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From Awareness to Action: Implementing Preventive Mechanisms against Sexual Harassment in the University of Rajshahi

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Abstract

Sexual harassment within higher educational institutions remains a critical global challenge, demanding urgent and comprehensive preventive strategies. This paper explores the transition from mere awareness-raising initiatives to the practical implementation of effective, sustainable preventive mechanisms against sexual harassment with a specific focus on the University of Rajshahi. Drawing on international human rights standards, institutional frameworks, and institutional policies, the study identifies key structural and cultural factors such as power imbalances, stigma, lack of reporting mechanisms, and limited institutional accountability that contribute to the persistence of harassment on campus. It emphasizes the role of university administration, faculty, student bodies, and civil society in creating a safe and inclusive academic environment. By integrating policy reforms, institutional accountability, and student-led advocacy, the paper proposes a context-specific framework for prevention, arguing that coordinated, rights-based interventions are essential for universities to move beyond awareness and take meaningful action against sexual harassment.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; Gender-based violence; Campus safety; Preventive mechanisms; Sexual harassment policy

1. Introduction

Sexual Exploitation represents a pressing socio-legal problem around the world, and the legal and institutional gaps that hinder effective prevention of sexual exploitation must be addressed through policy intervention and institutional reform. Grounded in international human rights law, the article critically examines the obligations of states and institutions to prevent, protect against, and respond to sexual exploitation, particularly in educational settings and among vulnerable populations. Gender education helps students understand the concept of gender equality and challenges stereotypes and biases. It encourages them to treat everyone with respect, regardless of their gender identity or expression. By

promoting equality, gender education contributes to building a more inclusive and just society. It is important to acknowledge that gender discrimination can exist in any institution, including universities.¹ In this article, the researcher has sought to present specific examples from University of Rajshahi while highlighting common forms of gender discrimination occurring within educational settings.

2. An Analytical Examine of Real Experience from Rajshahi University

Universities must actively engage with students to protect their communities by promoting human dignity and amplifying the voices of survivors of sexual abuse and exploitation, ensuring that their needs, rights, and well-being remain central to all prevention and response efforts. However, bureaucratic procedures, combined with prevailing toxic attitudes regarding gender, often create obstacles for teachers, students, and researchers working on sexual harassment issues, hindering efforts to achieve social justice. The Harassment Prevention Cell at the University of Rajshahi, led by Professor Dil-Ara Hossain, has submitted three investigations between 2024 and the present, all of which have been reviewed and disposed of by the Syndicate. Three additional complaints are currently under investigation. The Member Secretary, Professor Mst. Shahnaj Parvin, informed the researcher that she is handling Cell matters confidentially and will not provide any information regarding the number of harassment cases without an official letter and formal appointment.

The previous convenor of the Harassment Prevention Cell at the University of Rajshahi, Professor Tanzima Zohra Habib, informed the researcher that she has been serving in this role since July 2022 and has received 4 complaints during this period. After receiving first complaint, time has passed but the complainant was very

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¹ Abdul Alim, "Gender-Based Violence, Especially Sexual Harassment Prevention in Higher Educational Institutions." *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, September 2021. Overland Park, KS: OPAST GROUP LLC. ISSN 2690-0688.

reluctant to get any remedy. The second complaint was a wife of a teacher against her husband and it was about their family matter; therefore, the Cell observed that it fell outside its jurisdiction. Another complaint was made by a female student against her classmate and after some days she told the Cell that they can mutually settle the issue. The Convener of the Harassment Prevention Committee stated that they are fully committed to addressing these issues and is working to organize a daylong seminar involving each of the departments and institutions so that everyone come to know about the gender policy of the university. She also added the University could put the Committee's members list in the official website and establish a dedicated hotline number to assist students in accessing information on how to file a complaint and obtain necessary support. This research has observed that it is a crucial moment for the female student to get mental support and sometimes a safe shelter. The Rajshahi University Sexual Harassment Guidelines were adopted in 2010. However, despite their adoption, the guidelines were not printed or widely disseminated for nearly 15 years. Their recent publication is a positive development, although the prolonged delay may have reduced awareness and effective implementation. The University authority must publish the gender policy accessible to all in both printed and online official website.

Another member secretary of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee, Rawnok Jahan, informed the researcher that the harassment prevention policy of Rajshahi University may be revised in light of the technological advancement and that greater technical clarity is needed in the definition of the sexual harassment. She added each of the department should have a counseling center and they could collect the evidence and sent it to the University Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee (USHP Committee) with the complaint petition. It has a crucial investigation system that must operate confidentially, making the collection and preservation of evidence a challenging task. USHP Cell requested the Vice Chancellor of Rajshahi University to provide on-call vehicle services along with technical assistant. She also added disciplinary action

must be very prompt otherwise perpetrators get courage to do repeatedly the same offence. Professor Abu Bakar Md Ismail, Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering and also a member of sexual harassment prevention cells, shared his views with the researcher. He perceived that a law or policy loses its value when its implementation is excessively delayed. He emphasized on once an investigation has been completed and the report has been submitted to the Vice Chancellor. In his opinion, it is a matter of great concern that, at times, certain reports are kept under the red carpet and never brought before the Syndicate for consideration. He suggested that an amendment of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Guidelines could mandate that, once submitted, reports must be presented to the Syndicate within 15 working days.

