

Research Article

PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON ADOLESCENT GIRL STUDENTS IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The aim of the study was to explore the situation of sexual harassment among the adolescent girl students in Rupandehi district of Nepal. **Method:** Concurrent mix method was applied in the study. Total 402 adolescent school girls were selected for quantitative study. Five focus group discussion (FGD), four key informant information (KII) and seven in-depth interviews (IDI) were carried out for qualitative study. The quantitative data were analyzed in IBM SPSS 20. The qualitative data were transcribed manually and triangulated with quantitative data. **Results:** Higher prevalence (89%) of sexual harassment have been found in the studied group. The verbal types of harassments were most common (68.5%) among the victim. **Conclusion:** Sexual harassment was a common on the girl students at Rupandehi district and they were suffering from different types of sexual harassment. Among the different level of sexual harassment, less severe types of sexual harassments were more common than moderate severe level and most severe types of sexual harassments.

Keywords: sexual harassment, school girls, prevalence.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment against girls and women is widespread at different sectors and levels across the world. Though the term sexual harassment was not coined and popular until 1970, but after that it was rapidly diffused and disseminated.¹⁻³ There is no single most and common definition of sexual a harassment but is considered as a socially and culturally based evil of sexual nature which is deeply embedded in dimensions of socio culture, gender role, sexuality and power. Because of the variation in the concept, definitions and indicators of sexual harassment, the prevalence varies dramatically. Feminist scholars have considered sexual harassment as form of sex-based discrimination espoused by power, privilege and gender inequality in the society.³ The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment as unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of as sexual nature and has categorized it in to two types which are Quid pro quo and hostile environment. ⁴Likewise according to United States Merit Systems Protection Board sexual harassment happened in three types with respect to how severe these may be: "less severe, moderately severe and most severe. Less severe harassment includes unwelcomed sexual remarks, suggestive looks and gestures, and deliberate touching. Moderately severe behaviors include pressure for dates, pressure for sexual favors, unwelcomed letters and telephone calls. Most severe harassment includes actual or attempted rape or sexual assault".⁵

Sexual harassment on women and girls has been reported from every corner of the world. In recent the #Me Too # movement⁶ has raised the visibility of the sexual harassment that takes place in women life to unpredicted level and found that more than eight women in ten women experienced it in their life time.⁷Some studies has shown the 40 and 50 percent of women in European Union Countries and in Asia-Pacific region are experiencing unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of sexual harassment at work.^{8,9} In a

global comparison, South Asia is the second-lowest scoring region in Global Gender Gap Index and Nepal's gender index rate is at the middle of the South Asian scale¹⁰ it indicates the possibilities of different forms of marginalized behaviors on women in contrast to male in Nepal too. Some available studies has elaborated the different types of sexual harassment on educated working women especially in bureaucracy and other institutional sector.¹¹⁻¹³ Still, majority of available studies in Nepalese context are focusing on workplace sexual harassment and sexual harassment at public transport but the sexual harassment at academic institutes and among the adolescent girls are very few. School is an important institute which serves a number of functions such as socialization, personality development of students, transmission of cultural norms and values to new generation in our society beyond just transmitting academic knowledge and skills. There for the school environment is important for overall development of the students and it should be child friendly, healthy and conducive for students. Unfortunately, at school also girl students are suffering from sexually harassed by their peer boys and male teachers^{14,15}.The United Nation in 1996 has estimated that 150 million girls and 73 million boys under the age of 18 have been raped or suffered with different forms of sexual harassments¹⁶.Similarly, 83 percent of students in US have experienced some forms of sexual harassment during their school lives.¹⁷Sexual harassment on school going children is also found critical in African countries Asian countries .^{18,19}These abovementioned scenario show that the sexual harassment is predominant at school level throughout the world . In Nepalese context too, few studies have shown that 60 to 80 % girl students have found suffered from some kind of sexual harassment in Kathmandu valley.^{20,21} Sexual harassment is not only the gender based violence but also has been found responsible for different negative consequences on the victim 's mental health, physical health as well as their academic performance.^{14,22-24} Hence it is important to know the situation of sexual harassment at school level to create the good learning environments and to control the possible negative consequences on the adolescents girl students. In Nepalese contexts, as most of the studies are confined on the topics of domestic violence, sexual harassment in public places and workplace sexual harassment therefore, this study was intended to explore the

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prevalence of sexual harassment on especially on girl students and the finding of the study might be useful to concerned authorities to reduce the sexual harassment on school girls to create conducive learning environment at school.

