



## Article info

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# Bio-psycho-social Effects of Street Harassment: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

*Researchers and policymakers have underestimated the impact of street harassment on the victims. This systematic review examines the psychological, sociobehavioral and physiological effect of street harassment on the victims. This literature review examined all the peer-reviewed articles in Google Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science with the following search terms – street harassment, eve-teasing, stranger harassment, harassment in public places, psychological effects, sociological effects, and physiological effects. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined. A total of 1668 studies were found in our search results and from that 29 studies were identified based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist. The findings indicate that street harassment significantly impacts victims' psychological well-being, leading to increased levels of fear, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. Victims often experience decreased self-esteem, heightened stress, and emotional distress, with long-term effects including persistent anxiety and changes in social behaviors to avoid further victimization. Physiological impacts include sleep disturbances, headaches, and digestive issues, potentially leading to chronic health problems. The socio-behavioural impacts include significant alterations in social dynamics and behaviors, with victims often modifying their routines, attire, and social interactions to avoid harassment. Addressing street harassment effectively requires a multifaceted approach, including public awareness, supportive legal frameworks, and proactive social support systems.*

**Keywords:** Street harassment; eve-teasing; stranger harassment; systematic review

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## Introduction

Conventional sexual harassment research has neglected to examine women's encounters with harassment in public settings (Phillip, 2022; Rana, 2023). Sexual harassment is an umbrella term and can be described as varying in its context, establishing settings in which exploitation may occur including workplaces and schools, where the victim and the perpetrator are usually acquainted. This covers all aspects from verbal actions to physical violence and mostly occurs under the pretext of power within areas like working relations between an employer and an employee. Street harassment happens on the streets or in other public places such as buses, and entails harassment by strangers.

In this case, no real hierarchy is involved, as it usually happens outside of the workplace or academic institution. Street harassment represents "unwanted behaviors from strangers that typically occur in public spaces (e.g., in the street or on public transportation)" (Davidson et al., 2016, p553). Davidson et al. list the following as examples of these behaviors: whistling, leering, slurs that are sexist, homophobic, or transphobic; asking someone for their name or number repeatedly after they have declined; calling them by sexual names; remarks; and demands. Stranger harassment, eve teasing, and street harassment are different terms used to explain the misconduct of some men against women in public places (Herrera & McCarthy, 2023). Although there frequently is a crossover in the definition and usage of these words, they have all the same different cultural underpinnings and focus on distinct elements of gender-based violence. It has become so common that some people believe that it is a tolerated form of sexual harassment. This is not a problem in one single country; various surveys and studies show that it is prevalent worldwide, be it the US, Canada, or India (Guntur et al., 2015; Joseph, 2016).

Street harassment has become a common practice in India (Bharucha & Khatri, 2018; Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Talboys et al., 2017); there is an increase in cases of street harassment inside the university campuses which is a growing concern (Aina & Kulshrestha, 2018). Some interpret the experience of street harassment through the lens of system justification theory, which posits that marginalized groups, including women, often rationalize the system to make sense of their circumstances. Saunders and colleagues state that a woman's coping mechanism for stranger harassment partly revealed her perception of how fair or unfair she thought the status of gender relations was at the time (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017). Davidson et al. (2016) utilized a mediation analysis to study the relationship between street harassment and anxiety, whereas DelGreco & Christensen (2020) examined the mediating role of anxiety and depression in the impact of street harassment on sleep quality among college students. Street harassment leads to a spectrum of negative emotions, including anger, fear, humiliation, shame, guilt, and a sense of violation (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Fairchild, 2010; Valan, 2020; Brockschmidt & Wadey, 2022; Thornton et al., 2023). These emotions can escalate to anxiety, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Betts et al., 2019; Omer et al., 2023). Victims often alter their behavior to avoid harassment, such as restricting movements, avoiding certain areas, wearing headphones, or

ceasing to attend school or college (Betts et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2021). Individuals encountering harassment report experiencing physical symptoms such as muscular tension, difficulty breathing, light-headedness, and nausea in addition to internalizing sentiments of shame, disempowerment, and invasion (Farmer & Smock Jordan, 2017; Akram et al., 2020). The fear of rape and sexual assault, along with self-blame and lower self-esteem, were significant concerns among victims (Fairchild, 2010; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Thornton et al., 2023). Experiences of sexual trauma and street harassment have been linked with mental contamination, further increasing the negative emotional states.