Another member of the sexual harassment prevention cells, Advocate Shikha, told awareness program could be an effective tool to deal with sexual harassment and she emphasized that the investigation mechanism must be conducted in accordance with the law and that the involvement of legal personnel is essential. Proctor of Rajshahi University, Prof Asabul Haque, dedicates his time to maintaining law and order on the university premises. He noted that incidents such as relationship breakups sometimes lead to one partner attempting to expose private photos or, videos, which are unfortunately common among students. He emphasized that students should remain committed to their academic studies and develop good character or manners, as they will play a vital role in the nation's future. Student advisor Professor Jahangir Alam Saud has informed the researcher that students experiencing psychological distress, particularly those facing relationship-related problems, are referred to the university's mental health counseling center for professional support. Both of them either proctor and student adviser told no incident has been officially reported to their offices. It is quite surprising to the researcher that absence of sexual harassment complaint among 35,000 students 1200 teachers and 500 staffs are staying together and no harassment or gender based discrimination prevails in such a big campus. In the South Asian context, the researcher strongly believes discussing sexual

harassment often remains a taboo, and victims are blamed randomly with social pressure. They ended up being harassed rather than informing anyone. Silence thus became their only option.²

The researcher included an interview with former Convener of Sexual Harassment Prevention Committee, Professor Rezina Laz, who emphasized the importance of family support for the victims. She noted that while there were complaints filed by female students against male students, in some cases, the female students had to withdraw the complaints due to the pressure of the accused or reluctance from their families to pursue the matter. Professor Laz served during the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2022. She also has highlighted her commitment on zero tolerance policy. During her tenure, the Committee investigated three cases and submitted the detailed reports. Later on the University authority never try to proceed on to the syndicate for establish justice. It is the point why syndicate is silent? Why authority is reluctant to punish the perpetrator? The same question was raised by Professor Selina Begum of Zoology Department. She also was Convener during the period of 2016-2018. During her tenure, the Cell resolved six (6) harassment cases; interestingly, none of the investigation reports were sent to the syndicate, reportedly due to the political affiliations of the perpetrators with the administration. Member Secretary Ferdousi Begum of the Botany Department emphasized the need to retain experienced members to ensure that procedural requirements are properly maintained. She added that if appropriate punishment is not enforced by the higher authority, or if a case is left unattended ("goes to ghost room"), the Cell's considerable efforts becomes meaningless. Therefore, the execution of reports must occur within a short and defined period. She further noted that when the Syndicate forms an executive committee dominated by politically affiliated individuals, the impact of the harassment prevention Cell's reports is effectively nullified. A Professor of Social work department, Zannatul Ferdous Silpy told the researcher that she was a convener of the sexual harassment prevention Cell in 2019 for a period of 10

² *Ibid.*

months. During this period, she organized a public hearing regarding an incident that occurred at the Institute of Education and Research. She noted that four cases were investigated during that time.

Table 1.1: Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell from 2011-2026
in University of Rajshahi

Period	Convener	Total Member of the Cell	Number of Complain Cases	Investigated by the Cell	Final Decision-Syndicate
2011-2012	Prof Tanzima Yeasmin	7	5	4	4
2013-2015	Prof Mahbuba Kaniz Keya	7	8	8	8
2016-2018	Prof Selina Begum	7	8	6	none
2019-2020	Prof Zannatul Ferdous Silpy	7	5	4	1
2020-2022	Professor Rezina Laz	7	4	4	2
2022- 2024	Professor Tanzima Zohra Habib	7	5	2	2
2024-cont	Professor Dil-Ara Hossain	7	6	3	3
	Total Complain received		41	31 (disposed)	20

This Cell is empowered to receive complaints, conduct investigations, and make appropriate recommendations. It must consist of at least five members, with women comprising the majority of the Cell. The University of Rajshahi has gone beyond the requirement by constituting a seven member cell (according to RU policy). The Prevention of Sexual Harassment and Exploitation Principles, 2010 prescribes two members should come from women rights or human rights organization with long-term experience in this field. These provisions are sometimes not followed by the authorities, as members are often selected by the Vice Chancellor from among lawyers of the Rajshahi Court, who are not affiliated with any human rights organizations. This deviation has occurred in the formation of three to seven successive Cells. According to the national guidelines, each Harassment Prevention Cell must submit an annual report to the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs.

The research also finds that no Cell has submitted any annual reports to the government in compliance with these guidelines.³

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how masculinities are constructed throughout students' life courses and how these constructions influence behaviours and experiences within higher educational institutions. The research is based on in-depth interviews with 200 students (graduate and undergraduate) comprising male, and female—randomly selected from the Department of Law, the Department of Law and Land Administration, the Department of Psychology, others students from different faculties at the University of Rajshahi. Among them, 100 were female students, 100 were male students. The study is also analytical and document-based in nature. It examines relevant policies and guidelines of the University of Rajshahi to determine their consistency, gaps, and areas of dependency. Document analysis is conducted to assess the nature, form, and application of institutional rules, highlighting their strengths and limitations and offering observations relevant to the research objectives.

Data are collected through case studies, documents, and interviews with students, teachers, authorities and legal professionals. The collected data are processed using editing, coding, classification, and tabulation. An observational component is also employed to understand expressions of hegemonic practices across educational experiences. The research examines how university authorities respond to traditional or hegemonic masculinities and to men identified as perpetrators of gender-based violence.⁴ This helps develop deeper insight into motivations and social constructions of masculinity that influence discriminatory behaviour and shape institutional responses.

³ Sexual Harassment Prevention Guideline 9 (4) by honourable High Court Division 2009. *BNWLA v. Bangladesh and Others*, 14 BLC (HCD) 694 (2009)

⁴ Abdul Alim, "Understanding Masculinity and Sexual Harassment for Sustainable Development." *Social Science, Humanities and Sustainability Research* 4, no. 5 (2023). Los Angeles, CA: SCHOLINK INC. ISSN 2690-3628.