METHOD

The research design of was pragmatic research design and researcher used the concurrent mix method.²⁵ The sample size for quantitative data was 402 adolescent school girl students from both Public and institutional schools of Rupandehi district, Nepal. For qualitative data collection, five FGD guidelines and seven key informants interview has been carried out. Likewise, four in- depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with the sexually harassed girls. IBM SPSS 20 software was used for quantitative data analysis and the test of independence among variables was carried out with chi square test at P=0.05% significant level. For qualitative data, case interview and voices of FGDs has been transcribed.²⁶ Findings of qualitative data have been triangulated with the findings of quantitative data where possible.

RESULTS

Nepal has huge diversity in geography, social values, caste, religion, and economic status of the people. Similarly, there are prominently two types of school are found that is English medium institutional schools and Government run public schools. Generally, the institutional school lies at cities and urban areas with and they charge higher fee to the students and not affordable to poor and marginalized students. In the other hands the government run public schools are lies throughout the country, comparatively have less facilities and it is free of cost to for all students. Similarly, other different socio – demographic such as parent's educational status, occupation, income level was different. From the study, overall 86% of the respondents have been found suffered from different kind of sexual harassment. Similarly, in qualitative inquiry among 42 adolescent girl students from participants in 5 different focus group, 34 participants (81%) said they have suffered from different types of sexual harassment at different times and places. The prevalence of sexual harassment on the girl students in both community and institutional types of schools was similar that is 86% girls from community school and institutional schools were facing sexual harassment. In focus group discussion in both community and institutional schools, 34 girls were said that they have experienced sexual harassment. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative results indicated that sexual harassment was common problem among girl in Rupandehi district. The following are some verbatim of the participants about their experience of sexual harassment.

Boys use different types of vulgar words in classroom, and they connect our names with their friends. (FGD 1, Community, R.N.1, Brahmin) We do not have any areas where we can feel safe against sexual harassment and sometime, it may happen at our home too. (FGD 5, public, Disadvantage Janajatis).Our social studies sir always tries to hug me and rub my body parts as well as he said that, he loves me too but he is married. I have not shared about that matter with my parents and principal yet. (IDI B, Community, Dis advanced janjati) Similarly, the school administration also has received some complaints of sexual harassment.

Yes, some time ago, we faced problem that is harassment to girls by two teachers. According to girls one teacher used to touch on girl's sensitive parts and another teacher used to send vulgar massage to

them. After that incidence and girls complain us about it and we rusticated those teachers from the school. (KII 3, public)

Hence, both quantitative and qualitative data show that majority of girl students has been suffered from sexual harassment in their daily life.

Sexual Harassment at Different Caste and Ethnic Group

Nepal being multi-ethnic country, and the respondents of this study were also from different caste/ethnic background and grouped in to six different caste and ethnic group.²⁷ In this study 87% among Bramin, Chetri/Thakuri found sexually harassed. Similarly, 81% in advanced Janajatis, 86% disadvantaged Janajatis 80% in Dalit (so called untouchable) and 100% among the Madhesi and Muslim students were suffered from sexual harassment. (Table 1).

Table 1. Sexual harassment at different caste and ethnic group

Caste and ethnicity	Number of girls who have experiences of sexual harassment		Total
	No	Yes	
Brahman, Chetri/thakuri	13%(27)	87%(178)	(205)
Advanced Janjatis	19%(8)	81%(34)	42
Disadvantaged Janajatis	14%(17)	86%(107)	(124)
Dalits	20%(4)	80%(16)	(20)
Madhesi and muslims	0%(0)	100%(11)	(11)
Total	14%(56)	86%(346)	(402)

$X^2 = 3.41, P = 0.49$

(The value in parenthesis represents the number of respondents)

