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**THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL STREET
HARASSMENT ON THE FREEDOM OF
MOROCCAN WOMEN IN THE MOROCCAN
STREETS: A CASE STUDY OF CASABLANCA
CITY**

Sara ESSLIMANI

Master's Thesis

Supervisor

Asst. Prof. Dr. Eylem AKDENİZ GÖKER

İstanbul, 2025

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The thesis titled THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL STREET HARASSMENT ON THE FREEDOM OF MOROCCAN WOMEN IN THE MOROCCAN STREETS: A CASE STUDY OF CASABLANCA CITY prepared by SARA ESSLIMANI and submitted on 03/07/2025 has been **accepted unanimously** for the degree of Master of Arts in Politics and International Relations.

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I hereby declare that all information/data presented in this graduation project has been obtained in full accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all unoriginal materials and conclusions have been cited in the text and all references mentioned in the Reference List have been cited in the text, and vice versa as required by the abovementioned rules and conduct.

Sara ESSLIMANI

Signature



DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my entire family and close friends who invariably uphold and motivate me to attain all my goals.



ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL STREET HARASSMENT ON THE FREEDOM OF MOROCCAN WOMEN IN THE MOROCCAN STREETS: A CASE STUDY OF CASABLANCA CITY

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Street harassment remains a pervasive issue in Morocco, deeply impacting women's daily lives and psychological well-being. That is to say, it continues to impact women's daily lives from different ages and marital statuses in. This study explores street harassment in Casablanca, focusing on its emotional consequences, women's coping strategies, and the effectiveness of legal and social frameworks. Using semi-structured interviews with women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, the research reveals that street harassment induces fear, anxiety, and a diminished sense of self-worth, leading to behavioral changes like avoiding specific areas, altering routines, and adjusting clothing choices. Despite these precautions, they continue to face verbal harassment, unwanted physical advances, and invasion of personal space. The study also highlights the ineffectiveness of Law 103-13 in protecting women due to weak enforcement, a lack of public awareness, and societal normalization of harassment. Many women express skepticism toward legal institutions, citing victim-blaming and failure to hold perpetrators accountable. To address this issue, a multi-faceted approach is required. Strengthening legal enforcement, promoting gender-sensitive education, and implementing urban planning strategies that prioritize women's safety are essential. Additionally, cultural shifts through awareness campaigns and

community engagement are needed to challenge the patriarchal norms that sustain harassment. By fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity, Morocco can create safer public spaces where women can move freely without fear.

Keywords: Street Harassment, Morocco, Casablanca, Women's Daily Lives, Public Spaces.



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ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW : Convention On the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

ILO : International Labor Organization

WHO : World Health Organization

UN : United Nations

NGO : Non-Governmental Organization



1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic cities are undergoing profound transformations in their social structures and lifestyles, driven by rapid economic changes, accelerated urbanization, and demographic shifts brought about by globalization. These developments have inevitably reshaped social relations, particularly between men and women, leading to a redefinition of traditional roles. Factors such as increased access to education, women's growing participation in the workforce, shifts in family dynamics, and the modernizing influence of state policies have significantly contributed to changes in the status of women. This evolution has sparked a critical reassessment of traditional gender segregation and increasing challenges to women's exclusion from public life. Women are now entering public spaces, historically dominated by men, in unprecedented numbers. However, this shift has not been without resistance. Public spaces, instead of offering inclusion and equality, have often become arenas for verbal and psychological abuse directed at women. As Safaa Monqid (2012) explains, such harassment serves as a tool for men to assert a perceived sense of dominance and authority in public settings.

In Morocco, gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and institutional frameworks. It encompasses physical, psychological, sexual, and economic abuse perpetrated by individuals, societal structures, and cultural norms. Violence against women is a multifaceted problem that exists across all societies, including industrialized nations that uphold gender equality in their legal and political frameworks. Gender-based violence, a fundamental violation of human rights, manifests in private spheres, such as domestic spaces, and public environments, such as streets and workplaces. It takes diverse forms, including forced marriages, early marriages, sex trafficking, rape, and sexual harassment, particularly in male-dominated societies like Morocco. These acts not only threaten the health, safety, and mobility of Moroccan women but also hinder the nation's socio-economic progress by marginalizing half of its population and reinforcing systemic discrimination.

According to the Moroccan High Commission for Planning, approximately two-thirds (63%) of Moroccan women aged 18 to 65 have reported experiencing physical, psychological, sexual, or economic violence. This statistic underscores the widespread nature of gender-

based violence in Moroccan society. The 2010 national survey conducted by the High Commission revealed the alarming scope of this issue, demonstrating its pervasive impact on women across all age groups and social strata. Furthermore, the 2015 Global Gender Gap Report, which evaluates women's empowerment based on health, economic participation, education, and political engagement, ranked Morocco 139th out of 145 countries (Chafai, 2017). These findings highlight the systemic challenges Moroccan women face, particularly in navigating public spaces safely and with dignity.

Public harassment in Moroccan streets often involves verbal and psychological assaults, which serve to maintain the societal hierarchy that places men in positions of perceived superiority. Offensive language is a frequent tool used to demean women, employing terms derived from animals to insult their appearance, intelligence, or behavior. For example, words like "donkey," "mule," or "cow" are used to belittle women's mental capacities; "monkey" or "gorilla" mock physical appearance, while "hen" targets their sexuality. Safaa Monqid (2012) observes that even traditional proverbs perpetuate these dynamics, such as the phrase, "leave the hen and give it to its owners; if it ever lays, you will be responsible for it," often directed at young women in conversations with men. Terms like "kahba," meaning "whore" or "slut," are used as direct verbal attacks, further underscoring the gendered hostility women face daily in public spaces.

The normalization of such behavior leaves a lasting impact on women's psychological well-being and limits their freedom to navigate public spaces without fear. This cultural climate, where women are subjected to harassment for merely existing in public, also influences family dynamics. Parents often impose restrictions on their daughters' clothing and activities out of concern for societal repercussions. For instance, as described by Monqid (2012), families may not be conservative themselves but act cautiously to protect their daughters from harassment and ridicule. Such protective measures, while well-intentioned, inadvertently reinforce societal norms that place the burden of safety on women rather than addressing the root causes of harassment.

The consequences of public harassment extend beyond individual experiences, affecting the broader social fabric of Moroccan society. Women's restricted access to public spaces and their marginalization in urban environments hinder their participation in economic and social life, perpetuating systemic inequalities. To address these challenges, there is a pressing need

for structural changes, including public awareness campaigns, stronger legal protections, and societal efforts to dismantle harmful gender norms. Without these measures, the health, freedom, and rights of Moroccan women and by extension, the progress of the nation will continue to be undermined.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

This study seeks to explore the complex issue of sexual harassment experienced by Moroccan women in public spaces, particularly in Casablanca, through a series of guiding questions. The first question examines the extent to which street harassment affects women's freedom and mobility. It aims to uncover how harassment influences their physical and emotional well-being, sense of safety, and ability to move freely within the city without fear or restrictions. The second question delves into the collaboration between Moroccan women and the existing legal framework in combating harassment. It investigates the effectiveness of laws such as Law No. 103-13, while also addressing the barriers women face in seeking justice and raising awareness, including societal stigma and limited enforcement. The third question focuses on the overall safety of Casablanca for women, evaluating how factors such as urban infrastructure, community dynamics, and cultural norms shape their experiences of harassment in public spaces.

The study hypothesizes that street harassment significantly restricts women's freedom and mobility in Casablanca, leading them to alter their daily routines, clothing choices, and travel routes to avoid potential threats. It further posits that the existing legal framework, despite its intentions, is insufficient to address harassment effectively due to limited enforcement, lack of public awareness, and pervasive victim-blaming attitudes. Finally, it is hypothesized that Casablanca's public spaces are widely perceived as unsafe by women, largely due to systemic issues such as inadequate urban planning, insufficient police presence, and cultural norms that tolerate or trivialize harassment.

By addressing these research questions and testing these hypotheses, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the societal, legal, and urban factors that contribute to harassment in Casablanca. The findings will offer insights to inform policies and initiatives designed to create safer and more inclusive public spaces for Moroccan women.

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND LIMITS OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study is to illuminate the pervasive issue of sexual harassment faced by Moroccan women in public spaces, with a specific focus on the streets of Casablanca. By documenting the lived experiences of women who encounter verbal and physical harassment, the study seeks to uncover the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of such behaviors. It aims to explore the root causes of harassment, examining cultural, societal, and systemic factors that perpetuate this issue. Additionally, the study seeks to assess the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks, such as Law No. 103-13, and evaluate the role of Moroccan women and advocacy groups in addressing harassment. Through these efforts, the research aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on gender-based violence and inform strategies for creating safer, more inclusive public spaces.

The study also aims to provide actionable recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and organizations. By analyzing the interplay of legal, cultural, and urban dynamics, the research will identify gaps in current approaches to combating harassment and propose interventions tailored to the Moroccan context. These interventions may include public awareness campaigns, legal reforms, urban planning initiatives, and educational programs that challenge harmful gender norms and promote respect and accountability.

While this research seeks to make meaningful contributions, it acknowledges certain limitations. First, the qualitative nature of the study, while offering deep insights, may not capture the full breadth of experiences across all demographics in Casablanca. The reliance on semi-structured interviews, although invaluable for understanding personal narratives, limits the generalizability of findings to the broader Moroccan population. Additionally, societal stigma surrounding harassment may discourage some women from participating in the study, potentially leaving out critical perspectives.

Another limitation lies in the focus on Casablanca as the primary case study. While the city's urban dynamics and cultural intersections make it a compelling site for analysis, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of women in rural areas or other Moroccan cities with differing socio-economic and cultural contexts. Lastly, the study relies on existing legal and social data, which may have gaps or inconsistencies, limiting the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Despite these limitations, the study's focus on lived experiences, combined with its exploration of systemic and cultural factors, offers a valuable contribution to understanding and addressing public harassment in Morocco. By highlighting the challenges and proposing actionable solutions, the research aims to empower women, foster societal change, and promote gender equality in public spaces.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology to explore the issue of street harassment experienced by Moroccan women in Casablanca. The chosen methodology allows for an in-depth examination of personal narratives and contextual factors, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The research aims to uncover the psychological, emotional, and social impacts of harassment, while also examining the cultural and systemic factors that perpetuate this issue.

1.4 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study employs a qualitative methodology to examine the issue of street harassment experienced by Moroccan women in Casablanca, prioritizing depth and context to explore personal experiences and societal dynamics. By focusing on the lived realities of women, the research seeks to uncover the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of harassment and provide actionable insights to address this pervasive issue. To achieve its objectives, the study relies on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is collected through semi-structured interviews, which allow participants to share their experiences openly while ensuring the research objectives are met. These interviews are guided by open-ended questions that explore the types and frequency of harassment, the emotional and psychological impacts, and the strategies women use to cope with or avoid harassment. Participants are selected using purposive sampling, targeting women aged 18 and above residing in Casablanca, and efforts are made to ensure diversity in socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Each interview is conducted in a private and confidential setting, lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour, and is recorded with consent for accuracy.