A systematic literature review on the effects of street harassment on victims is vital because it integrates existing research to provide a detailed understanding of the psychological, social, and physical repercussions of this pervasive form of gender-based violence. The focus would be on documenting the way the harassment manifests itself both in the psychological and even sexual sphere. Socially it cuts individuals off from others therefore they can't interact with others fluently which may lead to diverse interpersonal dynamics. Somatically, the stress caused by repeated harassment may be felt physically, with the manifestation of headaches or gastrointestinal problems among others.

An SLR will enable us to assess the extent of the advancement achieved in this strand of literature so far. It will assist in defining the scope of the current study, and find out the areas of study, that are well-researched and the areas requiring more research. This understanding is important for informing future research and understanding the most crucial areas and directions for further exploration. The results of this review will help extend the theoretical and empirical understanding of the manifestations of street harassment and their consequences for stakeholders who include policymakers, educators, and healthcare providers. Due to the presented connections between biological, psychological, and socio-behavioral aspects of street harassment, the review may help to minimize tendencies of receiving a one-sided perspective and enhance the consideration of every layer of the victim's trauma during an intervention. Combining the data from different studies, the review may be able to give a picture of the breadth and the degree of these effects on various cultures and communities. This picture can help guide policymakers and advocacy groups in formulating informed, effective responses and preventive measures. Such in-depth research would, therefore, form an integral part of any efforts to formulate educational and legislative frameworks aimed at minimizing street harassment and the enormous psycho-social and physical consequences.

### Research questions

RQ1: What are the Psychological effects of street harassment on the victim?

RQ2: What are the Socio- Behavioral effects of street harassment on the victim?

RQ3: What are the Physiological effects of street harassment on the victim?

## Method

The authors are following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) to conduct this systematic literature review (Page et al., 2021).

### Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The following inclusion criteria were used for screening and including research studies for the SLR -

- 1) Studies focus on the phenomenon of street harassment and its psychological, sociobehavioral and physiological effects on the victims.
- 2) Studies focusing on only Females as victims of the phenomenon.
- 3) Publication dated before 1st April 2024 ensuring that the review incorporates all the recent findings.
- 4) Studies published in indexed and peer-reviewed journals
- 5) Studies must be empirical including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research design answering any of our research questions
- 6) Studies published in English.

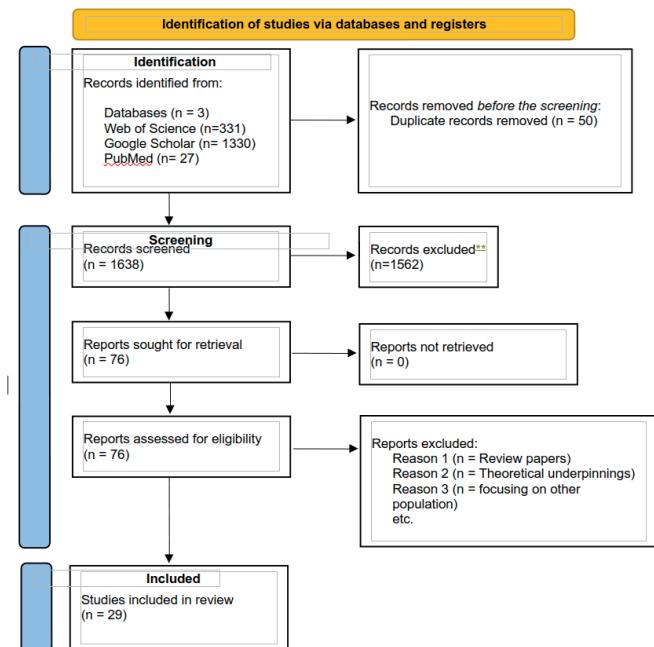
Studies were excluded if:

- 1) The full article was not accessible.
- 2) The reports were review articles, dissertations, commentaries and opinions.
- 3) Studies focusing on males as victims of street harassment.
- 4) Studies published in languages other than English.

### Conducting the review

Weekly meetings were conducted among the three researchers to conceptualise the review. NN, HK and TS conceptualised the review, NN and HK completed the PRISMA steps of the review, NN and HK wrote the first draft of the review, NN further made the revisions as per suggestions by HK and TS. The databases utilized for conducting the research include prominent scholarly platforms such as PUBMED, Google Scholar, and Web of Science. A systematic literature review was executed using keywords, phrases, and MESH terms. The search strategy incorporated logical operators “and” and “or” to refine and broaden the search scope. The keywords used were: ‘street harassment’, ‘stranger harassment’, ‘eve-teasing’, and ‘harassment in public places’, alongside the impacts measured, such as ‘emotions’, ‘well-being’, ‘psychological effects’, ‘social effects’, and ‘health’. Once the search string were finalised and piloted two researchers NN and HK conducted the searches and proceeded with four stages namely title screening, abstract screening, full-text screening and included studies analysis. Phrases like (“public sexual harassment” OR “gender-based street harassment” OR “psychological effects of street harassment” OR “social impacts of street harassment” OR “physical effects of street harassment”) were used for PubMed the following MESH terms were used (“Sexual Harassment”[MeSH] AND “Public Spaces”[MeSH] AND “Women’s Health”[MeSH]) (figure 1).

Fig. 1. Prisma 2020 Flow Diagram Presenting the Process of Systematic Review



## Results

A systematic literature review (SLR) was conducted using three databases: Web of Science (with 331 hits), Google Scholar (with 1,330 hits), and PubMed (with 27 hits). Then, fifty records were deleted due to duplication, while 1,562 records were eliminated, as they did not pertain to the topic under discussion. Seventy-six records that include articles and abstracts were identified and searched for retrieval. Among these papers, 29 records were found to fulfill the eligibility criteria. They were therefore considered for the current SLR, whereas the others were excluded owing to them being theoretical, review articles, dissertations, or failing to meet other stipulated criteria. There were 11 qualitative studies (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ahmed et al., 2021; Almanza Avendaño et al., 2022; Chafai, 2017; De Backer, 2020; Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Gadekar, 2016; Ison et al., 2023; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Omer et al., 2023; Thornton et al., 2023) 13 quantitative studies (Akram et al., 2020; Ali & Naz, 2016; Anwar et al., 2019; Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Betts et al., 2019; Campos et al., 2017; Davidson et al., 2015, 2016; DelGreco & Christensen, 2020; Donnelly & Calogero, 2018; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2020; Valan, 2020), and 4 mixed-method studies (Brockschmidt & Wadey, 2022; Fairchild, 2010; Lenton et al., 1999; Talboys et al., 2017) combined in this SLR, resulting in a total of 29 studies. One striking commonality observed in these works is highly prioritized female subjects. The geographical distribution of the research is vast and covers multiple areas such as Pakistan, India, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, and Africa. Such distribution testifies to the international scale of street harassment as a concern that affects various countries. Most of the works reviewed in these studies focus on analyzing the social and psychological effects of street harassment.