From the study, it was found that the experience of sexual harassment is not significantly different at 0.05% level ($P = 0.49$) and sexual harassment is equally happened on all caste/ethnic background of the girls, and it shows that girl students from all caste and ethnic groups have equal probability to be victimized from sexual harassment. In qualitative data also there was not major difference of sexual harassment among different caste and ethnic groups. But the types of sexual harassment (severity) were noticed slightly different among the caste and ethnicity group during qualitative inquiry. According to participant's experience on sexual harassment during focus group discussion and in depth interview, Bramin/Chetri/Thakuri and advantaged Janajati girls were found suffered from less severe types of sexual harassment like touching/pinching, gesturing, sexual remark etc. In case of participants from disadvantaged Janajati and Dalit, they were found suffered from moderate to severe types of harassment. The following verbatim by different participants from different caste and ethnic group illustrated the different types of sexual harassment which they have experienced.

Boys use different types of vulgar words at class room, and they connect our name with their friends. (FGD 1, Community, R.N.1, Brahmin)

Madam, I have one cousin, he usually comes in my home at festival time, our parents tell us to use the same room for all children. Once he was at my house and we used the same room to sleep. At that time, he started to touch and rub my sensitive organs and he tried to assault sexually too. I have not shared it with my parents till now and only have shared it with my friends. (IDI C, Institutional, Dalit)

Therefore, it was found that the girl students of all caste and ethnicity have been suffered from sexual harassment but the moderate and severe types of sexual harassment have been found in higher percentage in Dalits and disadvantaged Janajati community as compared to other caste group. This may happen due to the socio-cultural factor where Dalit are treated as inferior group and the people of elite caste always dominate them and they (Dalits) have little voice in community and could not protest against such inhuman behaviors. Father's occupation might affect the economic situation of the family. Hence study was conducted to analysis the effect of father profession (that is economic factor) on the prevalence of sexual harassment on their daughter.

Table 2. Situation of Sexual Harassment with Respects to Father's Occupation

Fathers Occupation	Number of girl who experienced sexual harassment		Total
	No	Yes	
Service	13%(19)	87%(123)	(142)
Agriculture	27%(8)	73%(22)	(30)
Business	16%(20)	84%(105)	(125)
Wage labor	11%(2)	89%(16)	(18)
Employment on foreign country	9%(6)	91%(63)	(69)
Unemployment	20%(1)	80%(4)	(5)
Total	14%(56)	86%(333)	(389)

X²= 6.14, P=0.29

(The value in parenthesis represents the number of respondents)

Quantitatively, girls whose fathers were in foreign employments were found more suffered from sexual harassment but statistically the different was not statistically significant at 0.05% level. Therefore, it was found that there is equal probability of sexual harassment to all girl students whatever their father's occupation. During the focus group discussion, there were also no huge differences of sexual harassment among girl students according to their father's occupation. But the case or sever types of harassment were found at whose father was already death and whose fathers were professionally labor. The girl students who participated in qualitative and quantitative study were living with six different living arrangements. During the analysis of situation of sexual harassment among the girl students with different living arrangement, it was found that most of the girls were used to live with their parents (329) and among them 84% have had experiences of sexual harassment (Table 3). Likewise, among 24 students who were living with relatives, among them 89% girls told that they had experienced sexual harassment. Similarly, two girls who were used to live with friends, both of them told that they had experienced sexual harassment. There were 43 girls who were living in the hostel said they all have found harassed sexually. Likewise, four students who used to live in other arrangement other than above mentioned groups also said that they have had experiences of sexual harassment.

Table 3 Situation of Sexual Harassment at different Living Arrangements of Girl students

Living arrangement	Girls response towards sexual harassment		Total
	No	Yes	
Parents	16%(53)	84%(277)	(330)
Relative	11% (3)	89%(24)	(27)
Friends	0%(0)	100%(2)	(2)
Hostel	0%(0)	100%(43)	(43)

(The value in parenthesis represents the number of respondents)

There was higher rate of sexual harassment was observed among the girl students who were living with friends and at hostel. In qualitative data, during focus group discussion it was noticed that most of the girls were living with their parents and with relatives. During focus group discussion, all girls who were at living at hostels said that they were having less severe types of sexual harassment frequently from their peers and teachers. The sexual harassment was also found common among girls who were living with parents and relatives too. Here are some verbatim which are the experience of participants:

We had one teacher who always tried to touch and pinch us but after ours complain about him with principal, now a day he has not repeated such types of activities. (FGD 2, Institutional, hostel, R.N.3, Brahman) Me and my younger brother are living with my mother and our father is in India and has married another woman there. All the financial and other supports have to be done by my mother. We have one small hotel. I have also to help my mother to run the hotel. Some customers who come there for food and snacks used to harass me frequently. They held my hands, tried to kiss and also tied to grab the breast and buttock. As we have no other alternatives for better livelihood, I have accepted all those misbehaviors and sexual harassments with burning heart (IDI, A, Community, Chetri).