4. Analysis of the Penal Laws of Bangladesh

The Penal Code of Bangladesh proscribes assault and criminal force to woman.⁵ Section 354 and 509 deal with word, signal, gesture or act intended to insult the humility or modesty of a woman. In cases involving violations of a woman's modesty, the relevant legal provisions shall be strictly enforced, and criminal proceedings shall be initiated promptly upon the filing of a complaint at the nearest police station. Offences under Section 509 are classified as cognizable and non-bail able. The section of Penal Code 354 and 509 are,

S. 354. Whoever assaults or uses criminal force to any woman, intending to outrage or knowing it to be likely that he will thereby outrage her modesty, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine, or with both.

S. 509. Whoever, intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object, intending that such word or sound shall be heard, or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman, or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.

In the above definition, the term 'modesty of a woman' is not clearly defined. Additionally, provisions addressing suicide resulting from the abetment of sexual harassment could be incorporated, given the prevalence of such incidents in society. The research would like to suggest to incorporate a new phenomenon in addition as 509A saying "If any person commits suicide in consequence of any act of sexual harassment committed by any person, that person shall be liable for abetment of suicide and for such offence he shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years and shall not be less than three years, and shall also be liable to fine".

⁵ Section 354 of Penal Code is the provision addressing assault or criminal force against women with sexual intent.

Bangladesh doesn't have any women commission or National Commission for woman. If a woman experiences any form of sexual harassment in the workplace, she may directly file a complaint with the Women's Commission in other countries. As examples, South African Commission for Gender Equality, or Australia, and Hong Kong. Upon receiving the complaint, the Commission follows up by notifying the relevant police station to initiate criminal proceedings and may also direct the employer to conduct an internal inquiry. The employer may be advised to immediately suspend the alleged harasser pending the outcome of the investigation. Additionally, the victim has the right to seek damages or compensation from the accused by filing a civil suit before the appropriate civil court.

4.1 Analysis of Case Study

The Daily Star⁶ reported that nine faculty members from the Department of Psychology lodged separate complaints with the Vice-Chancellor, demanding disciplinary action against a teacher who had sexually harassed a colleague. Two days later, the same teacher allegedly repeated the behavior with another faculty member, who then also filed a complaint with the Vice-Chancellor. Considering such incidents occur at the chairman room of a department, one can only imagine the challenges faced by female students encountering the same teacher. The case was investigated, and the teacher received a punishment from the Syndicate that excluded him from five years of academic activity. In 2025, the next Harassment Prevention Cell reviewed the case, found him not guilty, and lifted all previous charges and penalties.

This situation highlights the urgent need for active, independent Sexual Harassment Prevention Cells in universities, despite the 2009 High Court directive mandating their establishment in all educational institutions and workplaces. Many potential complainants remain reluctant to come forward due to fears that their identities may be exposed, putting them at risk of retaliation.

⁶ 25 May 2023, *The Daily Star*.

Such concerns undermine a core function of these Cells: ensuring the protection and confidentiality of victims.

Case Studies

Case Study 1.1

An Incident in the Department of Geology and Mining

On October 21, 2014 a first year student of the university, lodged a written complain to the university authorities accusing Prof Kamrul Hasan of sexually harassing her.⁷ Subsequently, on April 27, 2015, an investigation Cell appointed by the authorities recommended the suspension of the teacher after finding him guilty in connection with the incident. The Cell against Sexual Harassment and Repression reported that the accused teacher had sent numerous inappropriate and objectionable proposals to the student via mobile text messages. He allegedly tried to take advantage of her by exploiting his position as a teacher and guaranteeing her good grades if she responded. The student maintained that she had initially tried to evade the harassments but finally decided to lodge a written complaint after the harassment became unbearable. On April 27, 2015, the Sexual Harassment investigation team recommended his dismissal after obtaining preliminary evidence of Hasan's "objectionable proposals and harassment" via mobile phone. With the charges subsequently confirmed once again, the review panel instead recommended that Professor Hasan be compelled to retire, "keeping in mind his age and the honour of the teaching profession."⁸

Case Study 1.2

A Complain in the Institute of Education and Research⁹

Bishnu Kumar Adhikary, an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Education and Research at Rajshahi University, was set to be banned by the university administration after

⁷ 22 April 2016, *The Daily Star*.

⁸ 22 April 2016, *Bdnews24.com*

⁹ 27 February 2021, *The Dhaka Tribune*.

the allegations of sexual harassment made by two female students were found to be substantiated. In June 2019, the two students filed written complaints accusing Adhikary of sexual harassment. On June 28 of that year, they also lodged a General Diary (GD) with the Motihar Police Station. According to the students, the teacher had called one of them to his office without any valid reason on June 25, and had made offensive and sexual comments in the classroom on June 27, 2019, in the presence of other female students. Additionally, the students reported that the teacher frequently made derogatory remarks about women and their bodies during class. Prior to these incidents, female students from the evening course had approached the Chairman of the Examination Cell, requesting exemption from academic activities due to similar allegations of sexual harassment. On July 2, 2019, Adhikary was temporarily suspended from academic duties, and the university formed a probe Cell to investigate the allegations. Following the Cell's findings, which confirmed the truth of the complaints, a recommendation to ban Adhikary from the university was made during the 504th Syndicate meeting in February 2021.

Case Study 1.3

A Female Law Student was Harassed

A third-year female student of Department of Law filed a case on 24 August 2022 at the city's Boalia Model Police Station claiming she was sexually assaulted at Bashar Road in the Tikapara area of Rajshahi city. The written statement said that she was going for private tuition in a rainy morning at 8 am while a stranger suddenly grasped her from the back, and touched her private parts. The stranger left her when she started screaming. The victim said, "I don't know him personally, but he seemed to be a local. I can clearly identify the man." After that incident she informed her teachers, proctor and other concerned authority but no one came forward to help her to file a case. She waited the whole day after the incident but got no support from the University. In the late afternoon, Professor Mahbuba Kaniz Keya of the Psychology Department, who

was also the Provost of Begum Khaleda Zia Hall, along with a teacher from the Law Department, took the matter seriously and accompanied the student to Boalia Police Station to assist her in filing a case. Student Advisor Professor Tareq Noor later arrived and formally filed the case. Following the investigation, the police were unable to identify the alleged harasser, and a final report was submitted.