**Tab. 1.** Descriptive Characteristics of Reviewed Studies

Author (Year)	Type of Study	Tools for the study	Sample Size & Country of the study	Findings of the Study		
				Psychological effects	Socio-Behavioral Effects	Physiological Effects
Ahmad et al. (2020)	Cross-sectional; Qualitative	Interview Schedule (Thematic analysis)	200 Female University Students (Pakistan)	Diminishes victims' self-esteem and confidence, and they feel humiliated Has other psychological ramifications Victims become fearful and angry	Impairs Mobility and restricts victims from taking on opportunities in public spheres.	
Ahmed et al. (2021)	Cross-sectional; Qualitative	In depth - Interviews	N = 25 20 college teachers 10 Males and 10 Females) and 5 lawyers (Pakistan)	It causes trauma for a long period, depending on the age and maturity of the victim Feeling of guilt Body image issues Leads to depression	Restrictions on movement and opportunities, such as attending college. Parents start putting restrictions	
Akram et al. (2020)	Cross-sectional; Quantitative	Survey DASS-21	N = 260 Female University Students (Balochistan)	Increase in anxiety (extremely severe) Severe stress and panic		Dryness in the mouth, rapid breathing, trembling
Ali & Naz (2016)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Gender-based Public Harassment Scale Fear of crime survey	N = 250 Females, (Pakistan)	Felt scared for no reason A positive correlation was found between fear of victimization and experiencing street harassment. Most of the women reported negative emotions, feeling worried	Changing neighbourhoods and switching jobs	
Almanza Avendaño et al. (2022)	Cross-sectional; Qualitative (Grounded theory)	Group interviews	24 groups (Each group had 5-7 students) USA	Constant fear and uncertainty	Restriction on mobility, Increase in parental protection and monitoring of outings	
Anwar et al. (2019)	Cross-sectional Correlational study Quantitative	Sexual Harassment Experience Questionnaire for Workplaces (SHEQ)	N = 543 Female University Students (Pakistan)	It was discovered that being the victim of any one of the three forms of sexual harassment—verbal, nonverbal, or physical—was strongly associated with negative long-term effects, defensive behaviors, and immediate discomfort.		
Bastomski & Smith (2017)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Survey	N = 1621 (Males = 783 & Females = 838) Australia	Negative effect on emotional well-being. Constant Fear		
Betts et al. (2019)	Cross-sectional; Quantitative (person-centred Cluster Analysis)	Experiences of street harassment PANAS	N = 118 adolescents (Females = 68 ;Males= 43 and 7 no gender reported) UK	Higher negative emotions post a street harassment episode		
Brockschmidt & Wadey (2022)	Cross-sectional; Mixed method (Reflexive Thematic Analysis)	Interview	N= 121 runners (Females = 84; Males = 37) UK	Feeling "gross," "dirty," or "ashamed." Self-objectification also increases.		

Author (Year)	Type of Study	Tools for the study	Sample Size & Country of the study	Findings of the Study		
				Psychological effects	Socio-Behavioral Effects	Physiological Effects
Campos et al. (2017)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Baseline survey data	N = 952 Women (Mexico)		Reduced social cohesion and restricted mobility	
Chafai (2020)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Critical Discourse Analysis)	Interviews and Focus group discussions	N = 57 Women (Morocco)	Increase in self-blame and self-objectification	Sought more protection Moved to another neighbourhood Modified daily route	
Davidson et al. (2015)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Stranger Harassment Index OBCS OOQ	N= 501 Undergraduate women (USA)	Leads to an increase in self-objectification and more body surveillance.		
Davidson et al. (2016)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Street Harassment Index Beck Anxiety Inventory The Safety Rating Scale	N= 501 Undergraduate women (USA)	Increase in objectification of others (both men & women) The association between anxiety and street harassment is significantly mediated by feelings of safety in isolated places.		
De Backer (2020)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Thematic Analysis)	Exploratory Observation Interview Focus Groups	N = 48 (Females = 15; Males = 33) (Belgium)	Increased fear, anxiety and feelings of insecurity	Decrease in mobility Increased dependence on family members	
Delgreco & Christenson (2020)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Brief Symptom Inventory Survey for Street Harassment Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Scale	N= 252 Female undergraduate students (USA)			The quality of sleep was negatively correlated with street harassment and positively correlated with anxiety and depression. The results of mediation analyses showed that the connection between street harassment and sleep quality was mediated by both anxiety and depression
Dhillon and Bakaya (2014)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Interpretative Phenomenological Approach)	Interview	N = 20 Women; India (Delhi)	Fear, anger and frustration	Families are worried Restrictions on mobility Taking extra precautions when travelling alone.	
Donnelly & Calogero (2017)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Stranger Harassment Index Objectified body-conscious scale Perceived likelihood of crime	N=77 Female undergrad students (UK)		Perceptions of gender crimes that directly threaten and violate women's bodies were specifically linked to experiences of stranger harassment. This further led to an increase in self-surveillance.	
Fairchild & Rudman (2008)	Cross-sectional Correlational study; Quantitative	Sexual Experience Questionnaire Objectified Body consciousness scale Restriction of Movement Fear and risk of rape	N = 228 Females (USA)		There is a positive association between stranger harassment and self-objectification; these two factors have a positive correlation with women's perceived risk of rape and fear of it.	