The above verbatim from qualitative inquiry, it has shown that girls have been victimized with sexual harassment in school setting and hostel too. Moreover, girls who were living in hostel were more likely to be sexually harassed by male teachers and boys.

Types of Sexual Harassment

Adolescent girl students were found suffered from different type of sexual harassment. The different types of sexual harassment were categorized in to 3 types as defined by United State Merit System Protection Board (USMSPB) that is less severe type sexual harassment, moderate types of sexual harassment and most severe types of sexual harassment²⁸. For this purpose, multiple response analysis was used to report the responses on sexual harassment and there were total 700 case responses. From the Figure 1, the data shows that the prevalence of gestural type of sexual harassment was among 68.2% respondent. Likewise, the presence of other types of sexual harassment was verbal (48.5%), unwanted touching and pinching (28.9%), unwanted sexual, audio and visual messaging (23.9%), forced dating and purpose (2.5%) and sexual assault/abuse (2.2 %).

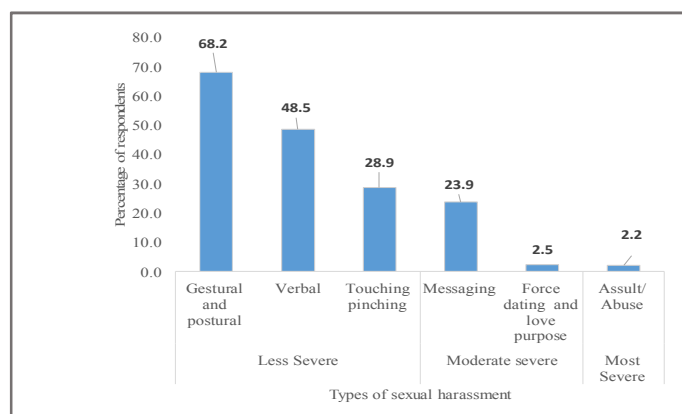


Figure 1 Types of sexual harassment on girl students (Multiple response n= 700)

From qualitative data also among majority of the participants (21 among 42) of focus group discussion, told that they were frequently facing verbal and gestural type of harassment such as using vulgar words, whistle, sexual remark, showing sexual posture/ organs, sexy joke etc. mainly by their male peers in school and by unknown peoples. Among the respondents, 13 girl students shared that they were facing touching/ pinching types of harassment which was mostly happened from their teachers, relatives and peers. Other 7 participates were facing massaging (text, audio and video) types of harassment from their teachers, relatives and peers/ friends. There were two girls who were found suffered from sexual assault by their relatives. As sexual harassment is a socially and culturally based evil which deeply embedded in dimensions of gender, sexuality and power. In Nepalese culture also the vulgar words and sexiest behavior by the boys (male) are considered as normal in society. Due to such hidden permission to male by society to talk vulgar words, might be the causes behind the higher rate verbal and gestural sexual harassment. The lower percentage of moderate (Messaging and force dating/ purpose) and severe types of sexual harassment (Abuse /assaults) might be due to the fear with laws and punishment. Here the following verbatim elaborate the situation of different types of sexual harassment on the girl students.

Yes, sometime we faced sexual harassment problem. There was one teacher who married with our student who was only 16 years old. At that situation we could not punish him because of the political support to him and he was also a permanent teacher too. We just show ours disagree just by boycotting his marriage function. (KII 3, Community) Our sociology teacher hugged me and rub my cheek and he told me that he like me. Due to this reason when I saw him I feel afraid and try to be far from him. (IDI -B, Community, disadvantage janajati) I have one cousin sometime he comes at our home, when he comes my home our parents say us to use same room with other children too where my sister and his sister is also with us. At that time when we all start to sleep then he starts to touch me and also try to press and catch my body parts and sensitive organs too. (IDI-C, institutional, Dalit)

The prevalence of different types of sexual harassment and differently managed schools that is community and institutional schools, gestural type of sexual harassment was also higher and it was 72% and 46% respectively at community and institutional school. On the other hands gestural types of sexual harassment was s higher in community school as compared to the institutional ones. But in case of touching / pinching and messaging types of sexual harassment among girl students, it was s higher in institutional schools as compared to community schools (Table 4).