Case Study 1.4

42 Female Students of Law Department Complain against a Classmate¹⁰

A number of female students came forward following multiple allegations against Shishir, which were submitted at different times. They stated that the matter was related to sexual harassment and requested the Sexual Harassment and Abuse Prevention Cell to investigate the allegations and take prompt action. Earlier, on March 2018, some students filed a complaint with the Malopara Police Station, accusing Shishir of sexually harassing them through social media. As a result of the allegations, the police detained Shishir, but he was released the following day. Subsequently, the victimized students submitted separate complaints to the University's Vice Chancellor, Professor M Abdus Sobhan, Pro-Vice Chancellor Professor Ananda Kumar Saha, Student's Adviser Professor Zannatul Ferdous, Law Faculty Dean Professor Abu Naser Md Wahid, and the Department Chair, Professor Mohammad Abdul Hannan, demanding immediate punitive measures against Shishir. The complaints revealed that Shishir had sent lewd messages and explicit pictures of himself to classmates and seniors using a fake Facebook account. After a thorough investigation by the concerned Cell, in May 2018 the university authorities expelled him from studentship.

¹⁰ 1 April 2018, *The Daily New Nation* and 31 May 2018, *The Daily Star*.

Case Study1.5

Teachers Minor Child was abused by a University Dental Doctor

Child sexual abuse (CSA) happens in all communities regardless of genders, religions, cultures, social and economic classes. It occurs everywhere in all ethnic backgrounds and is experienced by children whether males and females. The physical and psychological harm of such sexual abuse has significant impact on adult health outcomes. Sometimes its effects continue for the victims throughout their lives. A Class VIII student residing on the University of Rajshahi campus was repeatedly harassed by a university dental doctor. Being unaware of inappropriate touching, she initially felt only discomfort and began cancelling her dental appointments at the doctor's chamber. Mother of the victim child, who was also a teacher in the University, forced her child to tolerate dental treatment and set up an appointment. The teacher stated that she took her 13 years old child to the chamber on 30 October 2023.

She said she went out of the doctor's chamber to receive a phone call. When she returned to the chamber, she found her daughter crying. The girl alleged that the doctor sexually harassed her touching her private parts and attempt to rape. Understanding the face of fear and anxiety of her child, she asked what happened. After coming out of the chamber, the child informed her mother about the incident. Upon hearing about the harassment, the mother became extremely angry, rushed into Razu's chamber, and physically confronted him. The proctor, police and outsider arrived at the chamber and the teacher lodged a written complaint with the university authorities and filed a case with the Boalia police station against Razu Ahmmmed under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act section 10. The next day a group of RU teachers and students formed a human chain on the university campus protesting the sexual harassment of the minor student and demanded exemplary punishment for the physician. Following the human chain, a group of teachers entered the administrative building to meet the vice-chancellor to

discuss their demand while the students took position in front of the main entrance gate. While the teachers were holding the meeting, the agitating students locked the entrance gate. Later, the students opened the gate after the university public relations office administrator, Professor Pradip Kumar Panday, informed them that Vice-Chancellor Professor Golam Sabbir Sattar had suspended physician Razu and decided to form a three-member probe Cell to investigate the matter. Subsequently, the authorities of Rajshahi University imposed the penalty of permanently dismissal on Deputy Chief Medical Officer Razu Ahmmed.¹¹

It was not an easy journey to the victim's mother to work with the case and final remedy is pending from the court. She had to engage private lawyers and pay considerable legal fees, placing a significant financial burden on her. The whole responsibilities were to whom? Whose duty is it to create safe environment in the campus? The teachers' community should come forward promptly to ask for justice.

There is a Sexual Harassment Prevention committee composed of 7 members at the University of Rajshahi only to hear the incident and recommend to the syndicate. Between 2014 and 2023, more than 13 individuals—including teachers, staff members, and students; lodged complaints of sexual harassment against the doctor, Razu Ahmed, at different times. This Cell interviewed 22 persons including the minor girl. Therefore, we have suggestion to the Cell not only to be a deciding functional body but also to work in fighting the evils against all perpetrators. It may include awareness program, intensive investigation, victim and witness protection and necessary steps with police and lawyers.

5. Presentation of Data and Research Findings

Among the 200 students surveyed, 86% agreed that all great creations in the world are equally attributed to both men and women. Ironically, this perception contrasts with their views on

¹¹ 1 November, 2023, *The Daily Star*.

actual work roles: 84.9% of the respondents believed that men and women should have separate fields of work.

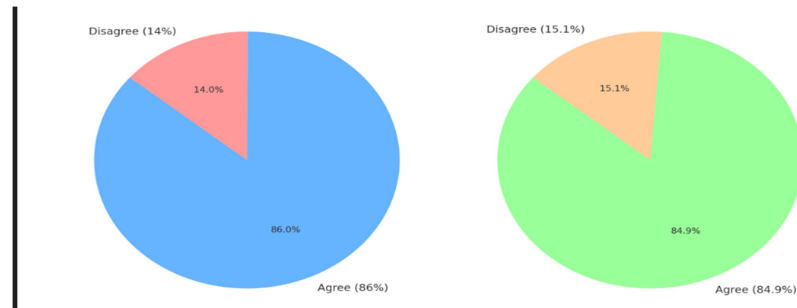


Chart1.1: Belief vs. Reality- Equal contribution of men and women Vs. women must have separate workplace.

