A CASE STUDY ON THE STAND UP AGAINST STREET HARASSMENT PROJECT IN TURKEY

Tamer ATABARUT
Sevgi KESIM GUVEN
Ece Gözde GOKAKIN
Elif YILDIZ
Boğaziçi University Lifelong Learning Center, TR

Email: atabarut@boun.edu.tr

ABSTRACT

In 2015, the United Nations declared Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by targeting people, the planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. SDG 5-Gender Equality promotes the empowerment of women and focusses on eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. A study conducted by L'Oréal Paris and IPSOS in 2019 revealed that street harassment is one of the most prevalent problems faced by women and girls, yet is not addressed well enough. According to this study, 78% of women experience sexual harassment in public spaces. While 25% of them stated that someone helped, 79% wished someone would help. In order to tackle this issue, an initiative was started with an international company (L'Oréal Paris) and an NGO (Right to Be). With this collaboration, a training programme was designed to help those exposed to street harassment and to build safe and inclusive spaces for all. Later, in 2021, this training programme was implemented as a global project.

In Turkey, Boğaziçi University Lifelong Learning Centre (BULLC) joined this partnership. As a lifelong learning institution, BULLC contributed to this project in different ways, i.e., localisation of the training content, train-the-trainers and campaigns in order to foster social and personal change, and online and in-person trainings. So far, BULLC has delivered the trainings in high schools and universities, and also built partnerships with local authorities and companies to inform, guide and offer practice on how to tackle street harassment. The goal of the project for 2022 was to train 1,500,000 people globally and 50,000 locally.

The collaboration in this project is a good example of ULLL partnership created among the university, private sector, local authorities and NGOs. Furthermore, it contributes to the achievement of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) for a sustainable world.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization, 35% of women worldwide have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2009). Street harassment is an experience that devalues women and men of all sexual orientations. The definition of street harassment is not always clear, however. As a

result of the harassment itself and its projection in the collective unconscious, women also often experience serious guilt and shame around harassment.

When people see someone fall or drop something in public, they instinctively help out. On the other hand, they do not show the same reaction when they see someone being sexually harassed. Most want to do something about it, but do not know what to do. Without knowing what constitutes street harassment and what to do, our ability to act is limited.

Street harassment is actually an indicator of the increasing violence against women all over the world. According to Laniya (2005), street harassment is deeply rooted in the broader notion of male supremacy, power and patriarchy. Cultural figures also directly or indirectly reflect hierarchy and prejudice against women. Furthermore, the impact of COVID19 also amplified gender inequality. Not only were there a greater number of women forced to stay at home due to the pandemic, COVID19 also caused the deepening of existing inequalities and resulted in an increase in violence at home (UN Women, 2021). Consequently, women were deprived of social and economic life during this period.

One of the most important steps in preventing violence against women is fighting against gender discrimination and ensuring gender equality. The UN's SDG 5 also defines these essential objectives of ensuring gender equality, affording women equal rights and opportunities and eliminating the main causes of discrimination in the public and private sphere. As one of the 17 SDGs declared in 2015 by the UN, "Gender Equality" (SDG5) underlines that equality and empowerment of women and girls are the fundamentals of inclusive and sustainable development. In this context, the most important measures that will enable women and girls to become stronger and more visible are, invariably, lifelong learning tools. It is through education and social projects that social transformation becomes possible to ensure gender equality.

Within this context, the projects that make women stronger in education, health, economics, and politics have taken on even greater importance in creating an equal world. There is no doubt that in order to empower women in those fields, they must first be more visible in the public sphere. Hence, women need to feel safe on the street and public places. However, along with the incidence of street harassment, the rate of violence against women also increases.

The Stand Up Project was initiated to protect the self-worth of women and men by creating a set of proven tools to safely intervene when there is a victim or a witness to harassment in public spaces.

THE STAND UP AGAINST STREET HARASSMENT PROJECT

The Stand Up Against Street Harassment Project, which is also known as the Stand Up Project, is a project originally created in partnership with an NGO, Right to Be, and a global company, L'Oréal Paris to prevent street harassment. Right to Be is a non-profit organization that raises awareness about and combats harassment through intervention trainings both online and in-person, a photo blog, and grassroots initiatives. The background of the project is based on the "Show Up for Gender Equity" campaign by the New York City Commission on Gender Equity in 2020 to build a safer and more inclusive New York City. The Stand Up Project is based on the inference that if an eyewitness sees harassment without intervening, it deepens the psychological trauma of the victim and leads the harasser to think that they have done nothing wrong. In order to disrupt this dynamic at once, the project has launched training programmes worldwide. Globally, with the support of Right to Be, this project is now carried out in approximately 50 different countries. In Turkey, L'Oréal Paris and Boğaziçi University have agreed to collaborate in order to adopt and implement the project locally.

