. Accordingly, the study seeks to answer two primary research questions: (1) What forms of sexual harassment are perpetrated by male teachers against female students in public primary schools? and (2) What are the barriers that prevent the reporting of such cases within these schools?

2. Literature Review

According to the World Health Organization (2003, p. 75), child sexual harassment includes "the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity" (p. 75). There are mainly two types of sexual abuse against children: contact and non-contact and non-contact (Finkelhor 2008; Putnam 2003, cited in Walsh et al., 2015). The types of sexual harassment further vary from sexual intercourse to verbal sexual abuse. Showing an adult's genitals to a child, forcing and/or convincing a child to show his or her body's private parts, touching a child's private parts, sex jokes, making a child watch a sexual activity, and the use of the child in pornographic films and magazines are a few forms of child sexual abuse. In other words, sexual harassment of a young child is a child's involvement in sexual activities that they may not recognize, cannot comprehend the intention, or are forced to engage in the activities. In addition, children under the age of 18 are generally incapable of giving informed consent to any sex act as they are still in physical and mental development (Johnson et al. 2001).

For the prevention and recurrence of sexual abuse, sexual harassment cases need to be reported. Reporting is done when disclosing the acts of sexual harassment against children at school is either done by students or uncovered by school faculty, administration, etc. For children to report, they should first recognize sexual harassment. According to Rahimi et al. (2022), the limited or lack of knowledge of children about sexual harassment could be the most problematic issue. Children, especially those at primary school age, may not recognize all the types of sexual harassment. Research found that three-fourths of the participants (school children) believed that perpetrators would be neither their relatives nor teachers but rather strangers (Do et al. 2019). Children are more likely to believe that their home is a safe place and that school, as their second home, cannot include perpetrators, especially their teachers. Rahimi et al. (2022) and Letourneau et al. (2017) strongly believe that children's knowledge of sexual harassment is increased through educational programs. School programs should be designed in a manner to raise the awareness of children about sexual abuse and self-protection strategies according to their age. If young children, as school students, do not recognize the sexual harassment acts and signs, they will not be able to inform their school administration or their caregivers. Lack of recognition of potential sexual abuse circumstances can, therefore, be one of the factors that hinder reporting sexual harassment. Therefore, children's undeveloped skills to recognize potential sexual abuse acts, the fear of not being believed or threatened by the perpetrator, etc., hinder children's self-reporting of sexual abuse (Easton et al., 2014; Schaeffer et al., 2011; McElvaney and Culhane, 2017). In other words, the increased knowledge of young children about sexual abuse and strategies for self-protection may decrease and/or prevent the possibility of abuse.

A research aimed at a quantitative evaluation of quantitative effectiveness of child sexual abuse prevention programs conducted over the past 10 years found that increasing knowledge of students about sexual harassment and self-protection through school curriculum has a moderate effect while

the effective and economical method of the prevention strategies to child sexual abuse/harassment is a brief training program (Heidotting, Keiffer & Soled, 1994; Lu et al., 2023). Results from a meta-regression found that effective school program interventions include more than three sessions. They also found that interventions tend to be more effective for children aged eight and older compared to younger children. Saslawsky and Wurtele (1986) further contributed to producing an educational film to enhance young children's verbal and motor responses to sexual abuse. The children took three months to build their self-protection skills. They found out that the film that their research participants viewed was quite effective in encouraging the children to disclose sexual abuse to adults. Further, workshops on sexual abuse can facilitate abuse disclosures by children (Ungar et al., 2009), and, on the other hand, a systematic review research on school-based child sexual abuse prevention programs found that one-time single session awareness raising programs on personal safety were found to be ineffective. That is because building the skills for maintaining personal safety is cumulative and time-consuming. Children's attention is better attracted, and the opportunity is increased to grasp the main concepts of the topic when the awareness-raising program is divided into at least three sessions (Russell et al., 2020). In general, children's increased knowledge of sexual abuse can be the first step to reporting sexual abuse against children and, as a result, preventing and/or decreasing abuse.