A strong majority of students (86%) recognize and affirm that women and men have equally contributed to the world's greatest achievements. This suggests a progressive understanding of gender equality in terms of capability, creativity, and societal impact. It reflects growing awareness and acceptance of women's roles in shaping history, science, culture, and development alongside men. Interestingly, a nearly equivalent percentage of students (84.9%) also believe that men and women should have separate fields of work. This indicates a deep-rooted traditional mindset or a perceived difference in roles, possibly influenced by cultural, religious, or social norms. It reveals a contradiction—while students value equal contribution, they may still subscribe to gendered divisions in professional or societal functions.

Table-1.2 of the data section shows that the prevalence of stereotypes among higher-educational students of Rajshahi University.

Table 1.1: Gender Stereotypes Concerning Character.

Questions	Agree	Disagree
1. Do you think that male and female must have separate field of work?	84.9%	15.1%
2. "All the great creations of the world that are eternally good, half of them is done by women, half of them by men".	86%	14%
3. It is better to have more sons than the daughter.	73.6%	26.4%
4. Do you think that men should participate equally with women in household works?	24.9%	75.1%
5. Do you think, women are best to take care of the older family member of babies?	87.7%	12.3%

Belief: Girls Are Best to Care for Elderly or Babies (87.7% Agree)

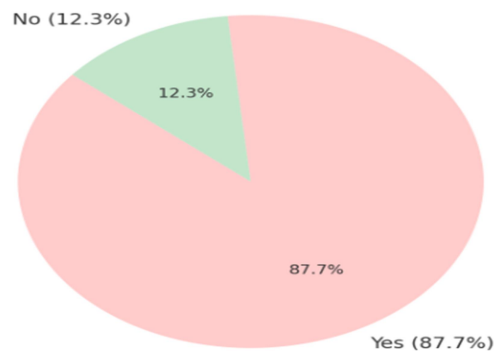


Chart 1.2: Women are best to care for Elderly

Questions related to gender roles explore participants' attitudes toward the division of responsibilities between men and women. These include whether they believe males and females should have separate fields of work; whether they agree that half of the world's enduring and valuable creations are contributed equally by both men and women; whether men should participate equally in household work; who should have the authority to decide when to

engage in sexual relations within a couple; and whether they agree or disagree with the view that women are better suited to care for elderly family members or infants. The responses to questions of this subset show that about 81.46% of participants believe in stereotypes roles, while about 18.54% of subjects rely on equal gender overall. This strong majority indicates a prevailing gender stereotype that care giving is primarily a woman's role. While this belief may stem from cultural norms that associate women with nurturing and emotional labor, it also reinforces traditional gender roles that can limit both women's opportunities in other sectors and men's participation in care giving. Such perceptions can perpetuate inequality in domestic responsibilities and professional care giving roles, often placing an unfair burden on women and underestimating men's care giving potential. Addressing this imbalance requires societal awareness, gender-sensitive education, and policies that promote shared responsibilities in both public and private spheres. Further, it is noticed that the dominance of stereotypes is lower among students pursuing graduate degrees compared to the students having their undergraduate courses. It is, therefore, presumed that higher education helped them in mitigating stereotypes regarding gender roles and developing a sense of equal gender roles in various aspects of familial, public, and national life.

Stereotypes regarding gender roles

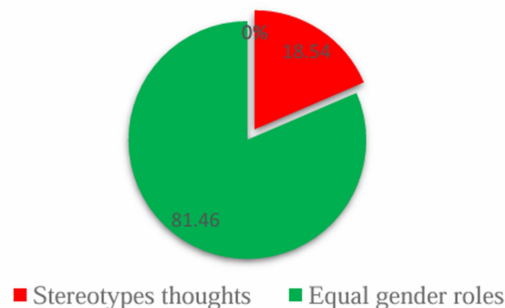


Chart-1.3: Stereotypes regarding Gender Roles.

This following table also represents data regarding stereotypes based on superstitions and inferences. This group also holds certain superstitious beliefs, including the thoughts listed below:

- i. The favorite color of all women is pink;
- ii. The woman who eats before her husband after cooking, misfortune soon comes into her house;
- iii. Shame and shyness are the ornament of women;
- iv. There is no way for women to be without husbands.

The replies of the candidates represent that up to 90% of them approve of superstitious thoughts and rather generalizations concerning gender equality.

Table 3: Gender Stereotypes concerning decisions making.

Questions	a	d
1. A man needs to have male friends to talk about his problems.	42.7%	57.3%
2. A man should have the final word about decisions in his home.	62.1%	37.9%
3. Do participants agree to report incidents of harassment to the appropriate complaint body?	90%	10%
4. Do you know where to file a complaint, such as a Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell?	8%	92%

a= agree/partially agree d= disagree/partially disagree

From table 1.2, Passive see that this table involves questions regarding stereotypical thoughts on the decision making. There are four questions in this subset. The questions are whether they think that a man needs to have male friends to talk about his problems; a man should have the final word about decisions in his home, whether they agreed to complain against harassment to complain body, and knowledge about sexual harassment prevention cell to file the complaints.

Responses were recorded to understand the participants' views on whether they thought it was important for a man to have male friends to talk about his problems. 42.7% of the respondents supported the view, while the remaining majority of 57.3% refuted the view.