Author (Year)	Type of Study	Tools for the study	Sample Size & Country of the study	Findings of the Study		
				Psychological effects	Socio-Behavioral Effects	Physiological Effects
Fairchild (2010)	Cross-sectional study; Mixed method	Vignette Stranger Harassment Index	N1 = 1277 Females N2 = 464 Females (USA)	Negative emotions, self-blame, fear of rape		
Gadekar (2016)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative	Interview	N = 30 female adolescents (India)	A feeling of insecurity in college. Thought of suicide due to constant harassment	Dropping out of school or college	
Ison et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Reflexive Thematic Analysis)	In depth-Interviews	N = 41 (Female = 39; Binary = 1; No Gender = 1) Pakistan	Afraid to move out of the house; Increased fear Being constantly alert Questioning their self-worth	Avoiding public transport and making monetary sacrifices Planning the day or changing the routes Conscious of how they dressed on public transport Learning self-defence	
Lenton et al. (1999)	Cross-sectional study; Mixed method	Survey and Interview	N = 1990 Females (Canada)	Increase in fear of crime Being alert and aware all the time	Decreased and restricted mobility Traveling with a companion	
Mason-Bish & Zempi (2019)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Grounded Theory)	Interviews, Focused Group Discussions	N = 60 Muslim Women (UK)	Increased fear or vulnerability	Restricted Mobility; Changing the way to wear a niqab or present oneself.	
Mishra and Lamichhane (2018)	Descriptive Cross-sectional study; Quantitative	Questionnaire.	N = 396 Female university students (Nepal)	Humiliated, angry, helpless & scared	Restriction in mobility, going out alone or at night	
Omer et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis)	Focus Group	N = 24 Female university students; Pakistan	Increased anxiety and stress Loss of confidence	Restricted Mobility Dropping out of higher education Avoiding going after dark Avoid wearing certain clothes	Sleepless nights
Rosenbaum et al. (2020)	Descriptive Cross-sectional study; Quantitative	Survey	N = 214 Females (Nepal)		Avoid going out alone Carrying pepper spray Avoid going to theatres and parks Not taking public transport	
Talboys et al. (2017)	Cross-sectional study; Mixed method	Focus Group Interviews Survey	N = 34 participants for FGDs ( Femles = 24 & Males = 10) N = 89 Females for Interviews India	Emotions - Humiliation, shame, fear, anger and worry Increase in suicidal ideations	The family's restriction on movement Restrictions on working and schooling	