Age and gender can be another barrier to disclosing and reporting sexual harassment of children. Two studies on the barriers to child sexual harassment found that men are less likely to disclose sexual harassment to them. The young male seems to delay sexual abuse until adulthood due to environmental factors such as the negative cultural attitude toward male victims of sexual abuse. Further, the younger the child is, the less likely they are to disclose sexual abuse to them. The main factors contributing to delayed disclosure of child sexual abuse include the lack of recognition of abuse at an early age and the fear of shame or not being believed (Gagnier and Collin-Vézina, 2016; Easton et al., 2014; Schaeffer et al., 2011; McElvaney and Culhane, 2017). Hershkowitz et al. (2007) further examined thirty cases of child sexual abuse among children aged 7-12 and found that 53% of the children delayed disclosure for periods ranging from one week to two years. Additionally, threats made by the perpetrator have been identified as another significant barrier to disclosure (Schaeffer et al., 2011).

Moreover, environmental factors can also hinder or facilitate the disclosure of child sexual abuse. For example, neighborhood and community conditions play a role by either providing a supportive environment, such as following up on abuse cases, noticing potential abuse situations, or addressing rumors, or by creating obstacles that discourage disclosure (Alaggia, 2010). The lack of school involvement in investigating teacher–student sexual harassment cases poses a significant barrier to students reporting such incidents (Alaggia, 2010).

Nevertheless, a review of the literature revealed no research specifically examining the factors that inhibit school administrations from reporting cases of student sexual harassment in Iraq, whether when primary school students and/or their caregivers report incidents, or when school faculty witness or detect harassment of female students. This study, therefore, aims to explore the main barriers to reporting by school administrations in the Erbil Governorate of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI).

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Data Collection Method and Research Sample

A purposive sampling method was used for data collection. This technique is commonly employed in qualitative research to select a specific target group of individuals who can provide insights into the research problem (Merrill & West, 2009). The researcher chooses participants based on their relevant experience and knowledge related to the topic under study. Purposive sampling stood out to be the most effective technique for data collection for this research because the subject of the research is highly sensitive, and people avoid talking about it for their safety and the victims. The researcher, therefore, used her network (friends, colleagues, and professionals), based on convincing and snowball methods, to find cases of sexual harassment of female students in public

primary schools in Erbil city. Thus, the research covers a total of 31 cases of female students who were sexually harassed by nine male teachers; all the cases happened in eight public primary schools in Erbil city. All the interviews were conducted between April 2nd to the 8th of August, 2024.

The semi-structured interview tool, which was developed by the researcher, has been used to gather accurate data on the above-mentioned 31 cases through interviews with 12 voluntary school faculties (10 females and 2 males holding positions, including public primary school principal, principal assistant, teachers, and a social worker) in Erbil city who had witnessed one or more of the cases of child sexual harassment and abuse. The semi-structured interviews included a combination of a pre-determined set of open questions, which prompted the interview discussions, observation, and some non-determined questions for exploring further information on specific themes and responses during the interviews. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with the 12 school focal points; each interview took between 38 minutes to 1.5 hours (50 minutes average), during which 24 main structured questions and 31 sub-questions were asked. In addition, a few unstructured follow-up questions that emerged during the interviews were posed to the participants. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission between 2 April and 8 August 2024. Then, the records have been transformed into written transcripts as an academic record. The names and the voice records of the participants, in addition to sensitive data about the cases, have been kept confidential.

With regard to ethical considerations, all the interviews have been recorded with the permission of the interviewees. Then, the records have been transformed into written texts on paper as an academic record. The names and the voice records of the participants, in addition to sensitive data about the cases, have been kept confidential. Thus, the research considered key ethical principles to ensure the protection and respect of all participants. Informed consent was obtained, confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded, and participants were given the right to withdraw at any stage. The study also ensured that no harm (emotional, psychological, or professional) was caused during the data collection process. These measures helped maintain integrity, transparency, and trust throughout the research.