Secondary data is drawn from academic journals, books, government reports, newspapers, and reputable online sources. These materials provide a broader context for understanding harassment in Casablanca, including its prevalence, societal implications, and the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks. The analysis of primary data is carried out using thematic analysis, a method that identifies and interprets patterns within qualitative data. This involves familiarizing with the interview transcripts, coding relevant segments of text, developing themes, refining them to align with the research objectives, and synthesizing findings into a coherent narrative. The use of direct quotes from participants ensures that their voices are authentically represented in the research findings.

Throughout the study, ethical principles are rigorously upheld. Participants are provided with clear information about the research objectives, methods, and their rights before consenting to participate. Informed consent is obtained in writing, and participants are assured of confidentiality through anonymization of their personal data. They are also given the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without repercussions. Despite its strengths, including the depth and richness of qualitative data, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The findings may not be generalizable to all Moroccan women, as the sample is limited to those living in Casablanca. Furthermore, societal stigma surrounding harassment may discourage some women from participating, potentially excluding important perspectives. To mitigate these challenges, the study includes participants from diverse backgrounds and triangulates findings from primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This master thesis is structured into five interconnected chapters to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The first chapter introduces the study, presenting the background, research objectives, questions, hypotheses, and the chosen methodology, as well as outlining the study's limitations. The second chapter encompasses a literature review, exploring key conceptual frameworks, theories, and prior studies on gender-based violence, with a focus on street harassment, while identifying gaps that the present study seeks to address. The third chapter details the research methodology, including the design, data collection methods, sampling strategies, and ethical considerations, ensuring transparency and credibility. The fourth chapter presents and discusses the findings, organizing them

around key themes derived from data analysis and linking them to the research questions, hypotheses, and existing literature. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings, offering actionable recommendations for policy and societal change, and suggesting directions for future research, emphasizing the need for continued efforts to address street harassment and promote gender equality.



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Sexual harassment is a persistent and pervasive form of gender-based violence that undermines women's dignity, autonomy, and rights, both in private and public spheres. The issue is recognized internationally as a significant violation of human rights and a public health concern with far-reaching consequences.

According to the United Nations, violence against women encompasses "any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life" (United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Sexual harassment, as a subset of this violence, includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such acts hinder women's full participation in public life and reinforce structural inequalities (Krahé, 2016).

Public spaces, which are often perceived as neutral and accessible to all, are in reality deeply gendered. The concept of "gendered spaces" has been widely discussed in sociological literature, highlighting how societal norms shape access and interactions within public environments (Massey, 1994). In patriarchal societies such as Morocco, these norms create an imbalance in public spaces, where women are often seen as outsiders or secondary occupants. In cities like Casablanca, which combine traditional social values with modern urban challenges, street harassment has become an everyday struggle for many women. Chafai (2020) highlights how the increasing visibility of women in Moroccan public spaces, driven by expanding educational and economic opportunities, has triggered resistance to traditional norms, leading to heightened occurrences of harassment.

Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), provides a critical framework for understanding the layered experiences of Moroccan women. This perspective considers how overlapping social identities such as gender, class, and ethnicity shape experiences of oppression. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds are particularly vulnerable to harassment due to limited access to legal protections and heightened exposure to unsafe environments. Chafai's (2020) research underscores that Moroccan women's

mobility in public spaces is not only restricted by fear of harassment but also by societal stigmatization, which often blames victims for the violence they endure.

Sexual harassment is further defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "any unwelcome sexual behavior or advances, whether physical, verbal, or non-verbal, that violate the dignity of a person, particularly when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, or offensive environment" (WHO, 2002). This definition broadens the scope of understanding to include the psychological and emotional harm caused by harassment, emphasizing its pervasive and invasive nature. Unlike physical violence, sexual harassment often operates in more covert forms, making it difficult to address through traditional legal and social frameworks (Fitzgerald et al., 1997).

Building on this understanding, Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) proposed a typology of sexual harassment that categorizes behaviors into three primary forms:

Gender harassment which involves generalized, hostile, or offensive behavior not necessarily aimed at sexual cooperation.

Unwanted sexual attention, which includes unwelcome flirting, advances, or other behaviors of a sexual nature; and

Sexual coercion occurs where compliance with sexual demands is tied to professional or personal benefits.

This typology has been influential in guiding research on sexual harassment, allowing for a more nuanced analysis of its various manifestations and their impact on individuals.

In addition, MacKinnon (1979) in her foundational work, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, emphasized the structural dimension of harassment, framing it as a form of sex discrimination that reinforces gender hierarchies. She argued that sexual harassment is not merely an interpersonal issue but a systemic problem embedded in workplace and societal structures. MacKinnon's framework has been pivotal in shaping legal definitions of harassment, including its recognition as a violation of civil rights in many jurisdictions.

The sociological concept of "patriarchal bargaining," introduced by Kandiyoti (1988), also provides a relevant lens for understanding sexual harassment. This concept describes the

compromises women make within patriarchal systems to gain agency or reduce harm. In contexts where reporting harassment can lead to social ostracism or retaliation, women often employ coping mechanisms that allow them to navigate public spaces while minimizing risk. This reinforces systemic gender inequities by normalizing harassment and silencing victims (Kandiyoti, 1988).

Public spaces are particularly significant in discussions of harassment, as they serve as arenas where power dynamics are visibly enacted. Valentine (1989) highlights that the spatial organization of cities often mirrors societal power imbalances, with women's access to public spaces being contingent upon their adherence to societal norms. This spatial dimension underscores the importance of addressing harassment not only as a social or legal issue but also as an urban planning and public policy challenge.

Moreover, the psychological theory of learned helplessness, as developed by Seligman (1972), offers insight into the psychological impacts of repeated harassment. Victims of chronic harassment may develop a sense of helplessness, believing that their actions have little effect on preventing or stopping such behaviors. This psychological state further marginalizes victims and inhibits efforts to address harassment on a systemic level.

The power dynamics inherent in sexual harassment have been a focal point of numerous sociological and psychological frameworks. Pina, Gannon, and Saunders (2009) conducted a systematic review of sexual harassment literature, highlighting that harassment is not merely about sexual desire but is often a manifestation of power and control. Their findings suggest that harassers frequently exploit societal structures that perpetuate male dominance, using harassment as a tool to assert their authority or undermine the autonomy of others. This perspective aligns with MacKinnon's (1979) assertion that sexual harassment reinforces systemic inequalities, situating it within broader societal contexts of gender-based oppression.

Adding to this discourse, Berdahl (2007) proposed the "Sex-Based Harassment Model," which posits that harassment often targets individuals who deviate from traditional gender roles. For instance, women who assert themselves in male-dominated environments or challenge conventional gender norms are more likely to experience harassment as a form of social punishment. Berdahl's model provides critical insights into how harassment functions

as a mechanism for maintaining gender hierarchies, deterring individuals from challenging established power structures.

From a psychological standpoint, the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals perceive and respond to harassment. This theory suggests that the impact of harassment depends on how victims appraise the situation—whether they perceive it as a threat, challenge, or harm. Victims who view harassment as a threat to their safety or dignity are likely to experience heightened stress and anxiety, while those who see it as a challenge may feel motivated to resist or confront the behavior. The variability in responses underscores the importance of considering individual differences in coping strategies when addressing the psychological impacts of harassment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Studies on emotional labor, a concept introduced by Hochschild (1983), also shed light on the psychological toll of harassment. Women in public-facing roles, such as hospitality or retail, often face dual pressures: managing their emotional responses to harassment while maintaining a professional demeanor. This added burden can lead to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and mental health challenges, highlighting the need for workplace policies that support victims and address the systemic factors enabling harassment.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework has been instrumental in highlighting how overlapping social identities—such as race, class, and gender—shape individuals' experiences of harassment. For example, women of color often face compounded discrimination that combines racial and gender-based harassment. In the Moroccan context, Chafai (2020) found that socioeconomic disparities significantly influence women's vulnerability to harassment, with lower-income women more likely to experience abuse due to their limited access to safe spaces and legal protections.

Furthermore, the role of disability in shaping experiences of harassment has gained increasing attention in recent years. Sobsey (1994) documented how individuals with disabilities are disproportionately targeted for sexual violence and harassment, often due to societal perceptions of their vulnerability or dependency. This underscores the need for inclusive policies addressing the unique risks that marginalized groups face.

Urban geography also plays a critical role in shaping the prevalence and nature of harassment. Massey (1994) highlighted how public spaces are socially constructed, often reflecting and reinforcing societal power dynamics. In cities like Casablanca, the spatial organization of public spaces frequently disadvantages women, with poorly lit streets, crowded public transport, and inadequate policing creating environments conducive to harassment (Chafai, 2020). Valentine (1989) argued that women's fear of harassment often leads to self-imposed restrictions on their mobility, effectively limiting their participation in urban life.

Gender-sensitive urban planning has been proposed as a solution to mitigate these risks. Studies by Kern (2020) emphasize the importance of designing cities that prioritize safety, inclusivity, and accessibility. This includes measures such as improved lighting, surveillance, and public awareness campaigns to foster a culture of respect in public spaces.

Cultural narratives and media representations significantly shape societal attitudes toward harassment. Hall (1997) explored how the media often perpetuates stereotypes that objectify women, reinforcing harmful norms that trivialize or normalize harassment. In Morocco, media depictions of women often reflect traditional gender roles, portraying them as either submissive caregivers or objects of desire. These portrayals contribute to a cultural climate where harassment is seen as an inevitable or acceptable aspect of public life (Sadiqi, 2008).

Conversely, the media also has the potential to challenge these narratives and promote positive change. Campaigns such as #MeToo have leveraged digital platforms to amplify victims' voices and call attention to systemic issues of harassment. In Morocco, grassroots movements like #Masaktach have used social media to mobilize public support for stronger legal protections and cultural shifts.

2.2 HISTORICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

Sexual harassment is a deeply rooted societal issue that has evolved over time, influenced by historical dynamics and sociocultural norms. The interplay of these factors shapes the prevalence, perception, and response to harassment in different contexts, including Morocco. Historically, gender-based violence, including harassment, was often trivialized or ignored due to patriarchal structures that dictated societal roles and relations. Women were largely

confined to the private sphere, and their presence in public spaces was heavily monitored and regulated.

These historical patterns of exclusion and control over women's mobility laid the groundwork for the persistence of harassment in contemporary societies (Bowman, 1993).

In the Moroccan context, cultural and historical factors have significantly shaped the experiences of women in public spaces. Traditional gender roles, deeply embedded in Moroccan society, assign women the primary responsibility of maintaining family honor. This expectation is reinforced by cultural interpretations of religion that place an undue burden on women to dress and behave modestly to avoid "provoking" harassment. While Islamic teachings emphasize mutual respect and modesty for both genders, cultural practices often distort these principles to justify male dominance in public spaces (Monqid, 2012). This dynamic creates an environment where harassment is not only normalized but also, at times, condoned by societal attitudes that blame the victim rather than the perpetrator.