It is found that stereotypes are deeply rooted in regard to the decision making process. Most of the undergraduate participant, higher-educational students of Rajshahi, believes in stereotypical thoughts and deems that 42.7 % men should have different types of problems and must talk with male friends. Masculinity attitudes represent another domain where stereotypes remain deeply rooted and dominant. This category includes two questions designed to assess such attitudes among students of Rajshahi University. The findings are somewhat surprising, as a significant proportion of respondents continue to endorse stereotypical views of masculinity. A majority of respondents (62.1%) believe that a man should have the final authority in household decision-making. In contrast, 37.9% of respondents support a more egalitarian approach, stating that household decisions should be made jointly through cooperation between men and women. The results from the above table indicate a significant gap between willingness and awareness. While a large majority of participants (90%) agree that incidents of harassment should be reported to the appropriate complaint body, such as a Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell. In addition, only 10% disagree with reporting harassment, overwhelming 92% lack knowledge about the proper channels for filing complaints.

A man should have the final word about decisions in his home

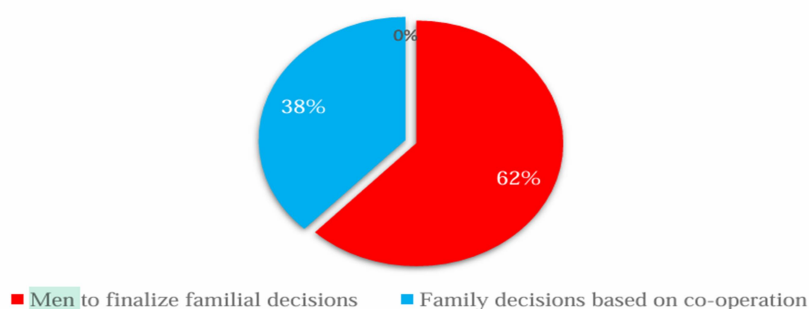


Chart-1.4: Whether a man should have the final words in decision making.

Questions in this category address whether respondents believe a man should have the final say in household decisions and whether it is important for a man to have male friends to discuss his problems.

A total of sixty-two point one percent of interviewees agreed that a man should have the final word in his home, reflecting a clearly gender-centric stereotype. A majority of respondents, 90%, considered it unnecessary to report sexual harassment to the relevant authority, believing that nothing could be done and that the victim would suffer further. Another question assessed respondents' knowledge of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell and the complaint-filing process. The findings reveal that 92% of respondents were unaware of where to file a complaint with the Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell.

5.1 Research Finding

According to data collected from 200 undergraduate and graduate students, 56% of reported harassers were classmates of the victims. Whereas, 24% were identified as seniors or juniors, 11% percent were outsiders and 9% were faculty members. Of those interviewed, 10% mentioned incidents of physical harassment, 30% reported verbal abuse, and the majority 60% reported incidents of cyber harassment.

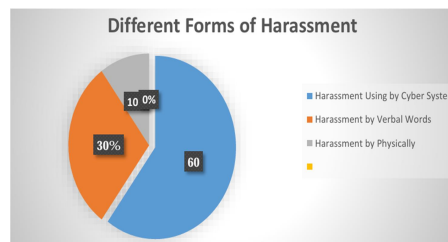


Chart1.5: Harassment by Using Different Forms

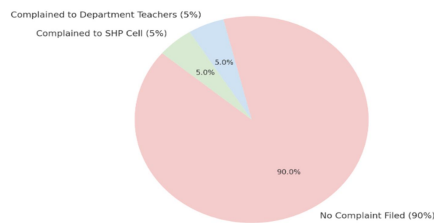


Chart1.6: Filing complaints - sexual harassment incidents

Meanwhile, ninety percent of the respondents stated that no complaint had been filed regarding the incidents. Of the remaining respondents, five percent reported the matter to their department teachers, while only five percent filed a complaint with the Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell of the university. Furthermore, ninety-two percent indicated that they did not file a complaint due to fear of judgment and character assassination. They reported that the perpetrators were influential and had connections with the ruling party. Additionally, ninety-two percent of students did not know the office or the name of the Convener of the Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell and were unaware of the proper procedure or location for filing complaints. In light of these findings, it is urgently recommended that the university authority organize seminars, workshops, and awareness programs on women's rights, including clear guidance on how and where to file complaints, in accordance with the directives of the High Court. Most students reported that, although they had heard about the cell, they had not observed any awareness program related activities and were unaware of the competency or functioning of such bodies within the university. It is essential to provide sufficient orientation sessions before the start of each academic session and to conduct regular orientations—monthly or biannual—in all educational institutions and workplaces.

The chart reveals a significant gap in the reporting of sexual harassment incidents within the university. An overwhelming ninety percent of respondents stated that they did not file any complaint, highlighting a serious issue of underreporting. Only five percent approached their department teachers, while another five percent reported the incidents to the university's Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell. This low level of formal reporting suggests barriers; such as fear of retaliation, lack of trust in the system, concerns over confidentiality, or the belief that no meaningful action will follow.

The findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen institutional mechanisms, ensure anonymity and protection for complainants, raise awareness about available channels, and foster a supportive

environment that encourages victims to speak up. Female students reported that teachers or faculty members were often unhelpful, unsupportive, or uncooperative, leaving them feeling helpless. Many students noted that teachers are frequently too busy with other responsibilities to meet with them or address their concerns. Therefore, there is a strong need for dedicated and trained personnel similar to the role of sports or physical instructor—who can work closely with students, providing guidance, support, and accessible channels for reporting harassment. For example, mental health counselors or legal instructors could play a crucial role in assisting students with legal matters and the complaint process.

6. University Harassment Prevention Policy

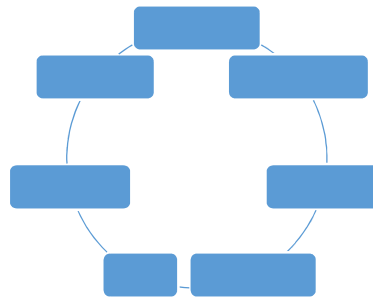
Sexual harassment prevention policy is a set of guidelines and procedures implemented by an organization to prevent and address incidents of sexual harassment in the educational institutions. Such a policy is essential for creating a safe and respectful learning environment for all students.¹² While policies may vary between organizations, but there are certain important parts that are usually included in any strong sexual harassment prevention policy.