3.2 Research Challenges

During this study, the researcher faced the following challenges:

-It was quite difficult to find data on the research topic because of the sensitivity of the topic. People who had witnessed or heard about the sexual harassment cases in their schools would rather not disclose the data for their own safety and cultural restrictions on discussing such topics, neither privately nor in public.

-One of the school teachers and the two assistant principals indicated that they might face repercussions if the school principals became aware of the purpose of the research interviews with faculty members. Therefore, the researcher conducted the interviews only when the school principals were not present.

-Building trust between the researcher and the participants was crucial and demanding. Most participants were initially reluctant to have their voices recorded until the researcher clearly explained that their identities and recordings would be kept strictly confidential.

-The most challenging aspect for the researcher was psychological. Handling sensitive information regarding sexual abuse cases of primary school students while maintaining confidentiality was emotionally demanding. In one case, the researcher experienced secondary trauma when eight Grade 6 students were subjected to online sexual harassment by a male teacher, the perpetrator.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 General Overview

The research discusses 31 cases of female students who are sexually harassed by nine male teachers in eight public primary schools in Erbil city and its surroundings. The number of victims of sexual harassment by a single teacher varies between 1-15 female students. In several cases within the research sample, male teachers sexually harassed more than one female student, with some

perpetrators targeting up to 15 students. Of the 31 victims, 26 were between 11 and 13 years old, attending Grades 5 and 6, while the remaining five victims were between 7-10 years old, attending Grades 2, 3, and 4. In this study, the perpetrators of sexual harassment were male teachers in public primary schools who sexually abused their female students. Two of the teachers worked at the same school, although the incidents occurred in different academic years. The remaining teachers were employed at different schools at the time of the harassment. Their ages ranged from 24 to 60 years, with approximately half between 45 and 60 years old and the other half between 24 and 44 years old. Eight of the nine male teachers were married and had children, while only the youngest teacher was single.

4.2 Method of Disclosure

Generally, there have been three methods of disclosure of the sexual harassment cases of this research. Less than half of the students (aged between 7-13) who were sexually harassed by their male teachers disclosed the harassment to either one or both of their parents. Further, about half of the students were either detected by school staff or reported by other students to the school staff. They were aged between 10-12 years old. Only a few students reported to the school administration that they had been sexually harassed by their male teachers. The overall environment was supportive in facilitating the disclosure of harassment cases, whether reported by the victims themselves, detected by school faculty, as occurred in half of the cases, or reported by other students in the same schools. This finding is consistent with Alaggia (2010), who reported that neighborhood and community conditions can facilitate the disclosure of abuse by providing a supportive environment, such as following up on abuse cases, addressing rumors, and noticing potential instances of sexual abuse.

4.3 Types of Sexual Harassment

Furthermore, according to the age of the female primary school students, the sexual harassment committed against them is mainly classified into two types: physical contact and online sexual attention (non-contact form of sexual harassment). The five students of younger ages, i.e those in grades 2 to 4 (between 7-10 years old) have been sexually harassed in at least one or more forms of the following physical contact type of harassment: tapping on the shoulders, putting an arm around the students' shoulder, kissing/or attempt to kiss, touching their hair, hugging, the teacher rubbing himself sexually against the students and holding the students at the back firmly. All those physical touches were recognized by the students to be uncomfortable due to having sexual intentions of the teachers. The recognition facilitated the disclosure of the harassment; otherwise, they would probably just keep silent. That finding confirms what Rahimi et al. (2022) pointed out, that the limited or lack of knowledge of children about sexual harassment could be the most problematic issue. For children to report, they should first recognize sexual harassment.