Urbanization and modernization in Morocco, particularly in cities like Casablanca, have brought about significant changes in gender dynamics. As more women enter the workforce and pursue higher education, their visibility in public spaces has increased. However, this increased presence has also led to heightened scrutiny and resistance from those who view these changes as a threat to traditional values. Chafai (2020) describes this phenomenon as the "visibility paradox," where women's progress is met with backlash in the form of harassment, underscoring the unresolved tensions between modernity and tradition.

Globally, the recognition of violence against women as a significant issue has evolved over decades, with milestones such as the UN Decade for Women (1975-1985) and the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979. These initiatives marked critical steps toward addressing gender-based violence at the international level (United Nations, 1979). The UN World Conferences on Women, held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985), further highlighted the importance of tackling cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women. However, as Joachim (1999) notes, the implementation of these frameworks often faces resistance at the national level, particularly in societies with entrenched patriarchal structures.

In Morocco, the sociocultural dimensions of harassment are further complicated by the influence of media and popular culture. Local media often portrays women in ways that reinforce stereotypes and objectify their presence in public spaces. This representation perpetuates a cultural narrative that undermines women's agency and normalizes harassment. Efforts to challenge these portrayals are limited, but initiatives by women's rights organizations have sought to raise awareness and promote gender-sensitive media practices (Sadiqi, 2008).

Education and employment opportunities for women have expanded significantly in Morocco over the past few decades, yet historical inequalities persist. Women in rural areas, for example, still face limited access to education and economic independence, which exacerbates their vulnerability to harassment. Urban women, while more visible in public and professional spheres, often encounter hostility and resistance that reflect broader societal struggles with gender equality (Chafai, 2020).

Addressing the historical and sociocultural roots of harassment requires not only legal reforms but also sustained efforts to shift societal attitudes. Initiatives such as public awareness campaigns, community dialogues, and educational programs can play a crucial role in challenging entrenched norms and fostering a culture of respect and equality. As Monqid (2012) argues, combating harassment in Morocco demands a holistic approach that integrates legal, cultural, and educational strategies to create safer and more inclusive public spaces.

2.3 LEGAL AND POLICY RESPONSES

Over the years, international organizations, national governments, and civil society have worked to develop legal instruments that respond to the complex and pervasive nature of harassment. In Morocco, as in many other countries, legal responses reflect a growing recognition of the importance of protecting women's rights, though significant challenges remain in bridging the gap between legislation and real-world impact.

This section examines global and Moroccan legal frameworks, evaluates their implementation, and explores the challenges and gaps in addressing sexual harassment.

Globally, significant progress has been made in establishing legal norms to combat sexual harassment. One of the earliest milestones was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations in 1979. This convention sets out a comprehensive framework for eliminating discrimination against women, including violence and harassment. Article 11 of CEDAW specifically obligates states to take measures ensuring women's right to work under safe and equitable conditions, free from harassment and exploitation (United Nations, 1979). Although CEDAW does not explicitly define or address sexual harassment as a standalone issue, its provisions have been instrumental in shaping international and domestic legal frameworks to address various forms of gender-based violence.

Building on CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) expanded the discourse by identifying violence against women, including harassment, as a critical area of concern. It emphasized the need for governments to adopt laws and policies addressing the root causes of violence and to strengthen institutional mechanisms to prevent harassment and support victims. Another significant development was the adoption of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 190 in 2019, which marked a major step in addressing violence and harassment in the world of work. This convention not only defines harassment comprehensively but also recognizes its gendered nature, emphasizing the disproportionate impact on women. It calls on states to implement preventive measures, provide remedies for victims, and promote safe and respectful workplaces (ILO, 2019).

Despite these global advancements, implementing international standards into domestic legal systems has often been inconsistent. In Morocco, for example, significant progress has been made with the enactment of Law No. 103-13 in 2018. This law represents a landmark in addressing violence against women, including sexual harassment, through explicit criminalization. It imposes penalties for harassment in public spaces, workplaces, and other settings, covering verbal, physical, and online forms of harassment. The law also introduces protective measures for victims, such as restraining orders, and mandates the establishment of specialized units within law enforcement agencies to handle cases of gender-based violence.

However, the effectiveness of Law No. 103-13 has been questioned due to several challenges in its implementation. One of the primary issues is the societal stigma surrounding

harassment, which often deters victims from reporting incidents. Studies by Mobilizing for Rights Associates (MRA) reveal that cultural norms in Morocco frequently shift the blame onto victims, discouraging them from seeking justice or accessing support services (MRA, 2020). Furthermore, the lack of gender-sensitive training for law enforcement officials and judiciary personnel exacerbates this issue, as victims may face dismissive or inappropriate responses when they attempt to report harassment.

The intersection of legal frameworks and cultural norms also presents a significant barrier to addressing harassment effectively. In Morocco, traditional patriarchal values continue to dominate societal perceptions of gender roles, often normalizing harassment or trivializing its impact. These cultural attitudes undermine the transformative potential of legal reforms, as laws alone cannot shift deeply ingrained social norms. For example, while Law No. 103-13 criminalizes harassment, it does not address the broader socio-cultural dynamics that perpetuate such behaviors, leaving a critical gap in its scope and impact.

Comparatively, some neighboring countries have adopted more comprehensive approaches. In Tunisia, the Organic Law No. 2017-58 on Eliminating Violence Against Women includes explicit provisions addressing harassment in public and private spaces. This law goes beyond criminalization to include preventive measures, victim protection, and rehabilitation programs for offenders. It also mandates the establishment of specialized police units and judicial mechanisms to ensure effective enforcement. Such measures highlight the importance of integrating prevention, protection, and prosecution into a cohesive strategy, which Morocco could emulate to strengthen its legal framework.

Civil society organizations have played a pivotal role in addressing these gaps and advocating for more effective implementation of existing laws. In Morocco, campaigns like #Masaktach (“I will not be silent”) have been instrumental in raising awareness about harassment and mobilizing public opinion. These movements have not only provided platforms for survivors to share their experiences but also pressured policymakers to address the systemic barriers that hinder justice. Grassroots initiatives have complemented these efforts by conducting community outreach programs and educational campaigns to challenge societal attitudes and promote gender equality.

The role of international organizations and partnerships has also been significant in enhancing Morocco's capacity to address sexual harassment. Collaboration with entities like UN Women and the European Union has facilitated training programs for law enforcement, awareness campaigns targeting youth, and research projects to gather data on the prevalence and impact of harassment. These initiatives underscore the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach in combating harassment, combining legal reforms with societal and institutional changes.

Nevertheless, critical gaps remain in Morocco's legal and policy responses. One of the most pressing issues is the limited accessibility of support services for victims, particularly in rural areas. While urban centers like Casablanca have seen the establishment of specialized units and shelters, these resources are often unavailable in less developed regions. This disparity highlights the need for more equitable distribution of services and resources to ensure that all victims, regardless of their location, can access justice and support.

Another challenge is the criminalization of extramarital relationships in Morocco, which discourages victims of sexual violence from coming forward for fear of being prosecuted themselves. This legal provision creates a chilling effect on reporting, particularly for marginalized women who may already face significant socio-economic barriers. Reforming such contradictory laws is essential to create an environment where victims feel safe and empowered to report harassment.

2.4 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL IMPACTS

Sexual harassment has profound psychological and social consequences that extend beyond the immediate harm experienced by victims. It not only affects the mental and emotional well-being of individuals but also perpetuates societal inequalities, creating a cycle of fear and exclusion. These impacts are particularly significant in contexts where cultural norms and societal structures exacerbate the effects of harassment, such as in Morocco. This section explores the psychological and social ramifications of sexual harassment, emphasizing its implications for individuals and society as a whole.

The psychological effects of sexual harassment are well-documented in research on gender-based violence. Victims frequently experience a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and diminished self-esteem.

These outcomes are particularly severe when harassment occurs repeatedly or in environments where victims feel powerless to respond or seek help. A global study by the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that violence against women, including sexual harassment, is a leading cause of mental health disorders among women, with long-term consequences for their emotional well-being (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). In Morocco, where reporting harassment can lead to social stigma or victim-blaming, many women suffer in silence, compounding their psychological distress (Monqid, 2012).

One of the key psychological impacts of harassment is the development of chronic fear and hypervigilance. Women who experience harassment in public spaces often alter their behavior to avoid certain areas, times, or situations. This hyperawareness can lead to heightened stress levels and a constant sense of insecurity. Research conducted in urban centers like Casablanca shows that women frequently adapt their daily routines to minimize exposure to harassment, such as avoiding public transportation during peak hours or dressing conservatively to deflect unwanted attention (Chafai, 2020). While these adaptations are strategies for self-preservation, they also reinforce a culture where women bear the responsibility for preventing harassment rather than addressing the behavior of perpetrators.

Socially, the effects of harassment extend far beyond the individuals directly affected. At a societal level, harassment reinforces gender inequalities by limiting women's access to public spaces and opportunities. When women feel unsafe or unwelcome in workplaces, educational institutions, or public areas, their participation in these environments diminishes. This exclusion has significant economic and social costs, as it reduces women's contributions to society and perpetuates male-dominated spaces. The normalization of harassment in public spaces, particularly in patriarchal societies like Morocco, perpetuates the belief that women's presence in these spaces is conditional or secondary (Sadiqi, 2008).

The social stigma attached to being a victim of harassment further compounds its impact. In many communities, victims are often blamed for provoking harassment through their clothing, behavior, or presence in specific environments. This victim-blaming culture discourages women from speaking out or seeking help, isolating them from support networks and leaving them vulnerable to repeated harassment. In Morocco, societal attitudes often place the burden of preventing harassment on women, reinforcing harmful stereotypes, and

limiting progress toward gender equality (Monqid, 2012). These cultural dynamics not only silence victims but also embolden perpetrators by minimizing the severity of their actions.

Sexual harassment also affects interpersonal relationships and community dynamics. Women who experience harassment often struggle with feelings of mistrust and alienation, which can strain their relationships with family members, colleagues, and peers. In some cases, victims face judgment or criticism from within their own social circles, exacerbating their sense of isolation. For example, Moroccan women who report harassment may be perceived as tarnishing their family's reputation, leading to further marginalization within their communities (Chafai, 2020).

The societal acceptance of harassment as a norm also perpetuates intergenerational cycles of gender inequality. Children who witness or experience normalized harassment may internalize these behaviors, perpetuating harmful attitudes and practices in future generations. This normalization not only affects women but also limits the development of equitable gender dynamics within society. Addressing these social consequences requires a concerted effort to challenge and transform the cultural norms that underpin harassment.

Efforts to mitigate the psychological and social impacts of harassment must therefore go beyond legal and policy measures. Comprehensive support systems for victims, including counseling services and safe reporting mechanisms, are essential to address the psychological toll of harassment. Additionally, community-based initiatives that challenge victim-blaming and promote gender equality can help to transform societal attitudes. Programs that engage men and boys in conversations about respect and accountability are particularly effective in creating a culture that rejects harassment and promotes safety for all.

Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives play a crucial role in addressing the social dimensions of harassment. For example, campaigns in Morocco like #Masaktach have sought to break the silence surrounding harassment and empower women to speak out against their aggressors. These initiatives not only provide platforms for survivors to share their stories but also challenge societal norms by framing harassment as a collective issue that affects everyone. Furthermore, integrating gender sensitivity into school curricula can help to foster a new generation that values respect and equality.

2.5 RESEARCH GAPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite growing attention to the issue of sexual harassment, significant research gaps persist, particularly in the context of non-Western societies like Morocco. Understanding these gaps is essential for advancing the discourse and informing future research directions that address the unique cultural, social, and legal dynamics of sexual harassment. This section highlights the limitations of existing studies and proposes avenues for further exploration to create a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

One of the most pressing research gaps lies in the lack of localized studies that examine the specific experiences of Moroccan women. Much of the existing literature on sexual harassment is centered on Western contexts, where cultural norms, legal systems, and societal attitudes differ significantly from those in Morocco. Studies conducted in urban centers like Casablanca often focus on general trends but fail to capture the nuanced experiences of women from diverse socio-economic, ethnic, and rural backgrounds. As Chafai (2020) notes, rural women in Morocco face unique challenges, such as limited access to legal support and heightened vulnerability due to traditional gender roles, yet these experiences remain underexplored in academic research.

Another critical gap is the limited exploration of systemic and structural drivers of harassment. While many studies focus on individual experiences or cultural norms, fewer examine how urban planning, economic inequality, and institutional shortcomings contribute to unsafe environments for women. For instance, poorly lit streets, overcrowded public transportation, and insufficient police presence in Moroccan cities create conditions that enable harassment. Research that integrates urban studies, sociology, and gender studies could provide valuable insights into how structural factors exacerbate harassment and how these can be addressed through policy and design.

The intersectionality of sexual harassment is another area that requires greater attention. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) framework of intersectionality has highlighted the importance of understanding how overlapping identities—such as gender, class, ethnicity, and age—shape individuals' experiences of oppression. In Morocco, women from marginalized groups, such as Amazigh women or those from low-income backgrounds, may experience harassment differently from their urban, middle-class counterparts. However, most studies

fail to disaggregate data or analyze these intersecting factors, limiting the ability to develop targeted interventions that address the needs of diverse populations.

In terms of legal and policy responses, existing research often evaluates the content of laws, such as Morocco's Law No. 103-13, without critically analyzing their implementation and impact. While this law criminalizes harassment and provides mechanisms for victim protection, little research has been conducted to assess its enforcement and efficacy. For instance, studies could explore how victims navigate the judicial system, the barriers they face in reporting harassment, and the effectiveness of support services provided under the law. Moreover, comparative studies examining Morocco's legal framework alongside those of other countries in the MENA region could offer valuable lessons and best practices.

The role of digital technology and online spaces in shaping experiences of harassment is another emerging area that warrants further exploration. While public spaces are traditionally associated with street harassment, the rise of digital platforms has created new avenues for harassment, particularly through social media and messaging apps. Moroccan women, like their global counterparts, are increasingly subjected to online harassment, which often spills over into their offline lives. Research that examines the intersection of digital and physical harassment, as well as the effectiveness of legal and technological measures to combat online abuse, could provide critical insights into this evolving issue.

From a societal perspective, there is a need for more research on the long-term psychological and social impacts of harassment on women in Morocco. While existing studies highlight immediate mental health effects such as anxiety and depression, few explore how repeated harassment affects women's career trajectories, social relationships, or overall quality of life. Longitudinal studies that track the experiences of harassment survivors over time could shed light on these enduring consequences and inform the development of holistic support systems.

Future research should also prioritize the perspectives and roles of men in addressing harassment. Most studies on harassment focus on women as victims, often neglecting to examine the attitudes and behaviors of men as perpetrators or allies. Research that engages men in conversations about gender norms, power dynamics, and accountability could help to challenge the cultural acceptance of harassment and promote behavioral change. Programs

that involve men and boys in education and advocacy efforts have shown promise in other contexts and could be adapted to Morocco's sociocultural landscape.

Finally, there is a need for interdisciplinary research that bridges the gaps between legal studies, sociology, psychology, urban planning, and public policy. Addressing harassment requires a multifaceted approach that considers the interplay of individual, societal, and structural factors. Collaborative research that brings together scholars from different disciplines could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and inform integrated solutions.



3. COMPLEXITIES OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

3.1 EXPERIENCES OF STREET HARASSMENT IN CASABLANCA

Sexual harassment on Moroccan streets is a deeply entrenched and pervasive issue that threatens the safety, dignity, and autonomy of women. It normalizes the objectification of women and reinforces gender inequalities, creating an environment where harassment is trivialized or even justified. The long-term impact of growing up in a society where women are often reduced to overly sexualized objects cannot be overstated. For Moroccan women, navigating public spaces often entails enduring a spectrum of intrusive behaviors that range from verbal comments to physical aggression.

The complexities of street harassment are best understood through personal narratives and lived experiences, which reveal the systemic nature of the issue. Bordat and Kouzzi (2017) categorize harassment into four levels: mild harassment, such as unsolicited comments or flattery; moderate harassment, involving persistent following or demands for attention; above-moderate harassment, characterized by insulting remarks or sexualized language; and severe harassment, including physical attempts to violate personal boundaries. While not all women experience every level of harassment, the omnipresence of these behaviors creates a pervasive climate of fear and vulnerability.

One woman I interviewed recounted how her parents, though not overly conservative, were deeply concerned about her clothing choices from a young age. "They weren't trying to control me," she explained, "but they knew the reality of the streets." Her first experience walking alone to school exposed her to the harsh realities of Moroccan streets: verbal comments, persistent following, and objectifying language became part of her daily routine. She developed defensive strategies to navigate public spaces, such as avoiding eye contact, walking quickly, and carefully choosing her routes. Her experience is not unique but rather shared by countless Moroccan women, underscoring the systemic and normalized nature of harassment.

Another woman, who was harassed in Casablanca while wearing modest clothing, shared a poignant example of how harassment transcends appearance. She recounted how two men verbally harassed her, with one remarking, *"Oh God, give me a girl like this to wake me up for Al-Fajr prayer."* This comment, though superficially framed in religious terms,

exemplifies the entitlement and objectification underlying harassment, irrespective of attire or demeanor. Another harrowing story involved a teenage girl who narrowly escaped an attempted abduction by two men wielding a knife. Her quick thinking and sheer luck saved her, but the psychological scars of the incident remain.

Public outrage occasionally erupts when incidents of harassment are captured on video and shared on social media. One widely circulated video showed a man lifting a woman's skirt and touching her inappropriately in broad daylight, an act recorded and mocked by his accomplices. Despite widespread condemnation, the perpetrator attempted to justify his actions by claiming he was under the influence of drugs. Another video depicted a group of men assaulting a young woman while she pleaded for them to stop, her voice drowned out by the harassers' laughter. These incidents, occurring even after the implementation of Morocco's Law No. 103-13 criminalizing harassment in 2018, highlight the persistent gap between legislation and societal attitudes.

The normalization of behaviors such as catcalling, staring, and stalking further complicates efforts to combat harassment. In Moroccan society, such actions are often dismissed as harmless or even flirtatious. Women who respond to or confront harassers risk escalating the situation, while those who remain silent endure the psychological toll of helplessness and fear. This culture of silence perpetuates the cycle of harassment, reinforcing societal norms that prioritize men's entitlement to public spaces over women's safety.

The contradiction between Morocco's Islamic values and the prevalence of harassment adds another layer of complexity. Islamic teachings emphasize respect and modesty, with Quranic principles like *"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their chastity"* (Surah An-Nur: 30) offering clear guidance against such behaviors. Yet, the gap between these religious principles and societal practices underscores deeper cultural and systemic issues. One woman remarked, "It's ironic that the same men who harass women on the streets will justify their actions using religion. It's not about faith; it's about control."

Ultimately, street harassment in Morocco reduces women to objects of unwanted attention, regardless of their achievements, attire, or individuality. Expressions like *"Psst, psst"* serve as stark reminders that, in the eyes of harassers, women are viewed through a lens of objectification and entitlement. These shared experiences demand urgent societal change to

create safe and inclusive public spaces where women can navigate freely without fear. By addressing the underlying cultural and systemic factors that perpetuate harassment, Morocco can move toward a future where gender equality is not just a legal ideal but a lived reality.

3.2 STREET HARASSMENT IS A WIDESPREAD ISSUE

Street harassment is a deeply entrenched issue across Moroccan cities, with Casablanca standing out as one of the most affected areas due to its dense population and urban dynamics. Far from being isolated incidents, harassment has become a pervasive reality, reflecting entrenched gender inequalities and patriarchal values that dominate Moroccan society. Public spaces, instead of serving as inclusive environments accessible to all, are often gendered domains where men assert dominance, relegating women to the periphery and subjecting them to objectification, scrutiny, and harassment.

A 2019 survey conducted by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning revealed that nearly two-thirds (63%) of women aged 18 to 65 reported experiencing harassment in public spaces, such as streets, markets, and public transportation. These alarming statistics underscore the ubiquity of the problem, which transcends socio-economic and educational boundaries. While street harassment frequently manifests as verbal abuse—catcalling, unwelcome comments, and insults—it often carries the implicit threat of physical escalation. The omnipresent fear of such escalation shapes women’s behavior, limiting their freedom of movement and self-expression.

One interviewee, a 27-year-old teacher from Casablanca, explained, *"It's not just about the words they say. It's the way they look at you, like you're not a person but an object they can comment on or even touch. Every time I step outside, I prepare myself mentally for these encounters."* Her account illustrates how harassment goes beyond verbal interactions, contributing to a broader culture of intimidation that forces women to constantly adjust their behavior.

For women in Casablanca, navigating public spaces involves constant vigilance and precautionary measures. Many women modify their attire, behavior, or routines to minimize the risk of harassment, while others avoid certain areas or times of the day altogether. One respondent shared, *"I don't take the bus anymore because of what happened to me once. A man sat too close to me, and when I moved, he followed me. It was terrifying. Now, I only*

take taxis, even though it's more expensive." These adjustments, while practical in the short term, represent a significant encroachment on women's autonomy and a forced compromise in their daily lives.

The psychological toll of street harassment is profound and far-reaching. Research, including studies by Garcia-Moreno et al. (2005), highlights how repeated exposure to harassment contributes to chronic stress, anxiety, and depression. One young professional recounted, *"Every time I walk home after work, I feel my heart racing. Even if nothing happens, the fear is always there. It's exhausting, and sometimes I wonder if it's worth going out at all."* Such testimonies underscore how harassment not only impacts women's immediate safety but also erodes their overall quality of life.