Author (Year)	Type of Study	Tools for the study	Sample Size & Country of the study	Findings of the Study		
				Psychological effects	Socio-Behavioral Effects	Physiological Effects
Thornton et al. (2023)	Cross-sectional study; Qualitative	blog posts, written experiences	N = 35 Females (UK)	Feelings of shame, fear, and self-loathing were experienced	Long-term consequences - feelings of anxiety and vulnerability	
Valan (2020)	Cross-sectional study; Quantitative	Self-report questionnaire	N = 530 Females (India)	Decreased self-esteem and confidence	Humiliated, angry, scared, depressed and irritated	

## Discussion

This systematic review aimed to examine the psychological, -sociobehavioral and -physiological effect of street harassment on the victims. The researchers conceptualised three research questions to examine the effects better which were *What are the Psychological effects of street harassment on the victim? What are the Socio- Behavioral sociological effects of street harassment on the victim? and What are the Physiological effects of street harassment on the victim?* Here, we will discuss each research question with respect to the included studies

### *Negative emotions/emotional distress/psychological effect that follows a street harassment experience*

The psychological effects of street harassment on women are severe (Ahmad et al., 2020), penetrating through multiple dimensions of their mental and emotional well-being. Typically, street harassment causes the victim a significant loss of self-confidence (Omer et al., 2023) and self-esteem (Ahmad et al., 2020; Thornton et al., 2023). The loss of self-esteem can provoke a severe body-image disturbance (Ahmed et al., 2021), whereby the victim is likely to view her body negatively and, thus, feel responsible for the harassment (Chafai, 2021). As a result of this misplaced self-blame, the woman quickly plunges into self-hatred and enters a cycle of self-disparagement that is very difficult to break (Fairchild, 2010; Thornton et al., 2023).

Street harassment enhances self-objectification (Brockschmidt & Wadey, 2022; Davidson et al., 2015; Fairchild & Rudman, 2008) and body surveillance (Chafai, 2021; Ison et al., 2023; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019). Women who experience these cases need to examine their body appearance; hence, they are forced to self-monitor their bodies throughout the day to prevent or stay away from the attention they receive (Ison et al., 2023). This extremely heightened self-consciousness and self-monitoring are, once again, mentally and emotionally draining and also harmful to their overall self-concept, because it further reinforces the notion that they will only be valued or safe if their bodies look a certain way (Ison et al., 2023).

The emotional response to street harassment is negative, immediate and powerful (Ali & Naz, 2016; Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Betts et al., 2019). Typically, women claim to feel

angry (Ahmed et al., 2021), humiliated (Ahmad et al., 2020), afraid, ashamed, or frustrated after the experience (Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Talboys et al., 2017; Valan, 2020). These powerful emotions can leave women feeling gross, dirty, and violated, which can be overwhelming (Brockschmidt & Wadey, 2022). The psychological harm caused by street harassment is serious, and for younger, more naïve victims, it may be long-term (Ahmed et al., 2021). This experience varies from one person to another; the more traumatized victims are, the higher the level of long-lasting effects will be and, though for some, they may be able to rise above the traumatizing experience, the potential for long-lasting negative effects is still high (Anwar et al., 2019).

Resulting from street harassment is a pervasive sense of fear (Akram et al., 2020; Bastomski & Smith, 2017; Ison et al., 2023; Lenton et al., 1999), which creates a hyper-awareness of potential threats (Almanza Avendaño et al., 2022; Davidson et al., 2016). This constantly leaves the victim in a state of hypervigilance (Ison et al., 2023; Lenton et al., 1999) that can be expressed as chronic worry, doubt, and anxiety (Akram et al., 2020; Ali & Naz, 2016; Davidson et al., 2016; DelGreco & Christensen, 2020; Omer et al., 2023). Such feelings make them feel unsafe in their daily lives, constantly waiting for yet another word or gesture of harassment (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019). Being in a state of constant vigilance and living under the impression of the danger of rape can be the cause of stress (Anwar et al., 2019; Omer et al., 2023) and depression (Akram et al., 2020; DelGreco & Christensen, 2020; Talboys et al., 2017; Valan, 2020). A psychological burden of consequences on the health of the person who is under continuous threat can take its toll with time.