Those students who were aged between 11-13 in grades 5 and 6, who make up the majority of the research cases, can be divided into two groups. The first group, which consists of about half of them, was victims of a physical contact type of sexual harassment, including more than one of the forms explained above, in addition to touching the breasts of the students, for only a few of them. Thus, the physical contact type of the sexual harassment indicated above happened in many different scenarios, including short conversations with extra intentional attention, simple touches inside the school campus, mostly inside the classes and in the corridors in the presence of the other students, and sometimes in private when the teachers asked the students to see them in either the art rooms or stay in the class during break times. These findings, which include physical-contact forms of sexual harassment, are consistent with those reported by Finkelhor (2008) and Putnam (2003, cited in Walsh et al., 2015), who discussed physical-contact types of sexual abuse against children.

The majority of male teachers who engaged in physical sexual harassment claimed that they had touched their students, such as hugging, kissing, or rubbing their shoulders, with supposedly innocent intentions. In contrast, the students did not feel comfortable with the touch types they received from their male teachers, as they disclosed it to their caregivers and/or teachers. "I witnessed a male teacher holding a second-grade student tightly from behind and rubbing himself

against her back. When I confronted him about his inappropriate behavior, he immediately began defending himself, claiming he had no immoral intentions and that he considered all the students as if they were his own children. He even acted as if he might faint at my accusation and insisted that, as a religious man, he would never engage in such acts, fearing Allah above all else. We all knew he was pretending,” (Interview No. 1, Vice Principal of School, 4 April 2024)

The second group of students, comprising approximately one-third of the total cases in this study, experienced online harassment - the second type of sexual harassment examined - through a variety of digital platforms, most commonly Snapchat, and across a range of abusive behaviors. They received “romantic” and/or unwelcome sexual content and requests such as sexually explicit images, photos, messages, comments, and videos. Almost all of them were harassed by a married male teacher who was 26 years old. The male teacher reportedly admitted, in a meeting with the school principal, that he had approached other students; however, these incidents were not disclosed by the school administration. Another respondent (Interview No. 2, a School Principal, 5 April 2024) stated, “When the first two students reported being subjected to online sexual harassment by the male teacher, I immediately established a committee to investigate and identify additional victims. The further we proceeded with the investigation, the more victims we discovered. We were shocked and deeply concerned for the students’ safety, so we decided to halt further victim identification and instead take immediate action against the male teacher.” Among the victims targeted by the male teacher, only two female students were persuaded by him to share inappropriate personal videos consensually, in addition to receiving inappropriate video calls via Snapchat. The remaining victims rejected his sexual advances, comments, pornographic videos, and other sexual images he attempted to share with them.

Among all of the research cases, less than half of the students had mobile phones, internet access, and digital platform accounts on at least one of the following: Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Instagram. Those who had mobile phones and used social media platforms were those who were harassed online by male teachers. In addition, these two male teachers were not able to deny their inappropriate behaviors because the voice messages, the photos, and the videos proved their sexual harassment intentions. However, one of the perpetrators threatened all of the female students he had approached or sexually harassed by threatening to defame them and share on social media any messages or inappropriate videos the students had sent him. Only two female students who had shared their self-recorded inappropriate videos were scared of his threat, while the other two female students reported their teacher’s sexual advances to the school principal.

The School Principal (Interview No. 2, a School Principal, 5 April 2024), further pointed out, “Two female Grade 6 students approached me and hesitantly disclosed their teacher’s inappropriate behavior toward them. They were afraid they would not be believed, but I encouraged them to speak openly and provide all the details they could. To support their disclosure, the students shared the teacher’s inappropriate sexual messages and explicit self-recorded content that he had sent in an attempt to coerce them into complying with his sexual demands”. Thus, the self-reporting of the two students demonstrates that threats by perpetrators are less effective when families and school administration take the victims’ disclosures seriously. This aligns with Schaeffer et al. (2011), who noted that threats by perpetrators are a significant barrier to child sexual abuse disclosure, a finding that is also evident in the case of the other two students in this study. Furthermore, online harassment through social media platforms appears to be a relatively new form of abuse, primarily affecting the younger generations. In other words, social media platforms were less prevalent at the time Finkelhor (2008) and Putnam (2003) conducted their research, which may explain why this form of harassment was not addressed in their studies.