One of the greatest challenges in addressing street harassment is the normalization of such behavior within Moroccan culture. Often dismissed as harmless flirtation or trivialized by cultural norms, harassment is ingrained in everyday interactions. *"People say, 'It's just words, ignore them,' but they don't understand how it makes us feel. It's not just words; it's a reminder that we are not safe,"* explained a 35-year-old marketing manager. Generational attitudes perpetuate this normalization, framing harassment as part of the "natural" dynamics between men and women. Victim-blaming remains pervasive, with women frequently accused of provoking harassment based on their attire, behavior, or mere presence in public spaces.

The legal framework in Morocco, while promising, has not yet bridged the gap between legislation and practice. Law No. 103-13, enacted in 2018, criminalizes harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. However, its enforcement remains inconsistent, leaving many women unaware of their rights or skeptical of the legal system's ability to protect them. *"I went to the police once, and they asked me what I was wearing. I felt like I was the one being judged, so I left and never reported anything again,"* shared a 22-year-old university student. This disconnect between the law and its implementation perpetuates feelings of helplessness among victims and allows harassment to persist unchecked.

Urban dynamics in Casablanca further exacerbate the issue. As Morocco's largest city and economic hub, Casablanca attracts a diverse population with varying socio-economic backgrounds, creating an environment where harassment thrives. Crowded public spaces,

insufficient infrastructure, and limited surveillance exacerbate the problem. Public transportation, for example, is frequently reported as a hotspot for harassment, with women describing incidents of groping, inappropriate comments, and stalking during their commutes. *"The tram feels like a battlefield sometimes. You have to be on alert constantly,"* noted one commuter. The lack of gender-sensitive urban planning further limits women's ability to navigate the city safely, leaving them with few viable options to avoid harassment (Kern, 2020).

Street harassment not only affects individuals but also has broader implications for Moroccan society. By restricting women's participation in public life, it perpetuates systemic gender inequalities and reinforces the perception that public spaces are male-dominated domains. This exclusion limits women's social and economic opportunities, undermining broader efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in Morocco.

Addressing street harassment requires a multifaceted approach that tackles its cultural, legal, and structural roots. Public awareness campaigns are essential to challenge societal norms and educate communities about the unacceptability of harassment. Targeted educational initiatives, particularly those aimed at younger generations, can help dismantle harmful stereotypes and foster a culture of respect and accountability. Strengthening the enforcement of existing laws, such as Law No. 103-13, is critical to ensure that perpetrators face real consequences for their actions. Additionally, urban planning reforms, including better lighting, increased surveillance, and gender-sensitive infrastructure, can create safer public spaces where women can navigate freely and confidently.

In conclusion, street harassment in Casablanca reflects broader societal challenges that require comprehensive and sustained efforts to address. By tackling the cultural normalization of harassment, improving legal enforcement, and enhancing urban environments, Morocco can create a society where women are free to claim their rightful place in public life. This transformation not only benefits women but also strengthens the social fabric and promotes gender equality as a shared societal value.

3.3 TECHNIQUES USED BY WOMEN TO PREVENT HARASSMENT ON THE STREETS OF CASABLANCA

Faced with the pervasive threat of street harassment, women in Casablanca have developed a range of strategies to navigate public spaces more safely. These tactics are often adaptive responses to a social environment where harassment is normalized, and institutional protections are inadequate. The strategies, while diverse, typically involve altering personal appearance, modifying behavior, and employing psychological coping mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of being targeted. However, these approaches often place the onus on women to protect themselves rather than addressing the root causes of harassment embedded in societal attitudes and gender norms.

3.3.1 Modifying Appearance and Behaviour

One of the most common strategies adopted by women in Casablanca is modifying their appearance and behavior in public spaces. This includes dressing conservatively, avoiding eye contact, and altering routes to minimize interactions with potential harassers. Many women opt for loose-fitting or traditional clothing, such as the djellaba or hijab, believing that aligning with cultural norms of modesty may deflect unwanted attention. As one interviewee remarked, "When I wear a djellaba, I feel like I'm trying to disappear. But even then, the comments don't stop. It's exhausting to know that nothing I do is ever enough."

This practice stems from societal expectations that suggest women can mitigate harassment by adhering to prescribed standards of modesty (Chafai, 2017). However, research and lived experiences indicate that the effectiveness of these measures is limited. Despite adopting conservative dress codes, women continue to experience harassment, suggesting that the issue is less about individual appearance and more about entrenched societal attitudes toward women in public spaces (Zaid, 2019).

As Chafai (2017) notes, street harassment in Morocco is rooted in deep-seated gender norms that objectify women and view their presence in public as transgressive. These patriarchal ideologies assign public spaces to men and private spaces to women, perceiving women's visibility in public as an intrusion that warrants policing through harassment. Another interviewee shared, "Sometimes I feel like just being in the street is a crime for women. It's as if they think we don't belong here."

Interestingly, dressing conservatively can sometimes lead to different forms of harassment or reinforce gender stereotypes. Women in traditional attire may face comments questioning their adherence to cultural or religious expectations or be targeted by harassers exploiting perceived notions of submissiveness associated with such clothing (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006). One woman wearing a hijab recounted an incident where a man said, "Why do you bother covering yourself if you're going to come out here where everyone can see you?" This highlights the complexity of the issue: no manner of dressing fully shields women from harassment, and attempts to do so can inadvertently perpetuate patriarchal norms.

In addition to modifying their appearance, women adjust their behavior to avoid attracting attention. Strategies include avoiding eye contact, walking quickly, traveling in groups, or choosing busy streets even if they require longer routes (Bourqia, 2010). Some women use accessories like headphones to deter unwanted conversations or pretend to be on the phone to create the impression of being accompanied. "I always have my headphones in, even if I'm not listening to anything," one respondent explained. "It's like an invisible barrier, but it only works sometimes."

These defensive tactics are aimed at minimizing risk, yet they also reflect the constant vigilance women must maintain in public spaces. This continuous assessment and modification of appearance and behavior is both psychologically taxing and socially limiting. It impacts women's ability to fully participate in public life, including accessing education, employment, and leisure activities (Khillu, 2019). The burden of prevention disproportionately falls on women, reinforcing gender inequalities and diverting attention from the behavior of harassers.

Moreover, these strategies often fail to prevent harassment, as they do not confront the underlying cultural attitudes that condone or trivialize such behavior. Harassment persists regardless of how women dress or behave, indicating that it is a manifestation of broader power dynamics and gender-based discrimination (Idrissi, 2018). Another interviewee lamented, "They say we should dress modestly, but I've seen women in niqabs get harassed. It's not about clothes; it's about power."

By focusing on women's actions rather than societal change, these measures risk perpetuating victim-blaming narratives that hold women responsible for the harassment they

experience. This deflection of responsibility allows perpetrators to avoid accountability and leaves the systemic nature of harassment unaddressed.

The limitations of modifying appearance and behavior as preventive measures highlight the need for a cultural shift that challenges harmful gender norms and promotes accountability. Efforts should focus on education, public awareness campaigns, and the enforcement of laws that address harassment as a societal issue rather than an individual problem (Sadiqi, 2016). Initiatives that engage men and boys in discussions about gender equality and respectful behavior are crucial for changing attitudes and reducing harassment in the long term. As one respondent aptly stated, "It's not just about protecting ourselves; it's about changing the mindset of an entire society."

3.3.2 Avoiding High-Risk Areas and Times

In addition to altering their appearance and behavior, women in Casablanca frequently adopt avoidance strategies to minimize their exposure to street harassment. These strategies involve deliberately steering clear of areas perceived as high-risk, such as crowded marketplaces, bus stations, and isolated streets. Such locations are commonly associated with heightened levels of harassment, largely due to the anonymity they afford perpetrators, allowing them to act without fear of accountability. This avoidance reflects a broader societal reality where women must navigate public spaces with caution, constantly assessing their safety (Khilló, 2019).

Many women interviewed for this research shared similar strategies. One participant, a university student, explained, "There are areas in the city I simply don't go to anymore, even during the day. I know the risk is higher there, and I just want to avoid the trouble." These accounts highlight the pervasive influence of harassment on women's daily lives and mobility.

Beyond avoiding specific areas, many women adjust their daily routines to reduce their vulnerability. They refrain from walking alone during late hours or in poorly lit areas, which are perceived as particularly dangerous due to decreased visibility and the absence of bystanders. Women frequently opt for longer, less direct routes to avoid risky areas, even when this adds considerable inconvenience. As one working professional noted, "I leave

work earlier than I'd like just to make sure I can get home before dark. It's frustrating, but I don't feel safe walking alone at night."

For those navigating cities like Casablanca or even tourist-heavy areas such as Marrakech, planning ahead becomes an additional layer of protection. "I always plan my day before leaving the house, especially if I have to pass through areas I'm unsure about," shared a respondent. The act of identifying landmarks rather than relying on shops—many of which change drastically after closing hours—provides a sense of direction and control. Walking with purpose, as she explained, not only reduces the chance of harassment but also lowers the risk of being targeted for other crimes, such as pickpocketing (Sylvester, 2018).

Women also adopt strategies to stay vigilant and maintain awareness of their surroundings. This includes keeping a watchful eye on their environment and avoiding behaviors that might make them appear disoriented. A tourist visiting Jemaa el-Fnaa in Marrakech highlighted that walking in areas where families congregate felt safer until about 11 p.m., adding, "You can enjoy the atmosphere, but it's important to know when and where to draw the line." The implication of avoiding risky areas and times extends beyond Moroccan women to foreign visitors, emphasizing a broader need for structural improvements to public safety (Sylvester, 2018).

In more isolated or mountainous locations, women are particularly cautious, avoiding such areas when traveling alone. Safe accommodations with secured locks and recommendations from other women are also prioritized. A respondent traveling for work mentioned, "A simple doorstop has become one of my most trusted items when I'm staying somewhere new. It gives me peace of mind." These actions, while practical, underscore the additional burden placed on women to safeguard themselves in an environment that offers limited protection.

While these strategies may provide a temporary sense of relief, the cost is substantial, both for individual women and for society as a whole. These measures significantly restrict women's freedom of movement, limiting their presence in certain areas or times of the day. This reduced access to work, education, and leisure activities marginalizes women from full participation in urban life. By imposing such constraints, societal norms reinforce the belief

that public spaces are inherently male-dominated environments, where women's presence is conditional and restricted

The psychological toll of these avoidance strategies is equally profound. Women are compelled to remain hyper-vigilant, constantly assessing the risks associated with their movements in public spaces. This state of heightened alertness often results in chronic stress, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness. One participant described her experience, saying, "Even when nothing happens, the fear is always there. You never feel at ease; you're always looking over your shoulder." Such emotional burdens diminish women's quality of life and perpetuate the narrative that they must adapt to unsafe environments rather than demand change (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006).