Worse still, the psychological tension that women go through because of street harassment can make such women think about committing suicide (Talboys et al., 2017). After some time, strong feelings of shame, fright, and helplessness will make some of the women have thoughts of self-harming, all to run from the suffering (Gadekar, 2016). In addition, the very experience of street harassment often also leads to intensified surveillance of oneself (Davidson et al., 2015). Such women can change their behavior, dress (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019), and daily routine to avoid diverse threats, thus limiting their lives with further restrictions and aggravating the psychological impact of street harassment (Donnelly & Calogero, 2018).

The psychological harm from street harassment is quite devastating, as it impacts women's self-perception, emotional health, and overall quality of life. Such effects demand prompt social changes and supportive interventions to counteract and lessen the shocking consequences of street harassment on women.

#### *The effects of street harassment on the socio-behavioral aspect of the victim*

Street harassment significantly impacts women's social lives and overall well-being, creating substantial barriers to their freedom and mobility (Talboys et al., 2017). This harassment often leads to impaired mobility (Ahmed et al., 2021; Almanza Avendaño et al., 2022; De Backer, 2020; Ison et al., 2023; Lenton et al., 1999; Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018), restricting women from taking opportunities in public spheres such as pursuing jobs that require commuting long distances or seeking higher education which results in dropping out (Gadekar, 2016; Omer et al., 2023; Talboys et al., 2017), as evidenced by Ahmed et al. (2020).

The social cohesion within communities suffers because of street harassment. Women frequently opt to stay indoors (Ison et al., 2023), especially at night (Mishra & Lamichhane, 2018; Rosenbaum et al., 2020), to avoid potential threats, leading to reduced social interactions and participation in community activities (Campos et al., 2017). This avoidance behavior extends to public recreational spaces such as theatres and parks, often perceived as unsafe (Rosenbaum et al., 2020). Consequently, the social fabric of communities becomes frayed, with women being less visible and engaged in public life.

Family dynamics are also affected, as the persistent worry about their safety causes significant concern among family members (Almanza Avendaño et al., 2022; Dhillon & Bakaya, 2014). In some cases, families may decide to move to different neighborhoods in search of a safer environment (Ali & Naz, 2016) or alter daily routines and routes to minimize exposure to harassment (Campos et al., 2017), even changing jobs (Ali & Naz, 2016). These changes can disrupt social ties and community networks, further isolating women (Ahmed et al., 2021). The need for safety also means that women frequently require accompaniment by family members or trusted individuals whenever they go out, which can limit their independence and impose on the time and resources of others (De Backer, 2020; Lenton et al., 1999; Rosenbaum et al., 2020).

Monetary sacrifices are another consequence, as women often choose to take cabs instead of using public transportation like buses or trains to avoid harassment (Ison et al., 2023; Rosenbaum et al., 2020). This additional financial burden can be significant, especially for lower-income people.

Furthermore, street harassment forces many women to change their appearance and dress more conservatively to avoid attracting unwanted attention. This can include adopting specific clothing such as the niqab (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019), even if it is not a personal or cultural preference, solely as a protective measure (Ison et al., 2023). These changes in behavior and attire reflect a broader pattern of self-regulation and imposed limitations, highlighting the pervasive influence of street harassment on women's daily lives and societal participation.

Overall, the socio-behavioral effects of street harassment are profound and multifaceted, impacting women's mobility, social interactions, family dynamics, financial stability, and personal autonomy. The cumulative effect of these impacts underscores the urgent need for effective interventions and policies to address and mitigate the pervasive issue of street harassment.