4.4 School Administration Response to the Sexual Harassment

The 31 cases of sexual harassment examined in this study were perpetrated by nine male teachers across eight primary schools. Two of the teachers worked at the same school during different periods under two different principals. The school administration responded differently to the cases. About half of the schools made the teachers submit a request to be transferred to another school without

the school having to formally indicate the sexual harassment reason on the documents of the transfer. A few of those school administrations made the male teachers sign a pledge not to repeat the sexual harassment to other students in the new school where they had to move to, although, according to the law, this kind of pledge outside the court does not count as legal. A few other schools made the teachers resign from teaching; otherwise, the school administration would formally report the case to the authorities.

It is important to note that, in six of the eight schools, at least one parent of the female students was aware of the harassment committed against their daughters, as disclosed by the students themselves. However, less than half of the students' parents requested that the school administrations not report the cases to the authorities to protect their daughters' reputations, and instead sought only the dismissal of the teachers from the school. A few other parents in different schools attacked the male teachers (perpetrators) inside the schools with guns and threatened the teachers, but were stopped by the school administration, which was trying to find a way to solve the issues through negotiation. The schools' administrations have responded to harassment cases only by requiring the teachers to transfer to another school of their choice. In other words, regardless of whether the families wanted the sexual harassment to be reported or not, the schools did not officially report any of the cases.

Only one school administration reported the sexual harassment case to the GDE-Erbil after the parents of three students complained to the school about a teacher's inappropriate behavior - the sexual harassment. The directorate transferred the teacher to another place of work, changing his job title from teacher to just an employee as a form of punishment. However, the school principal and his two assistants believed that the teacher deserved a harsher punishment. A few months later, an anonymous person filed a complaint with the Commission of Integrity. The Commission raised the complaint to the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor, which is still under investigation for a year. In another school, the principal covered up the case, while the assistants decided to monitor the teacher more closely during class and break times. In the last case of sexual harassment, the mother of the student discovered that her daughter was emotionally attached to the teacher and secretly threatened him to stay away from her daughter, without informing the school. The student had confided in a female staff member about the teacher's extra attention and her feelings of attraction, but asked the staff member not to report it to the school administration.

Moreover, research data shows that female students in the upper grades of primary school (mostly grades 5 and 6) experience sexual harassment more than those in lower grades. This is likely due to changes in their bodies and appearance, which may make them more noticeable to the opposite sex, and, more importantly, because they are better able to recognize inappropriate comments and touches by male teachers. Additionally, data also reveal that male teachers of older ages harass their female students sexually more than the teachers of younger ages. The majority of the research sexual harassers were between 40-60 years old, only a few were between 24-34 years old.

There are mainly two methods of disclosure of sexual harassment in this research study. Those cases that were detected by the school staff make up about half of the research, which reveals a school supportive environment and awareness for the student protection from sexual harassment. Those cases that themselves disclosed it to either their parents or to the school administrations make up the other half of the research cases. The latter indicates the students' self-awareness in reporting, despite the absence of awareness programs in the curriculum or through any other school-based initiatives. The researcher could not investigate where the students learned to recognize and report sexual harassment, as the students, being under 18, were not interviewed. However, a few school interviewees indicated that the administration would, every year, informally speak for about 10 minutes to students in grades 5 and 6 about sexual harassment and self-protection, without following any structured program. The findings suggest that students may gain awareness of sexual harassment from their families. However, awareness-raising is likely to be more effective when conducted through structured school programs (Heidotting et al., 1994; Lu et al., 2023).