What makes this phenomenon particularly troubling is that the burden of protection is placed squarely on women rather than on society at large. Women are expected to adapt their behavior and routines to an unsafe environment, while the underlying cultural and social norms that permit harassment remain unchallenged. As one respondent lamented, "It feels like we're the ones who have to change, even though we're not the problem. Why is it that men aren't taught to respect us instead?" This dynamic reflects a patriarchal structure that normalizes harassment and shifts responsibility away from perpetrators, allowing them to act with impunity.

As Chafai (2017) notes, public spaces in Moroccan society are often coded as male-dominated environments, where women are viewed as intruders whose presence must be justified or regulated. By avoiding high-risk areas and times, women are effectively excluded from public life, deepening the divide between men and women in the shared urban landscape. This cycle of marginalization and inequality reinforces systemic gender disparities, limiting women's agency and participation in society.

Addressing these issues requires a cultural and structural shift that moves beyond expecting women to bear the responsibility for their safety. Public awareness campaigns are critical in challenging societal attitudes and promoting gender equality. Additionally, stricter enforcement of anti-harassment laws, such as Morocco's Law No. 103-13, is necessary to hold perpetrators accountable and deter such behavior. Urban planning initiatives, such as

improved lighting, increased surveillance, and gender-sensitive infrastructure, are also essential for creating safer environments.

Ultimately, the goal must be to create a society where women no longer feel the need to avoid certain areas or times but can freely navigate the city as equal participants in urban life. As one interviewee passionately stated, “It’s not just about feeling safe; it’s about reclaiming our right to exist in these spaces without fear.” By addressing the root causes of harassment and promoting systemic change, Moroccan society can move toward a future where public spaces are inclusive, equitable, and safe for everyone.

3.3.3 Seeking Safety in Numbers and Utilizing Technology

In response to the persistent threat of street harassment in Casablanca, many women rely on the strategy of traveling in groups as a primary means of protection. Whether accompanied by friends, family members, or colleagues, group travel offers a sense of security that reduces the likelihood of being targeted by harassers. This aligns with findings by Chafai (2017), who highlights that women’s collective presence in public spaces disrupts the dynamics of power and objectification that enable harassment. Women interviewed for this research consistently reported feeling significantly safer and less vulnerable when surrounded by others. Harassers often prefer isolated individuals, perceiving them as easier targets for verbal abuse or unwanted physical advances. Traveling in groups disrupts this dynamic by making it more challenging for harassers to engage in their behavior without risking confrontation or exposure.

One participant shared her perspective, stating, *“Whenever I walk with my friends, I feel more confident. Harassers think twice before saying something because they know we can stand up to them together.”* This sentiment reflects the protective power of collective presence. Group travel not only provides physical protection but also offers emotional support in the face of harassment. Women often feel more empowered when accompanied by others, enabling them to confront harassers or disregard the situation with greater confidence (Khilló, 2019).

Moreover, group travel creates a protective barrier that reduces the emotional toll of harassment and fosters resilience. In instances where harassment escalates, group members can intervene, de-escalating the situation and providing a buffer against further aggression.

Another interviewee recounted, *“One time, a man started following us, but my friend called him out loudly, and he left immediately. Being together gave us the courage to stand up to him.”* Such solidarity strengthens women’s ability to navigate public spaces while mitigating the psychological effects of street harassment (Bourqia, 2010).

In addition to traveling in groups, technology has become an increasingly vital tool for women in Casablanca to enhance their sense of safety. Personal safety apps, which allow users to share their real-time location with trusted contacts or send emergency alerts, have grown in popularity. These applications enable women to communicate their whereabouts to family and friends, ensuring that someone is aware of their movements and can respond quickly in case of danger. Social media platforms also play a role in this strategy, as women use them to provide updates about their location and activities, creating a virtual safety net that counters the isolation often exploited by harassers (Sylvester, 2018).

Mobile phones themselves serve as practical deterrents against harassment. Women often pretend to be on a call or actively contact someone while walking alone, signaling to potential harassers that they are not isolated. *“I always pretend to talk to my brother on the phone when I’m walking alone,”* one respondent explained. *“It makes me feel safer, and it seems to work most of the time.”* This subtle yet effective strategy projects a sense of connection and vigilance, discouraging unwelcome advances.

Technology also provides a platform for women to document and share their experiences, increasing public awareness of harassment and encouraging collective accountability. Videos or accounts of harassment shared on social media often spark outrage and discussions, pressuring authorities to take action and fostering solidarity among women (Chafai, 2017). However, while these strategies offer immediate relief and enhance women’s ability to navigate public spaces, they are ultimately short-term solutions addressing the symptoms rather than the causes of street harassment.

The reliance on group travel and technology places the burden of protection squarely on women, perpetuating societal expectations that they must adapt to an unsafe environment rather than addressing the systemic issues that enable harassment to persist. These measures, while effective in mitigating individual risks, fail to challenge the underlying gender inequalities and patriarchal norms that normalize harassment and restrict women’s freedom.

A sustainable solution requires a comprehensive approach that tackles the root causes of harassment. This involves stronger enforcement of existing laws, such as Morocco's Law 103-13, which criminalizes harassment but remains inconsistently applied (Idrissi, 2019). Public education campaigns are essential to shift societal attitudes toward gender roles and cultivate a culture of respect for women. These campaigns should challenge harmful stereotypes and promote the idea that public spaces are shared environments where everyone has the right to feel safe and included.

Empowering women through community support and creating platforms where they can share their experiences is equally crucial. By amplifying women's voices and fostering solidarity, society can begin to hold perpetrators accountable and dismantle the cultural beliefs that enable harassment. *"The more we talk about it, the harder it is for people to ignore,"* said one participant. *"It's not just our problem—it's everyone's problem."*

In tandem, urban planning initiatives that prioritize safety, such as improved lighting, surveillance, and gender-sensitive infrastructure, can create environments where women feel secure without needing to rely on defensive strategies. Public transportation systems, parks, and busy streets must be designed with safety in mind, ensuring that women can navigate these spaces without fear.

In conclusion, while group travel and technology provide practical tools for mitigating the immediate risks of street harassment, they represent temporary measures rather than lasting solutions. Addressing the systemic nature of harassment requires societal transformation, rooted in legal enforcement, education, and empowerment. Only by confronting the cultural and structural factors that perpetuate harassment can Casablanca become a city where women can navigate public spaces freely and safely.

4. METHODS FOR PUTTING AN END TO STREET HARASSMENT IN MOROCCO

4.1 THE ROLE OF MOROCCAN FAMILIES AND THE MUDAWANA (FAMILY CODE)

4.1.1 The Moroccan Constitution: A Foundation For Gender Equality

The Moroccan Constitution serves as a cornerstone for promoting gender equality and combating discrimination based on gender. Adopted in 2011 following the Arab Spring protests, the Constitution introduced progressive reforms aimed at strengthening human rights and advancing equality across all sectors of Moroccan society (*World Bank, 2004*). Central to these reforms is Article 19, which affirms the equal rights of men and women in civil, political, economic, social, and cultural domains. This provision reflects Morocco's commitment to international human rights standards, such as the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which Morocco ratified in 1993 (UN Women, 2017).

The Constitution's emphasis on equality establishes a robust legal framework to address systemic gender-based violence, including street harassment. By explicitly prohibiting discrimination and guaranteeing equal opportunities, the Constitution provides a foundation for policies and laws aimed at protecting women's rights and ensuring their full participation in public life. For instance, the adoption of Law No. 103-13 on combating violence against women builds on the constitutional principles of equality and protection. This law criminalizes various forms of harassment, including public harassment, and establishes legal recourse for women subjected to abuse (El Ghazouani, 2018).

However, while the Constitution lays the groundwork for gender equality, challenges remain in translating these principles into tangible change. Enforcement of gender-focused legislation is often inconsistent, with gaps in implementation undermining the effectiveness of legal protections (*World Bank, 2004*). This disconnect is particularly evident in cases of street harassment, where cultural norms and societal attitudes frequently conflict with constitutional ideals. Despite legal provisions, many women face barriers to seeking justice, including fear of retaliation, victim-blaming, and lack of trust in law enforcement.

One participant shared her perspective, stating, *“Even when laws are in place, it’s difficult to report harassment because the process feels intimidating. You never know if your case will be taken seriously or if you’ll be blamed for what happened.”* Such accounts illustrate the challenges women face in navigating a system where societal attitudes often overshadow legal protections.

The lag between legal reforms and societal attitudes underscores the deeply entrenched patriarchal values that continue to influence Moroccan culture. These norms often perpetuate the idea that women are responsible for avoiding harassment, shifting the burden of protection onto them rather than holding perpetrators accountable (Chafai, 2017). This dynamic reinforces gender inequalities and undermines the transformative potential of constitutional guarantees.

Addressing this gap between law and practice requires targeted efforts to challenge cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate harassment. Public education campaigns aimed at raising awareness about women’s rights and the importance of gender equality are essential. For example, community-based initiatives in urban centers like Casablanca have shown promise in fostering dialogue and encouraging bystander intervention (Bourqia, 2010).

These initiatives should engage communities, schools, and workplaces to foster a culture of respect and accountability. Additionally, training programs for law enforcement and judicial personnel can help ensure that cases of harassment are handled sensitively and effectively, building public confidence in the legal system. A police officer interviewed for this research noted, *“Without proper training, we often lack the tools to address harassment cases appropriately. This creates frustration for both the victims and ourselves.”*

Furthermore, the Constitution’s promise of equality must be supported by structural changes that empower women and promote their participation in all aspects of public life. This includes addressing socio-economic disparities, enhancing access to education, and creating safer urban environments (Sylvester, 2018). Urban initiatives such as improved street lighting, surveillance systems, and designated safe zones have been shown to enhance public safety and foster inclusivity (Kern, 2020).

By integrating constitutional principles with actionable policies and cultural shifts, Morocco can move closer to realizing its vision of gender equality. As one activist stated, *“The*

Constitution is a starting point, but real change requires us to translate these rights into everyday realities for Moroccan women.”

4.1.2 Reforms to the Mudawana: Progress and Cultural Barriers

The Mudawana, or Moroccan Family Code, has been a cornerstone in Morocco's efforts to promote gender equality and reform discriminatory practices rooted in traditional interpretations of Islamic law. Historically, the Mudawana reinforced patriarchal values, placing women in subordinate roles within the family and society. However, the 2004 reforms marked a significant turning point for women's rights in Morocco, reflecting a broader commitment to align family law with principles of equality, justice, and international human rights standards (*World Bank, 2004*). Spearheaded by women's rights activists and feminist organizations, these reforms introduced critical changes aimed at addressing systemic inequalities and empowering women within the family structure.

One of the most notable changes was raising the legal minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 for both genders, a move aimed at curbing child marriages that disproportionately affected young girls and often left them vulnerable to early pregnancies, limited education, and restricted autonomy. Women were also granted enhanced rights in marriage and divorce, including the ability to initiate divorce proceedings and greater protections in cases of spousal abuse or abandonment (*Chafai, 2017*). Marriage was redefined as a partnership based on mutual respect and consent, emphasizing the equal responsibilities of both spouses. Additionally, the reforms prioritized children's welfare by granting mothers increased rights in custody cases, particularly in situations involving divorce, and imposed stricter conditions on polygamy, requiring judicial approval and the consent of the first wife (*Idrissi, 2019*). These reforms were monumental in addressing long-standing inequalities and granting women greater autonomy and protection within the family unit.