Boğaziçi University plays a leading role in Turkey in the area of university lifelong learning by integrating social dimensions with its formal education and research functions. Moreover, new generation universities are no longer purely education-based or single-disciplined institutions, but have already transformed into places where achieving education and research goals functions alongside the development of social projects, thus adding direct value to society. Furthermore, the continuing education/ULL centres play an important role in those projects by bringing scientific based knowledge and rich experience with different stakeholders in similar projects. Within this context, the aim of the Stand Up Project coincides with the core objectives of Boğaziçi University's lifelong learning policy. It was agreed to carry out the project in Turkey with the partnership of Boğaziçi University Lifelong Learning Centre (BULLC) and L'Oréal Paris.

Within the scope of this project, the role of BULLC is primarily to bring the academic knowledge and experience in similar corporate social responsibility projects. Initially, the faculty members of the university who were to be involved in this project were determined by considering their background and project experience. The academic team reviewed the curricula and content of the Stand Up training and contributed to the localization. Interactive train-the-trainer sessions were also another platform for discussion and further development of the project training material. During the implementation period, faculty members offered the additional asset of academic knowledge and experience to the trainings. The project, which was enriched through collaborations with other universities and stakeholders, has not only contributed to the change and transformation of society, but has also used the power of interaction with national and international networks in developing and implementing solutions to social problems.

Street harassment is on Turkey's agenda and demands awareness and concrete action in order to work towards a solution. Therefore, this project is crucial to raise awareness on this issue and to encourage people to take a more active, conscious stance. The general value of "everyone deserves it" has also been the main motto of the project. The training programme developed in this context aimed to teach participants how to identify street harassment they witnessed in public and then equip them with five effective intervention methods that have been proven to help put a stop to it. Since the beginning of the project, online education programmes have continued on a global scale. The general content of the training is structured as follows:

a) **Deepening understanding of street harassment:** outlining what street harassment looks like and why it matters.
b) **Learning how to respond while witnessing harassment**: ways to intervene and still feel safe and comfortable, i.e., learning 5D methodology.
c) **Teaching strategies:** about how to react when harassed and to help combat the judgment that harassment is the fault of the victim.
d) **Provision of ways**: To provide participants with the belief that there is at least one thing they can do about street harassment.

At the training implementation stage, initially the training programme was designed and then trainers were provided with in-depth knowledge about this sensitive subject. The project set out to rethink and to build a world where harassment is no longer normalised, instead of one where girls and women often receive sexualized comments about their bodies.

THE IMPACTS OF STREET HARASSMENT

Unfortunately, Turkey is not in a good position in the international rankings announced every year on gender equality. Even a slight decline from 130th to 133rd rank is significant,

according to the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (WEF, 2021). Although the issue of sexual harassment in Turkey is on the agenda, its reactivity dimension is a social phenomenon that does not extend beyond social media posts. The assumption that harassment does not result in serious physical harm may be one contributing factor to the fact that the physical, social and mental impacts of street harassment on victims are largely ignored by society. This situation, on the one hand, normalises the issue of harassment in the public sphere for society; on the other hand, it has made it a part of daily life. Hence, harassment has not been prevented and, moreover, is witnessed increasingly every day. The Stand Up Project devotes an important part of its training to this subject in order to draw attention to these points in particular. The impacts of street harassment could be summarised as below (Fernandez, 2016):

a) **Psychological and mental health:** Some of its effects manifest as trauma; most commonly seen as anxiety or depression. It can manifest as PTSD and appear just as severe as some of the worst forms of sexual assault.
b) **Social and financial impacts:** Especially not walking alone or not walking at all in the street at a certain time at night in the hope of avoiding harassment negatively affects social life. There is an additional economic impact involved in women having to take taxis at night or choosing to live in more expensive houses for security reasons.
c) **The impact on life quality:** Limited or little interaction with other people in daily life. As a clear example of this, women feel inclined to think that saying "hello" in public or "good morning" when they pass men will be an invitation to something worse.

The results show that women especially restrict their own movements, seeing themselves as responsible for the harassment. The percentage of those who think that women are sometimes responsible for harassment on the street because of their attitudes or appearance is 53% (L'Oréal, 2019). Furthermore, harassment devalues women's views of themselves and "accentuates the perpetual male gaze that allows a man to view a woman and forces a woman to view herself as object rather than subject" (Laniya, 2005, p.103).

COMMON REASONS WHY WITNESSES FAIL TO INTERVENE IN STREET HARASSMENT

One of the most important problems that the Stand Up Project has tackled is people's unwillingness to react when they experience or witness street harassment. According to the results of the fieldwork carried out during the formation of the project, the reasons for this approach are listed as follows:

- I am afraid that it will turn to me.
- It is not my problem.
- I am afraid I will make things worse.
- I do not fully understand what is going on.
- It is harmless.
- I cannot make any difference.

Lastly, there is a concept called the "Bystander effect." It is the thought that "No one else is doing anything, so why should I do?" (Hudson, 2004).