It is worth mentioning that most of the research cases who have been sexually harassed in at least one of the following forms regardless of their age: tapping on the shoulders, putting an arm around the students' shoulder, kissing/or attempting to kiss, touching their hair, hugging, the teacher

rubbing himself sexually against the students and holding the students at the back firmly which all made the students upset and feel unusual. However, a few of the female students who were sexually harassed online were aged between 11-13 years old and had mobile phones and social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat accounts. Therefore, technology and internet access have facilitated sexual harassment. In addition, the teachers who practiced online sexual harassment against those students were 26 and 24 years old. Hence, younger teachers who are more familiar with technology and social media platforms seem to find it easier and less noticeable to engage in online sexual harassment.

Moreover, the data shows a lack of a unified and appropriate system for reporting sexual harassment to the authorities in primary schools in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Unexpectedly, the research data reveals that the majority of school administrations responded strongly to male teachers who sexually harassed female students, yet did not formally report them to the GDE-Erbil. The responses varied: about half of the male teachers were transferred to another school without specifying the reason for the transfer, a few school administrations forced the teachers to resign, and only two administrations simply covered the cases and monitored the teachers more closely within the school campus.

The main barrier to formal reporting by the schools was the fear of cultural attitudes toward such cases. School administrations, primarily the principals who held the authority to report, were concerned about the reputation of their schools and the potential public blame on the management for these incidents. Additionally, the principals preferred not to formally disclose the cases to protect the reputation of the female students and avoid stigmatizing community attitudes toward her and the family. Regardless of whether the families wanted the sexual harassment to be reported or not, the schools did not report the cases to the GDE-Erbil, with the exception of only one school. Importantly, the data indicate that the majority of parents who were aware of the sexual harassment against their daughters requested that the school administrations not report it to the GDE-Erbil, but instead either transfer the teachers or monitor them more closely, for the same social-cultural reasons outlined above.

Finally, the lack of a code of ethics, legislation, and clear guidelines for teachers and school staff regarding the penalties for sexual harassment and the inappropriate use of power may contribute to the increase of sexual harassment in education, particularly in primary schools and mainly against female students.

5. Conclusion

The research identified two types of sexual harassment practiced against primary school female students: physical and online. The data emphasized that female students across various grades (grades 2 to 6) experienced physical sexual harassment in different forms, including tapping on the shoulders, putting an arm around the student's shoulder, kissing or attempting to kiss, touching their hair, hugging, the teacher rubbing himself sexually against the students, and holding the students firmly at the back, all of which the students recognized as inappropriate touches. In contrast, online sexual harassment occurred among upper primary school students (grades 5 and 6), as these students had mobile phones and access to social media.

Moreover, the research findings reveal that primary school administrations do not report sexual harassment cases to the authorities, but instead take action independently - either solely by the principal or through a committee established by the principal to decide on measures against the harasser. This independent approach by the schools may be related to the lack of a unified and appropriate system for reporting sexual harassment to the authorities in primary schools in the KRI. Furthermore, another significant factor hindering the formal reporting of sexual harassment cases to the GDE-Erbil is the fear of community and socio-cultural reactions. School administrations and most of the parents in the research cases preferred to handle the cases within the schools to protect the students' reputations.

Therefore, further research is needed to examine the impact of sexual harassment on the well-being of female students and the community, the awareness level of primary students in recognizing signs of sexual harassment, and the methods used by harassers. Additionally, parent and student

awareness-raising programs, self-protection initiatives, campaigns, and curricula on sexual abuse and harassment are crucial to be included in the education system in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Implementing a code of ethics for school faculty, installing monitoring cameras on school campuses, employing social workers in elementary schools, and training them on a unified procedure for handling such cases should be seriously considered to prevent or, at least, reduce sexual harassment to a minimum. Additionally, as technology and social media have become integral to daily life, students' awareness must also increase regarding how they can be victimized, bullied, threatened, or abused on these platforms.