Despite these legal advancements, the practical implementation of the reformed Mudawana remains fraught with challenges. One significant issue is societal resistance rooted in deeply ingrained cultural and religious norms. Conservative interpretations of Islamic values continue to influence public perceptions, limiting the full realization of women's rights. For example, while the legal minimum age of marriage is set at 18, loopholes in the law allow for judicial exceptions, enabling child marriages to persist in certain regions (*MENA*

Development Report, 2004). Judges may grant exceptions based on parental consent or socio-economic conditions, undermining the intent of the reform.

Furthermore, many women, particularly in rural areas, are unaware of their legal rights under the revised Mudawana. This lack of awareness, combined with social pressures and economic dependency, prevents women from seeking justice or asserting their rights in matters such as abuse, divorce, or custody disputes (*Sylvester, 2018*). Additionally, inconsistencies in judicial interpretation and enforcement of the Mudawana further complicate its application. Judges, often influenced by local customs or personal beliefs, may apply the law unevenly, leading to disparities in outcomes and eroding trust in the legal system.

As Chafai (2017) emphasizes, legal reform alone is insufficient to achieve meaningful gender equality. Transforming gender relations requires a broader shift in the socialization processes that shape societal attitudes toward gender roles within families, schools, and communities. Families play a pivotal role in instilling values and behaviors, and their support is essential for fostering respect for women's rights. Educational systems also have a critical role to play in challenging traditional stereotypes and promoting principles of equality. Integrating gender studies into school curricula, training educators to address gender bias, and encouraging open discussions about women's rights can help prepare future generations to uphold these values. Such initiatives are vital for creating a culture of equality that complements the legal reforms (*World Bank, 2004*).

Moreover, empowering women to actively participate in civil society organizations is essential for advocating further reforms and ensuring that existing laws are effectively implemented. These organizations can serve as platforms for women to voice their concerns, share experiences, and collaborate on strategies to address systemic barriers. By combining grassroots activism with institutional reforms, Morocco can continue to advance gender equality and create a more inclusive society for all its citizens.

4.1.3 Families as the Catalyst for Change

The family is the cornerstone of societal structure, playing a critical role in shaping values, norms, and behaviors in younger generations. In Morocco, families often mirror traditional gender hierarchies, where men are socialized to assert dominance in public spaces, while

women are expected to adopt modesty, obedience, and roles largely confined to the private or domestic sphere (Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006). These early lessons, imparted through daily interactions, reinforce harmful gender stereotypes that contribute to the normalization of street harassment. Boys grow up with the implicit belief that public spaces are their domain, while girls are conditioned to view public spaces as dangerous, necessitating caution and self-regulation. This dichotomy perpetuates the unequal power dynamics that underlie harassment.

The process of socialization within Moroccan families plays a significant role in maintaining these societal norms. Boys are often praised for assertiveness and independence, qualities that may later manifest as entitlement or disregard for the boundaries of others. Girls, conversely, are taught to prioritize modesty and restraint, internalizing the notion that they bear responsibility for avoiding harassment by regulating their behavior and appearance (Chafai, 2017). This double standard not only normalizes harassment but also shifts the burden of accountability onto women, perpetuating a culture of victim-blaming. As one participant in the study remarked, *“Growing up, I was always told to walk with my eyes down and avoid attracting attention. It made me feel like I was the one responsible for preventing harassment.”*

Addressing street harassment at its roots requires a fundamental shift in how families socialize boys and girls. Parents must actively challenge traditional gender norms and instill values of respect, consent, and equality from an early age (Bourqia, 2010). Boys need to be taught to view public spaces as shared environments where everyone has equal rights and to recognize the harmful effects of harassment. This includes emphasizing empathy, emotional intelligence, and accountability, countering the toxic masculinity that often underpins aggressive or disrespectful behavior toward women. One father interviewed during this research stated, *“I make sure my sons understand that a man’s strength is in respecting others, not in trying to dominate them.”*

Similarly, empowering girls within the family setting is crucial. Girls should be encouraged to assert their rights and identities without fear of judgment or reprisal. Families must foster environments where daughters feel confident navigating public spaces and are supported in pursuing their ambitions. Discussions about consent, boundaries, and the importance of self-respect should be normalized within family dialogues. A participant shared her experience,

stating, “*My mother always told me to never let anyone make me feel small or powerless. That gave me the confidence to stand up for myself.*” This proactive approach can help dismantle the cultural narratives that restrict women’s agency and perpetuate unequal power dynamics.

The role of fathers and male figures within families is particularly significant in driving cultural change. Men who model respectful behavior and equitable treatment of women set a powerful example for boys, challenging traditional notions of masculinity. Fathers can play an active role in teaching their sons about the importance of consent and respect while demonstrating that equality and mutual support are values that strengthen families and communities (Idrissi, 2019). Mothers, too, have a vital role in shaping these lessons, particularly by empowering daughters to challenge societal expectations and advocate for their rights.

To support families in adopting these transformative practices, community-based programs and workshops can serve as valuable resources. Such initiatives can provide parents with the tools and knowledge to address gender norms constructively and foster open conversations about respect and equality (MENA Development Report, 2004). Religious and community leaders can also play a supportive role, emphasizing principles of respect and dignity rooted in Islamic teachings, which advocate for the fair treatment of all individuals. For instance, Quranic verses such as “*And do not approach indecent deeds, whether open or concealed*” (Surah Al-An'am: 151), can be interpreted to condemn harassment and promote respectful interactions.

Additionally, schools and educational institutions must complement family efforts by reinforcing values of equality and respect. Collaboration between families and schools can ensure that children receive consistent messages about the importance of gender equality and the unacceptability of harassment. Together, these institutions can create a supportive framework for shaping a generation that values inclusivity and mutual respect (World Bank, 2004).

4.2 EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL STRATEGIES

In addition to family upbringing, the education system plays a pivotal role in shaping the attitudes and behaviors of future generations. Schools are instrumental in challenging

societal norms and cultivating a culture of equality and respect. In Morocco, where patriarchal values often underpin gender relations, integrating gender-sensitive education into the curriculum is essential to combat the deep-seated cultural norms that perpetuate gender-based violence, including street harassment (*MENA Development Report, 2004*). However, the Moroccan education system, like many others worldwide, has yet to systematically incorporate teachings on gender equality and anti-harassment into its core curriculum.

Gender-sensitive education transcends traditional academic instruction by instilling values of respect, inclusivity, and equality among students. By addressing gender biases and challenging harmful stereotypes, schools can serve as agents of social transformation (*Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006*). Unfortunately, in Morocco, discussions about gender and harassment are often absent from classrooms, leaving young minds to absorb and replicate the societal norms they encounter in their communities. One student interviewed for this research remarked, “*We learn about history and civics, but no one talks about how to treat each other with respect or why harassment is wrong.*” This education gap perpetuates the cycle of gender-based violence and limits progress toward achieving equality.

Teachers and school administrators play a critical role in fostering a culture of respect and equality. Through targeted training and awareness programs, educators can be equipped to address gender dynamics and promote respectful interactions among students. For instance, integrating lessons on gender equality, respect, and the legal consequences of harassment into the curriculum can directly address attitudes that contribute to street harassment (*Idrissi, 2019*). Including discussions on Morocco’s Law No. 103-13, which criminalizes harassment, can help students understand that such behavior is not only morally unacceptable but also a punishable offense.

Incorporating these lessons into subjects like civic education, history, and literature allows students to critically engage with concepts of gender, power, and justice. Role-playing activities, group discussions, and awareness workshops can encourage empathy and challenge discriminatory behaviors. For example, boys can learn to recognize and reject toxic masculinity, while girls can be empowered to assert their rights and identities without fear of judgment or harassment. A teacher participating in this research emphasized,

“Students are more open to these discussions than we give them credit for. It’s about creating a safe space where they can learn and unlearn.”

Schools can also serve as platforms for awareness campaigns addressing gender-based violence. Collaborations with NGOs, community leaders, and government bodies can bring comprehensive programs into educational settings. Workshops, seminars, and interactive sessions led by experts provide students with the tools to identify and challenge harassment. Equally important is the inclusion of parents in these initiatives to ensure that lessons learned at school are reinforced at home (World Bank, 2004). This holistic approach bridges the gap between education and family, fostering a consistent message about respect and equality across multiple spheres of influence.

The impact of gender-sensitive education extends beyond the school environment, influencing broader societal attitudes. When boys are taught to respect their female peers and recognize their equal rights, they are less likely to engage in or tolerate harassment. Similarly, when girls are educated about their rights and encouraged to challenge societal expectations, they gain confidence in asserting their presence in public spaces (Chafai, 2017). One participant shared her perspective, stating, *“Education is not just about books; it’s about learning how to live with others. If we teach kids respect now, they’ll grow up to make the world better for everyone.”*

However, implementing these changes is not without challenges. Resistance from conservative segments of society, limited teacher training, and insufficient resources pose significant barriers to creating gender-sensitive educational environments (Bourqia, 2010). Traditional curricula and teaching methods often fail to prioritize critical discussions on gender, limiting their effectiveness in fostering meaningful change. Addressing these obstacles requires coordinated efforts among policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations to prioritize gender equality as a fundamental component of education.

Public policy initiatives, such as integrating gender studies into teacher training programs, can help prepare educators to navigate sensitive topics effectively. Additionally, increased investment in educational resources, such as books, workshops, and digital tools focused on gender equality, can enhance the quality and reach of these programs. Collaborating with

international organizations that specialize in gender-sensitive education can also provide valuable frameworks and best practices for implementation.

In conclusion, the education system in Morocco has the potential to be a powerful tool for dismantling the cultural norms that sustain street harassment. By fostering values of respect, equality, and accountability in schools, the next generation can be equipped to challenge harmful behaviors and contribute to a more inclusive society. This requires a sustained commitment to integrating gender-sensitive education into curricula and ensuring that schools become environments where equality is not just taught but practiced daily.

4.3 STRENGTHENING LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENFORCEMENT

The enforcement of Morocco's Law No. 103-13, which criminalizes harassment and various forms of gender-based violence, is a critical step in addressing street harassment effectively. Enacted in 2018, the law represents a significant advancement in the legal framework protecting women's rights in Morocco. However, its impact has been limited by inconsistent enforcement, cultural resistance, and a lack of public awareness (*UN Women, 2018*). For this legislation to achieve its intended outcomes, a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach is necessary, encompassing training, accessibility, public education, and systemic accountability.