Table 4 .Different Types of Sexual Harassment at Community and Institutional Schools

Types of sexual harassment	Sexual harassment and school types	No		Yes		Chi square	P value
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
Gestural	Community school	59	25	179	75	13.36***	0.0003
	Institutional school	69	42	95	58		
Verbal	Community school	118	50	120	50	0.854	0.35
	Institutional school	89	54	75	46		
Touching /pinching	Community school	181	76	57	24	6.84**	0.008
	Institutional school	105	64	59	36		
Messaging	Community school	188	80	50	21	2.64	0.10
	Institutional school	118	72	46	28		
Assault/ abuse	Community school	231	97	7	3	1.31	0.25
	Institutional school	162	99	2	1		
Forced purpose and dating demand	Community school	232	97	6	3	0.002	0.958
	Institutional school	160	98	4	2		

Prevalence of assault/ abuse was lower than other types of sexual harassment and 4% and 2% girls respectively from community and institutional school were found suffering from sexual assault and abuse and its occurrence in community schools was significantly higher in community school than that of institutional ones (Table 7). From the study, most of the girls were found suffered with sexual harassment at more than two times and more than half of the respondents (57%) of the girls were found sexually harassed on frequently (Figure 2).

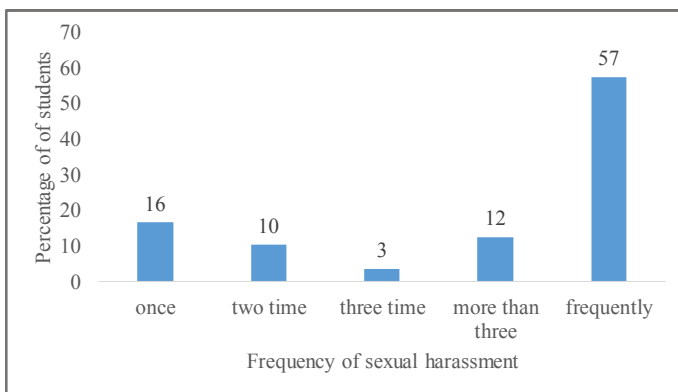


Figure 2. Frequency of sexual harassment on girl students

The repeated occurrences of sexual harassment on girl students also reported during focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. According to girls, the less severe type of harassment like touching/pinching, gestural activities were used repeatedly at most of the time by sexual offenders. The few respondents said that the moderate types of sexual harassments also had repeatedly happen with them and among five respondents; the most severe types of sexual harassment had been occurred more than once.

Some of the experiences which have been felt by the girls were illustrate as below.

Sexual behaviors are normal in my life, the customer who come to buy some goods try to touch my hand and try to brush their body with my body. Some time they asked for outing with them too. It is my duty to help my mother in shop but at the same time I have to encounter with such harassing behaviors. It makes me depressed and nervous. (IDI 'A')

Along the way to and fro the school, the boys in the street tease us, block the road and propose for love them. They also use vulgar words. We became habitual with such harassment. Not only for single day, we are facing it regularly (Rupandehi, institutional, Bramin R.N.6)