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گڇهلي سيڪسي بڻ سهر قوتابي قوناغي سهرهتايي له لايه ن ماموستاوه-تويژينه وهيهكي مهيدانيه له شاري هوليئر

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پوخته

رپيورترني گڇهلي سيڪسي كه به رانبره قوتابيان دهكرت، به ستراره ته وه به چهند هوكاريكي ئالوز كه په يوه سته به تايبه تمه نديه كاني خودي منڊال و پشنگيري خيزان و پالپشتي قوتابخانه بڻ قوتابيان و هوكاري كه لتووري و كومه لايه تيه وه. به شيويه كي گشتي، له شاري هوليئر له ههريمي كوردستاني عيراق قوتابخانه سهره تايبه كان حاله تي گڇهلي سيڪسي ماموستاي پياو بڻ قوتابيان كچ رپيورتر به رز ناكه نه وه بڻ سهرووي خويان له بهر چهند هوكاريكي ناديار. ئامانجي ئه م تويژينه وه ليكولينه وهيه له جوړه كاني گڇهلي سيڪسي كه ماموستاي پياو ئه نجامي ده دات به رامبر به قوتابي كچ له قوناغي سهره تايي و هوكاري رپيورتره كرندي ئه م جوړه هه راسانانه له لايه ن به رپويه به رايه تبي قوتابخانه كانه وه. ئه م تويژينه وه 31 حاله تي گڇهلي سيڪسي ماموستاي پياو بڻ سهر قوتابيان كچ له قوناغي سهره تايي قوتابخانه كاني شاري هوليئر له خووه دهكرت، تهكنيكي هه لپژاردي مه به سترار به كارها توه بڻ كوكردنه وهى داتا له ريگه ي چاوپيكيه وتني نيمچه دارپژراوه وه كه ئه نجام دراوه له گه ل ئه و كه سانه ي كه شاهيه تحالي حاله ته كاني گڇهلي سيڪسي بونه يا خود زانباري ورديان لا بووه له سهر حاله ته كان. ده رنه نجامي ئه م تويژينه وهيه ده ريد هات كه به رپرستي رپيورتره كرندي حاله ته كاني گڇهلي سيڪسي ده گه رپته وه بڻ نه بووني سيسته ميكي به كانگيري فه رمي روون بڻ رپيورتره كرندي ئه م حاله تانه بڻ ده سه لاتداران له كه رتي په روه رده دا و ترس له كار دانه وهى كومه لايه تي و كه لتووري بڻ كه يسه كان، هه روه ها به رپويه به رايه تي قوتابخانه كان و زوره ي دايك و باوكاني كه يسه كاني ئه م تويژينه وهيه به باشيان زانيوه كه يسه كان له ناو قوتابخانه جاره سهر بكرين له پيناو پاراستني ناوبانگي قوتابخانه كان و شه رهي قوتايه كان.

وشه سهره كيبه كان: گڇهلي سيڪسي، رپيورتره كرن، به ربه سته كان، قوتابخانه

التحرش الجنسي بطالبات المرحلة الابتدائية من قبل المعلمين: دراسة ميدانية في مدينة أربيل

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المخلص

الإبلاغ عن التحرش الجنسي للطلاب مرتبطة بعدة عوامل معقدة والتي تكون ذات صلة بخصائص الطفل، وبدعم الأسرة والمدرسي للطلاب والأسباب الاجتماعية والثقافية. بصورة عامة المدارس الابتدائية الحكومية في مدينة أربيل في إقليم كردستان العراق لا تبلغ عن حالات التحرش الجنسي للمعلمين تجاه الطالبات للجهات العليا لأسباب مبهمه. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو البحن عن أنواع التحرش الجنسي التي يرتكبها معلمو المدارس الابتدائية تجاه طالباتهم وأسباب عدم إبلاغ إدارة المدرسة عن حالات التحرش. تغطي هذه الدراسة النوعية 31 حالة تحرش جنسي بطالبات المرحلة الابتدائية في مدينة أربيل من قبل معلمهم الذكور وتم استخدام عينة قصدية غنية لجمع البيانات من خلال مقابلات شبه منظمة مع الأشخاص الذين شهدوا أو لديهم معلومات مفصلة عن الحالات المذكورة. وتكشف نتائج هذه الدراسة أن العوامل المانعة التي تحول دون الإبلاغ عن حالات التحرش الجنسي هي عدم وجود نظام رسمي موحد وواضح للإبلاغ عن الحالات التحرش الجنسي لجهات العليا في قطاع التربية والخوف من ردة فعل المجتمعية والثقافية للحالات وتفضل إدارات المدارس ومعظم أولياء الأمور للحالات البحثية التعامل مع الحالات داخل المدرسة من أجل سمعة المدرسة والطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحرش الجنسي، الإبلاغ، الحواجز، المدرسة