STAND UP TRAINING: WITNESS INTERVENTION – 5D'S METHODOLOGY

The content of the 1-hour online training provides an expert-approved set of tools to intervene with the harassment using 5D methods, which are distract, delegate, document, direct, delay. It's a 1-hour online training that talks about micro-attacks to violence — what harassment can look like — and how the 5D witness intervention method can help and try to dispel the judgment that harassment is our fault. The training content also discusses how witnesses will prioritise their own safety. Witness intervention basically consists of five methods known as "5D." They are shown in Figure 1 and summarised below:

Distract: Creating something distracting to calm the situation. You can start talking to the person who is the target of this harassment or try another way to distract them. You can ask for directions, ask for the time, or drop something on the ground to start a conversation with the target person or to distract them.

Delegate: Asking for help from the authorised person who sees the harassment situation. It is a way to involve other people by saying "Do you see what is going on there? Do you want to do something?"

Document: Documenting harassment in the street. For this, assuming that while the witness maintains a safe distance, the scene of the incident can be recorded as video, etc. The recording of the harassment moment must be provided to the person being harassed.

Delay: Supporting the harassed person after the incident. Hence, asking questions such as "May I sit with you?", "Can I accompany you?", or "What do you need?" are essential.

Direct: Speaking up about harassment clearly with the harasser as a witness. At this point, one needs to be determined and clear. Interventions are made with phrases such as "This is completely inappropriate", "You should stop what you are doing."

Besides introducing these methods to the people participating in the training, this project also aimed to help everyone discover the method they find most suited to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the project's implementation in 2021, it has greatly exceeded the number of people it initially aimed to reach. In 2021, 710,000 people participated in the project globally. In Turkey, 14,000 people was set as the target at the beginning of the year, but it ultimately reached 48,000 people with the short trainings on the website and live trainings of BULLC. Eventually, Turkey became the 3rd country with the highest participation in the Stand Up Project's global training in 2021. The project played a substantial role in resolving people's reservations about intervening in street harassment as a witness. In particular, having awareness of safer methods such as distract and delegate made the participants feel comfortable. Another important result is that participants have provided valuable feedback on their efforts to change their feelings and behaviours toward the harasser, instead of blaming themselves. These trainings are aimed at providing a cultural transformation so that more women can be seen in the public sphere and take part in business life. Helping to build a world where women can make themselves visible more comfortably and confidently is one of the significant outputs of this project. The output also corresponds to the mission of the BULLC as a pioneer of social inclusion and diversity projects, and to the objectives behind its ULLL activities.

CONCLUSION

The project's main objective is to continue reaching more people in the upcoming period and to include people from different socioeconomic strata. The next phase of the project aims to reach 1,500,000 participants in 2022. Through social media campaigns carried out with influencers, celebrities and events, more people will be attracted to the project. Universities' role in acting as a bridge between society and the academy through lifelong learning will continue by adding value and expanding partnerships with NGOs and the private sector. In future periods of the project, conducting both fieldwork and social impact analysis related to street harassment will increase the reach of the project, especially through its integration in lifelong learning. In this sense, the project results, which will be framed by the relevant researchers, will contribute to a long-term and permanent transformation on behalf of training and public perception in Turkey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Fernandez, N. (2016) *Street harassment effects on women: An exploratory study.* Long Beach: California State University.

Hudson, J.M. and Bruckman, A.S. (2004) 'The bystander effect: A lens for understanding patterns of participation', *The Journal of the Learning Sciences,* 13(2), pp.165-195. doi: https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327809jls1302_2

Laniya, O. (2005) 'Street smut: Gender, media, and the legal power dynamics of Street harassment, to "hey sexy" and other verbal ejaculations', *Columbia Journal of Gender and the Law,* 14(1), pp. 91-130. doi: https://doi.org/10.7916/cjgl.v14i1.2503

L'Oreal and IPSOS (2019) *Stand Up Against Street Harassment.* Available at: https://www.standup-international.com/en/en/facts (Accessed: 27 December 2022).

L'Oreal Paris (2021) *L'Oréal Paris Family Stands Up Against Street Harassment.* Available at: https://www.loreal.com/en/news/brands/loreal-paris-stand-up/ (Accessed: 27 December 2022).

Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. and Woelm, F. (2021) *Sustainable Development Report 2021: The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi: https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009106559

UN Women (2021) *Women and girls left behind: Glaring gaps in pandemic responses Report.* Available at: https://data.unwomen.org/publications/women-and-girls-left-behind-glaring-gaps-pandemic-responses (Accessed: 27 December 2022).

WEF (2021) *Global Gender Gap Report.* Available at: https://www.weforum.org/reports/ab6795a1-960c-42b2-b3d5-587eccda6023/in-full/gggr2-key-findings (Accessed: 27 December 2022).

World Health Organization (2009) *Promoting gender equality to prevent violence against women*. Available at: https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/44098 (Accessed: 27 December 2022).