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of sexual harassment among adolescent girl students was found at significant level at Rupandehi district. Girl students were found suffered from different types of harassment from less severe to most severe types of sexual harassment. Some of the past studies in Nepal also have shown the similar situation about the occurrences of sexual harassment at different situation and reported that 85% schools going adolescent girls were suffered from different kinds of sexual harassment in Kathmandu valley.²⁰ Similarly, Mishra and Lamichhane have reported 79% of students have experienced sexual harassment at public transport in Kathmandu valley²¹. In developed and developing nation also exposed the serious situation of sexual harassment on academic institutes. In USA it was found that more than 81% girl students having sexual harassment during school life.^{17,29} In European countries also, 50% girl in academic institute are facing sexual harassment.³⁰ Such harassment also has reported on developing and underdeveloped countries too.^{18,19} In this study, the percentage of sexual harassment at Nepalese condition has been found to be slightly higher than other countries. It may be due to our male dominated culture and poor laws and regulation against sexual harassment. This condition may be defined with socio cultural theory^{31,32} that sexual harassment is a logical consequence of gender inequality and sexism that already exists in society. In our societies also, females are considered as beautiful, soft and weak

and the object for entertainment to male. In the same time the society consider male as strong and powerful agents and have to control women. According to that social values, he might involve on the sexual harassment as a weapon to control over women. Similarly, the sexual harassment at school might be higher in Nepalese condition due to the opportunities presented by power and authority relation which drive from hierarchical structures of organizations.^{33,34} Schools also have organizational structure where teachers have higher power to rule over students. As a result of this, girls might be harassed by male teachers. In the study, girl in the Rupandehi districts has been found suffered from different types of sexual harassment, from sexual gestural to sexual assault. Here, most of the girls (85%) were suffering from less sever (verbal, gestural & touching/pinching) types of harassment. Similarly, 19% participants were faced moderately severe (massaging, text, audio, video) types of sexual harassment. Only 2% participants were facing most sever (assault & abuse) types of sexual harassment. The verbatim of the participants also supported the quantitative data where 34 (81%) girls among 42 were facing sexual harassment and less severe types of sexual harassment (verbal and gestural) was most common (52%). The higher frequency of less severe types of sexual harassment also has been reported at other countries too. In The Hong Kong Institute of Education, 80% students faced touching, cloth pulling, 40% student's verbal sexual behavior where most of the victims were girl students.³⁵ Likewise, 30% middle and high school girls in USA were sexually harassed by mail, SMS, and face book in USA.¹⁷ In Nepal also less to moderate severe types of sexual harassment has been found and reported that 85% of school going adolescents has been different types of harassment like sexual gazing, sexual gestures and blaming relation with other.²⁰ The higher occurrences of less severe type of sexual harassment might be due to the socio cultural taboos, where simple sexual activities by male are considered as normal phenomena and generally victims ignore such behaviors many times. Due to these reasons the offenders are motivated to do the less severe types of sexual harassment frequently. But in case of severe types of harassment, the victim may not tolerate the behaviors and they exposed such sexual harassments which were happened on them and such cases offenders may be punished by the society and other institutions too. Due to the fear of the punishment, the sexual perpetrator may afraid to conduct extreme severe type of sexual harassment. The higher prevalence rate of sexual harassment was also noticed on hostel living girl student and such situation was also reported by different media in past too.³⁶⁻³⁸ Hence, the result of this study also resemble with results with other national and international studies that the profoundly presence of sexual harassment among the adolescent school girls in studied area (Rupandehi district) of Nepal.

conclusion

The prevalence of sexual harassment was extremely higher at both community and institutional schools at Rupandehi district. The situation of sexual harassment according to the religion and caste, father's occupation and living arrangements of the respondents were not found significantly different. The number of girls who have frequently been suffered from the sexual harassment was also higher and most of the girls were found suffered from more than two times. The prevalence of low level of sexual harassment (gestural, verbal, touching pinching) was higher as compared to moderate severe (messaging, sending porn videos, audio, force demand of dating) and most severe (sexual abuse and assault) types of sexual harassment. As the sexual harassment is existed, the necessary action should be taken by schools and other concerned authority to protect our girl from sexual harassment.

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Authors' Contribution

KG and DP collected the data. KG transcribed, translated, interpreted the data, and drafted the manuscript. CBB and DP provided scholarly guidance and corrected the manuscript. All the authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Ethical Statement

Ethical clearance was obtained from National Health Research Council (NHRC), Nepal. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study conducted in accordance. Written consent was obtained from all schools informing them about the purpose, benefits, risks, the confidentiality of information, and the voluntary nature of participation in the study. The respondents were notified that they had the right to refuse or stop at any point of the data collection. Personal identifiers were not included in the written questionnaires to ensure participants' confidentiality (identities).

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Disclosure

The authors declare there is no competing interest.

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