6.1 Defining Sexual Harassment

The policy needs to clearly define what constitutes sexual harassment, including both verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature. This definition must align with the legal definition in the applicable jurisdiction. The policy is expected to explicitly state that sexual harassment is strictly prohibited in the education institutions, workplace, including any affiliated events or locations where work-related activities take place. The policy is required to clarify that the prohibition of sexual harassment extends to all employees, regardless of their position or seniority, as well as third parties such as clients, customers, vendors, and contractors.

¹² Abdul Alim, “Understanding Masculinity and Sexual Harassment for Sustainable Development.” *Social Science, Humanities and Sustainability Research* 4, no. 5 (2023). Los Angeles, CA: SCHOLINK INC. ISSN 2690-3628.

6.2 Reporting Mechanism and Investigation



The policy is required to establish a clear and confidential reporting process for victims or witnesses of sexual harassment. It should include multiple reporting channels, such as reporting to a designated individual, human resources department, or an anonymous hotline. Employees should be encouraged to report any incidents promptly. The policy should outline the steps that will be taken to investigate reported incidents of sexual harassment. This may involve conducting interviews, gathering evidence, and ensuring a fair and impartial investigation process. The policy is required to also address the timeframe for completing investigations. The policy should emphasize that all reports of sexual harassment will be treated with confidentiality to the extent possible. It should also explicitly state that retaliation against anyone who reports an incident or participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited and will result in disciplinary action. The policy must state that it will be periodically reviewed and updated to ensure it remains up to date with legal requirements and best practices.

6.3 From Awareness to Action

The policy of RU needs to specify the range of disciplinary actions that may be taken in response to substantiated incidents of sexual harassment. These actions can include verbal or written warnings, retraining, transfer, suspension, or termination, depending on the severity and frequency of the offense. The policy should outline the organization's commitment to providing regular training programs

on sexual harassment prevention for all employees. This training should cover topics such as recognizing and preventing sexual harassment, bystander intervention, and the reporting process. The policy should ensure that all employees receive a copy of the sexual harassment prevention policy and that it is easily accessible through the organization's intranet or other communication channels. New employees should receive the policy during their on boarding process.

It is to be noted that the definition of a sexual harassment prevention may vary based on local laws, industry regulations, and organizational culture. Organizations should consult with legal professionals to ensure their policies comply with applicable laws and regulations. The former conveners' of the Harassment Prevention Committee informed the researcher that they didn't have enough funds to run the cells and the investigations.

7. Vicarious Liability of the Organization

Childhood teachers have an influential role in shaping children's educational experiences. Combining a gender lens into teaching—by ensuring that learning materials, classroom practices, and teacher-student interactions are free from gender bias and promote equal participation can help challenge traditional gender stereotypes and foster gender equality from an early age.

- The strong suggestion is to establish a counseling center in each faculty office so that students can get support immediately.
- Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of existing policies and procedures to enhance accountability and ensure compliance, in collaboration with external stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- Implement nationwide efforts to prevent and address sexual misconduct within institutions, including sexual harassment, by strengthening mechanisms for prevention, reporting, and response in alignment with best practices.

- Cultivate a culture of respect across the higher education sector, one that rejects all forms of sexual misconduct, encourages reporting, supports survivors, and ensures protection against retaliation.
- Ensure institutional accountability to university staff and stakeholders by utilizing data-driven approaches to monitor progress and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

7.1 Gender Education for Students

It is important to address gender discrimination through comprehensive policies, awareness campaigns, and support systems within educational institutions. These measures can help create an inclusive and respectful environment that promotes equal opportunities and challenges discriminatory practices. To understand the specific situation at Rajshahi University, it would be beneficial to do more research and establish a Center for Gender and Development Studies to consult local reports, studies, or resources focused on gender discrimination in that specific context. Moreover, a victim support center could be beneficial to the University. Bystander students are required to be systematically included in the formulation of policies and different training efforts to them and to inspire them to call the proctor or campus police.¹³

7.2 Gender Sensitive Awareness

The duty of bystander students¹⁴ has a great role as individual of witnessing the incidence of sexual harassment. They can shout or protect that has also an important feature among organizational factors relevant for prevention of sexual harassment in higher education. The intervening students as a bystander when sexual harassment occurs is based on gender, sexuality, social class and

¹³ McDonald, P., Charlesworth, S. & Graham, T. 2016. "Action or Inaction. Bystander Intervention in Workplace Sexual Harassment." *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 27: 548–566.

¹⁴ Bystander students refer to individuals who witness or become aware of incidents of sexual harassment but are not directly involved as victims or perpetrators. They may play a critical role in either reinforcing harmful behaviors through silence or intervening to prevent, report, or challenge such conduct.

perceived similarity in terms of position within the organization may protect students.¹⁵ The research finds structural system must be developed that can produce healthy environment that is well-integrated which will also reduce sexual harassment occurrence.¹⁶ Structurally egalitarian workplace is needed where women and men have shared power and leadership equally prevents sexual harassment; women in male-dominated workplaces are at greater risk of sexual harassment.¹⁷ The type of contract that employees work under is related to their risk of being subjected to sexual harassment, where more secure jobs result in a reduced risk of victimization.¹⁸ Future research cell or project must run giving emphasis on prevention and on evaluating the effectiveness of preventive measures. Developing such strategies requires a thorough examination of incidents of sexual harassment, including emerging patterns and the evolving characteristics and motivations of perpetrators in both physical and virtual environments.¹⁹

7.3 Establish Victim Support and Training Center

Everyone will pronounce that sexual harassment is the fault of the perpetrators. Therefore, silence on this issue should never be encouraged, and anyone who experiences sexual harassment is urged to contact the Victim Support Center for free and confidential support. University authority must tell the options available to the

¹⁵ Dessel, A. B., K. D. Goodman, and M. R. Woodford. 2017. "LGBT Discrimination on Campus and Heterosexual Bystanders: Understanding Intentions to Intervene." *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education* 10: 101–116.