APPENDIX

Semi-Structured Questionnaire:

1. Gender
2. Occupation: teacher administration staff others
3. Duration of work at primary school:
4. Does the school where you work at have boys and girls mixed together?
5. Have you heard or witnessed any sexual harassment of primary female students by male teachers?
6. If yes, at the school where you teach or at other schools?
7. If at the school where you teach, the harassment had happened before you started work at the school or during your working period at the school?
8. Did you witness the harassment by yourself? Or you heard about it?
9. If you either witnessed or heard about it:
 - 1) how was it?
 - 2) When did it happen? (Date if remembered)
 - 3) what had happened?
 - 4) What did you see/hear about?
 - 5) How long did the harassment event take?
 - 6) Was it inside the school? At the break or class time?
 - 7) where did it happen? inside or outside school campus?
 - 8) If inside the school, at what part of the campus?
 - 9) Did it happen in front other students or alone by the teacher and the student?
 - 10) Does the school has monitoring cameras? if yes, was the harassment recorded?
 - 11) What was the students' reaction? Did she report it to school or to her family?
 - 12) What was the age and grade of the student?
 - 13) Do you think the student realized about the harassment? Or knows what sexual harassment if?
 - 14) If no, why in your opinion?
 - 15) What was the age of the teacher?
 - 16) Who told you about the harassment if you heard from other people?
 - 17) How many times did it happen to the same student?
 - 18) Did the family of the victim know about it?
 - 19) Did the family made any reaction or complain? If yes, how was it?
 - 20) What was the reaction of the school principle and administration? What did they do? Did they inform the family about the harassment?
 - 21) Did the school administration report the sexual harassment to the authority/directorate of education?
 - 22) If yes, what did they do? Did they involve the family of the victim?
 - 23) If no, what was the action against the harasser, then?
 - 24) Why did not the school admin report it?
 - 25) What did other teachers think about lack of the reporting?
 - 26) Did lack of reporting encouraged sexual harassment by the same harasser or by other male teachers?
 - 27) Does the harasser still teach at the same student?

- 28) If school did not report the case, and if the teachers still teaches there, does the school watch him more closely?
 - 29) How many students did the teacher harassed sexually?
 - 30) Does the female student continue at the same school? Or continued it happed long ago?
 - 31) How is her education performance? Did the event affect her performance at school?
Lowered her marks?
10. Have you or your colleague suspected other cases of sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers?
 11. If yes, have you informed school personnel about it?
 12. Have you educed the student bout preventing or recognizing the harassment?
 13. How many sexual harassment cases have you witnessed or heard about at your school?
 14. By the same male teacher or by different male teachers?
 15. To the same female student or different ones?
 16. Do you and/or other teachers at your school aware of any written code of conduct/ policy/ official penalty for sexual harassment?
 17. Do you think that the male teacher who aware of the code of conduct?
If yes, why do you think then he conducted the sexual harassment?
If no, why is not he aware of it?
 18. Does school admin educate teachers or update/remind them about the penalty of sexual harassment? If yes, how often?
 19. Does the school admin educate **new teachers** or update/remind them about the penalty of sexual harassment?
 20. Does school admin/or any other agencies raise awareness of students about recognition and/or self-protection of sexual harassment? What grade do they do the awareness for?
 21. Do you think school admins report sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers?
 22. If no, why in your opinion?
 23. How is the sexual harassment of female students by their male teachers at primary schools in general in your opinion?