#### *The physiological effects of street harassment on the victim*

Street harassment puts great stress on the physiological well-being of women, as reflected in their many symptoms of the body in connection to the response to chronic stress and fear. One of the most noticeable impacts is on the quality of sleep (DelGreco & Christensen, 2020). Insomnia or disrupted sleeping patterns due to the anxiety and resulting tension from harassment are what most of the victims often grapple with (Omer et al., 2023). This also brings chronic fatigue, further affecting the capacity of daily functioning and overall health.

Another common response is a feeling of dryness in the mouth (Akram et al., 2020). It occurs alongside the fight-or-flight response, due to the stress trigger in the body, which influences the salivary glands, thereby reducing saliva secretion. The feeling of dryness in the mouth can be very uncomfortable and is normally associated with rapid breathing (Akram et al., 2020). Among the studies that show the prevalence of symptoms experienced during street harassment, trembling or shaking prevents ease in many (Akram et al., 2020). This is another reflex action whereby the body shows its response to stress through tensed muscles in preparation for any form of danger. The shaking is usual, as the reflected readiness is thus shown, and more often, the shaking can vary from mild to very noticeable. The shaking is a great sign of the fear and discomfort that harassment situations mainly cause.

Such heightened rates of reactions are often not isolated but occur concurrently with great psychological distress. The physical and mental symptoms, in turn, support a very potent stress cycle. For example, conditions like insomnia, which result as a thing that ensues due to anxiety and the fear triggered by street harassment, provoke fatigue and instability with emotions, which, in turn, will provoke insomnia. These physical assaults, like hyperventilation and trembling, can heighten the sense of helplessness and vulnerability, which translates into a generalized feeling of unease.

This physiological burden of street harassment calls for integrated interventions to be put into place. The problem, as such, is not limited to the emotional or psychological dimension of well-being but transcends to the sphere of severe physical health concerns. Such integrated interventions should account for the possibility that victims might be impacted in multiple ways; that is, be available for support to cope with the mental as well as the physical effects of harassment.

#### *Limitations and Future Implications*

One key limitation of the present review is the absence of a formal quality assessment of the included studies using a standardized appraisal tool. Given that our review includes

the combination of quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method studies, future research should consider employing the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) for a comprehensive assessment of study quality. Including such an evaluation would strengthen the reliability and interpretability of the

findings. The search was limited to three databases - Web of Science, Google Scholar and PubMed; this may have resulted in missing out on some relevant articles. One form of method bias might be language bias where only English articles are included which might overlook some interesting work in other languages. The absence of dissertations and theoretical papers could lead to publication bias because exceptional unpublished papers were not considered. The review was conducted only on empirical papers, which might have excluded theoretical work and more context. Studies included in the review are limited to certain geographical regions of the world and do not cover every region. The mode of manual screening entailed records of human contact, leading to issues such as bias and error. The literature pays insufficient attention to the intersectionality of race, gender, and socio-economic status in understanding the dynamics and effects of street harassment (Fileborn & O'Neill, 2021; Logan, 2015). The researchers did not come across longitudinal studies so the review cannot comment on the long-term effect of street harassment in a detailed way, an area that future research can explore.

It is crucial that there should be policies on ways, means and methods to prevent and review strategies on how to deal with street harassment and support victims of these mishaps and there is a need to analyse the legal and social policies in this respect in different societies. Lastly, a possible avenue for further research is to understand how technology, including virtual reality simulations or apps, can help prevent such incidents or assist the victims (Jicol et al., 2022).

### Conclusion

It is worth noting that street harassment is a common occurrence that has dangerous effects on women physically, mentally, and socially. This SLR raises a dire and urgent need for a comprehensive and differentiated approach toward the given impact and toward promoting gender parity. Where societal responses can be enacted to address the root cause determinants for street harassment and where measures of support can be developed, society is then able to progress toward a safer and more equitable world for all women. Interventions and support services that include public policy programs, community initiatives, and health support should be integrated into addressing the general range of impact of street harassment and in the promotion of respect and safety of women.

**Ethical Approval:**  
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