¹⁶ Ollo-López, A., and I. Nuñez. 2018. "Exploring the Organizational Drivers of Sexual Harassment: Empowered Jobs Against Isolation and Tolerant Climates." *Employee Relations* 40 (2): 174–192.

¹⁷ Buchanan, N., I. Settles, A. Hall, and R. O'Connor. 2014. "A Review of Organizational Strategies for Reducing Sexual Harassment: Insights From the U.S. Military." *Journal of Social Issues* 70 (4): 687–702.

¹⁸ Hennekam, S., and D. Bennett. 2017. "Sexual Harassment in the Creative Industries: Tolerance, Culture and the Need for Change." *Gender, Work & Organization* 24 (4): 417–434.

¹⁹ VothSchrag, R. J. 2017. "Campus Based Sexual Assault and Dating Violence: A Review of Study Contexts and Participants." *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work* 32: 67–80.

students. They must not be on fear or think alone on these issues. If harassment happens on any university premises, it can be reported to the harassment prevention authority for investigation and appropriate action. If a student is in immediate danger, they should contact the police via the emergency hotline. In cases involving threats, violence, or sexual assault, the university should support the victim in reporting the incident as a crime to the police, in accordance with her wishes. The Victim Support Center should not merely listen to complaints; rather, it must provide continuous, practical support to assist the victim throughout the entire process.

7.4 Co-ordination with District Victim Support Center

In urban areas, if any student or woman is affected by a sexual offence and seeks support, she can submit a detailed complaint via email to the District Victim Support Center. The district victim support team is required to respond and make contact with her within 12 hours. District Victim Support Center will always shelter them with confidentiality and will not disclose personal information or identity without her permission. Personal details should only be shared if there are legal requirements to do so. There must also be a dedicated phone number or live chat service for support. Families and friends of those affected by the crime can also reach out for guidance, assistance, and information. Victims can reach the Victim Support Center (VSC) through the following channels:

- Contacting their local Victim Support team directly.
- Calling their 24-hour support hotline for free at example 444.
- Using the VSC free live chat service at example 222.
- Creating a free account on VSC Support Space, an online resource offering interactive guides to help victims navigate the impact of the crime.
- Submitting a request for support via their online form.

7.5 Strengthening Sexual Harassment Prevention

The RU Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell should organize workgroups and seminars with a panel of content experts, including faculty, administrators, staff, students, and representatives from

human rights organizations. These sessions should provide multi-perspective insights and directly communicate findings and suggestions to the Vice Chancellor on an ongoing basis. Several other initiatives can be implemented across the university at different levels, each with distinct objectives:

i. Student-Level Initiatives

It may include drama and music Campaigns initiated by students. The Department of Drama or Music can organize performances addressing sexual harassment awareness and gender equality.

ii. Orange Day Observance

The University may observe the 25th of each month as “Orange Day,” similar to the worldwide awareness initiative organized by United Nations. On this day, the University can arrange monthly awareness gatherings and invite input from diverse stakeholders to raise awareness, encourage participation, and foster meaningful dialogue on relevant social issues.

iii. University Student Political Level

Student political bodies can play a significant role in promoting a safe and respectful campus environment. The Student Union Committee, as the representative platform of students, can actively engage in raising awareness about sexual harassment and gender-based violence within the university community. Through campaigns, seminars, discussions, and peer-led initiatives, the committee can encourage students to understand their rights and responsibilities. It can also collaborate with university authorities, faculty members, and relevant organizations to develop preventive measures and support mechanisms for victims.

iv. Deans’ Committee

Deans can serve as key advisors in formulating and guiding policies, prevention strategies, and effective implementation measures related to sexual violence. Their leadership can help ensure institutional commitment to prevention, accountability, and a safe campus environment.

v. Provost Council

The Provost Council can develop strategies and oversee initiatives to ensure safe and violence-free residential communities.

vi. Trauma-Informed Services

- **Speaker Series:** The Department of Gender Studies can organize trauma-informed speaker series.
- **Training and Support:** Departments such as Social Work, Sociology, Law, and Psychology can provide trauma services and training networks for students and staff.

vii. Supporting Research Services

This consortium can review best practices from local, national, and international organizations and guide the university's efforts in addressing sexual harassment and promoting gender equity.

8. Conclusion

In today's diverse and interconnected world, understanding gender issues is crucial for personal and professional interactions. Gender education equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and contribute to a society that respects and values diversity, preparing them for future workplaces and relationships. The findings of this study reveal significant gaps in the reporting and prevention of sexual harassment at the University of Rajshahi. Despite policies and institutional mechanisms being in place, the overwhelming majority of students do not file complaints due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in authorities, and limited awareness of complaint procedures. Many students reported that faculty and staff are often too busy or unprepared to provide meaningful support, leaving victims feeling helpless and unsupported.

These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-level interventions. Strengthening the Sexual Harassment Prevention Cell, engaging students, faculty, administrators, and human rights organizations, and establishing dedicated support personnel are essential steps. Initiatives such as awareness

campaigns, trauma-informed services, student engagement, and research-based policy guidance can help create a safer and more gender-equitable environment. Ultimately, addressing sexual harassment requires a holistic and continuous approach: combining education, awareness, institutional accountability, and supportive structures to empower students, prevent abuse, and ensure a culture of respect and safety across the university.