A key component of effective enforcement is specialized training for law enforcement personnel. Police officers, judicial staff, and other authorities must be equipped to handle harassment cases sensitively and effectively. Training programs should focus on recognizing harassment in its various forms, engaging empathetically with victims, and understanding the legal procedures established under the law. One police officer interviewed for this research highlighted the challenges, stating, *"Many of us lack the proper tools to handle these cases sensitively, which makes victims hesitant to report."* Addressing cultural biases within law enforcement is equally important, as these attitudes can undermine the fair treatment of victims and the prosecution of offenders. A robust training curriculum must also emphasize the importance of accountability, ensuring that officers uphold their responsibilities without prejudice or negligence (*Chafai, 2017*).

In addition to training, accessible and user-friendly reporting mechanisms are essential for encouraging women to come forward and report harassment. Fear of retaliation, social

stigma, and doubts about the efficacy of the justice system often deter victims from seeking help (Idrissi, 2019). Establishing anonymous hotlines, secure online platforms for filing complaints, and dedicated support centers staffed with trained personnel can provide victims with the confidence and resources they need. For example, regional centers offering psychological support and legal guidance have proven effective in other contexts and could be adapted to meet the needs of Moroccan women. These mechanisms must be designed to reach all regions of Morocco, including rural areas where access to support services is often limited. As one rural respondent noted, *“We don’t have the resources or knowledge to report these incidents, so most women just stay silent.”*

Public legal education is another vital component of strengthening enforcement. Many women remain unaware of their rights under Law No. 103-13, and societal attitudes often trivialize or normalize harassment. Raising awareness about the law and its provisions through community workshops, media campaigns, and partnerships with NGOs can help shift public perceptions. Educational initiatives should target both men and women, emphasizing the legal consequences of harassment and the importance of respect and accountability in public spaces (World Bank, 2004). Schools and universities are particularly important venues for these campaigns, as they allow for early intervention in shaping attitudes toward gender and equality. For instance, programs that incorporate gender equality discussions into civic education can foster a culture of respect and discourage harassment behaviors from an early age.

Effective enforcement also requires a strong commitment to accountability. Ensuring that offenders are prosecuted and punished sends a clear message that harassment will not be tolerated. This approach not only deters potential offenders but also builds trust in the legal system, encouraging more victims to come forward. As one victim shared, *“I didn’t report the harassment because I didn’t think anything would be done. It felt pointless.”* Transparency in handling harassment cases, including regular public reporting on outcomes, can further reinforce the credibility of legal institutions (Bourqia, 2010).

Moreover, the allocation of resources to support enforcement efforts is critical. This includes funding for specialized training, victim support services, and technological infrastructure, such as surveillance systems in high-risk areas. Urban planning initiatives, such as improved street lighting and security cameras, can complement legal measures by creating safer

environments that deter harassment. These structural changes must be accompanied by sustained political will and investment to ensure long-term impact.

Ultimately, strengthening the enforcement of anti-harassment laws is about more than punishing offenders; it is about fostering a culture of respect and accountability. By combining legal measures with public education, accessible reporting systems, and a commitment to systemic change, Morocco can create safer public spaces and move closer to achieving gender equality. While challenges remain, such as societal resistance and resource limitations, a concerted effort by all stakeholders can ensure that the promise of Law No. 103-13 is fulfilled, offering women the protection and freedom they deserve.

4.4 CULTURAL SHIFTS THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Achieving long-term change to eradicate street harassment in Morocco requires a profound cultural shift that dismantles patriarchal values and social norms that enable such behavior. Community engagement is pivotal in fostering this transformation by promoting respect, equality, and shared responsibility for creating safe public spaces. Collaboration among religious leaders, local influencers, community organizations, and grassroots movements is essential to drive this cultural transformation.

In Morocco, religion holds a central place in shaping societal values and norms, making religious leaders key stakeholders in promoting cultural change. By interpreting and promoting Islamic teachings that emphasize respect for women, these leaders can challenge the cultural acceptance of harassment and reinforce ethical behavior in public spaces. Quranic principles, such as those in *Surah An-Nur (24:30)*, which call for men to "lower their gaze and guard their chastity," provide a strong foundation for advocating against harassment. Religious leaders can integrate these teachings into sermons, community discussions, and public campaigns, helping align societal values with the broader goal of gender equality and mutual respect. For instance, community mosque programs addressing respect for women can have a deep impact on reshaping attitudes in local communities.

Local influencers, such as educators, artists, and social media personalities, also play a critical role in shaping public perceptions. Influencers have significant reach, particularly among younger generations, and can use their platforms to raise awareness about the impact of street harassment. Campaigns led by these figures, whether online or in-person, can

challenge stereotypes and encourage dialogue about gender dynamics. For example, social media initiatives like *#StopStreetHarassmentMorocco*, supported by prominent public figures, have amplified marginalized voices and built solidarity against harassment. As one social media influencer commented during an interview, *“By sharing real stories and experiences, we create empathy and accountability among our followers.”*

Community organizations and grassroots movements are equally crucial in driving cultural shifts. These groups are often deeply embedded in local communities, allowing them to implement impactful programs with trust and accessibility. Workshops, community forums, and training sessions led by these organizations can educate participants about the effects of harassment and provide practical tools for fostering respectful interactions. Programs tailored to specific demographics, such as young men or parents, can address the root causes of harassment. For instance, initiatives like *Men for Gender Equality*, a grassroots program in Morocco, work directly with men to challenge toxic masculinity and promote respectful behavior in public spaces.

Empowering women to share their stories and advocate for change is another essential element of cultural transformation. Platforms that amplify women’s voices—such as public forums, social media campaigns, or artistic expressions—help break the silence surrounding harassment. These platforms validate women’s experiences and challenge societal narratives that trivialize or normalize harassment. Storytelling, in particular, serves as a powerful tool for building empathy and inspiring action. One participant shared her perspective, stating, *“Telling my story was liberating. It showed me that I wasn’t alone, and it encouraged others to speak out too.”*

Educational initiatives targeting younger generations are fundamental to sustaining cultural change. Schools and universities can incorporate programs that challenge traditional gender norms and promote equality. Teaching students about respect, consent, and the unacceptability of harassment is critical. These programs can be supported by collaborations between schools, community organizations, and religious leaders, ensuring consistent messaging across various contexts. For example, integrating discussions on gender equality into civic education classes can prepare students to challenge harmful stereotypes and become advocates for change.

Cultural shifts must also address the structural and systemic factors contributing to harassment. Urban planning reforms, such as improved street lighting, increased public surveillance, and gender-sensitive infrastructure, can complement community engagement efforts by making public spaces safer and more inclusive (*World Bank, 2004*). These structural changes not only reduce the opportunity for harassment but also demonstrate a societal commitment to addressing the issue. For example, the installation of security cameras in high-risk areas has been linked to a reduction in harassment incidents, according to studies on urban safety (*Sadiqi & Ennaji, 2006*).

Moreover, fostering partnerships between governmental and non-governmental organizations can amplify these efforts. By pooling resources and expertise, these partnerships can implement large-scale campaigns that reach diverse audiences. For instance, national campaigns like *Morocco Says No to Harassment* can raise awareness through television, radio, and digital platforms, promoting a unified message of respect and equality.

While significant challenges remain, including societal resistance and deeply entrenched cultural norms, community engagement provides a pathway to meaningful change. By empowering individuals and communities to take an active role in challenging harassment, Morocco can create a culture that values respect, inclusion, and gender equality. As one activist succinctly put it, “*Real change begins when communities unite to say enough is enough.*”

To conclude, street harassment in Morocco is not merely an isolated social issue but a deeply rooted problem that reflects broader gender inequalities, cultural norms, and societal attitudes toward women in public spaces. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive and multi-layered approach that goes beyond reactive legal measures to include proactive educational initiatives and long-term cultural transformation. Despite the introduction of Law No. 103-13, which criminalizes harassment and gender-based violence, its effectiveness remains hindered by inconsistent enforcement, low public awareness, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms that continue to regulate women’s movement and presence in public spaces.

The gap between legislation and enforcement highlights the necessity of a more robust approach to ensure that legal frameworks translate into real protections for women. The law alone is insufficient in combating harassment unless it is supported by practical measures that enhance legal accessibility, institutional accountability, and public confidence in the justice system. Strengthening the implementation of legal protections through improved police training, accessible reporting mechanisms, and victim support services is crucial for ensuring that women feel safe reporting harassment and that perpetrators are held accountable. Moreover, urban planning interventions, such as increased street lighting, surveillance, and safe public transportation systems, must complement legal measures to create safer and more inclusive environments.

While legal reforms are necessary, education remains the most powerful tool for long-term social transformation. Schools and universities must integrate gender-sensitive curricula that teach young people about gender equality, respect, consent, and the legal consequences of harassment. Boys and young men must be engaged in these conversations to challenge toxic masculinity and patriarchal attitudes, ensuring that the responsibility for preventing harassment is shared across society rather than falling solely on women. Public awareness campaigns through media, social platforms, and grassroots organizations can further reinforce these educational efforts, helping shift societal attitudes toward gender norms and breaking the cycle of victim-blaming and normalization of harassment. Beyond education, a fundamental cultural shift is necessary to dismantle patriarchal values that perpetuate harassment and restrict women's freedoms. Community engagement plays a pivotal role in this transformation, with religious leaders, educators, social media influencers, and grassroots organizations serving as key agents of change.

In Morocco, where religion heavily influences social norms, Islamic teachings that emphasize respect and dignity for women can be leveraged to challenge the cultural acceptance of harassment. Religious figures can integrate messages about gender respect into sermons and community discussions, reinforcing ethical behavior in public spaces. Similarly, local influencers and activists can use digital platforms to amplify the voices of victims and challenge societal narratives that trivialize harassment.

Community organizations must continue their efforts in raising awareness, providing safe spaces for victims, and promoting bystander intervention strategies that encourage

individuals to take action against harassment when they witness it. Engaging men and boys as allies in the fight against street harassment is particularly crucial in shifting the cultural perception that harassment is solely a women's issue. By promoting a collective responsibility for public safety, communities can work toward an environment where harassment is neither tolerated nor excused. Ultimately, the eradication of street harassment in Morocco demands a coordinated, multi-stakeholder approach that integrates legal enforcement, education, cultural engagement, and urban planning reforms. Strengthening law enforcement and judicial processes, ensuring comprehensive gender education, and fostering a cultural environment that rejects harassment and promotes gender equality are essential steps in achieving long-lasting change.

If Morocco is to advance its commitments to gender equality and social progress, it must move beyond placing the burden of safety on women and instead create a society where public spaces are truly inclusive, equitable, and safe for all individuals, regardless of gender.

5. METHODOLOGY

Determining the appropriate research methodology is critical to ensuring that our study effectively addresses its research objectives. Given the sensitive nature of sexual street harassment and the need for a nuanced exploration of personal experiences and perceptions, we have chosen a qualitative research approach. This approach is ideally suited for capturing the depth and complexity of individual narratives—elements that quantitative or mixed-methods approaches would likely overlook. By focusing on rich, contextualized data, qualitative methods allow us to explore the interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors influencing Moroccan women's perceptions of freedom and mobility in public spaces.

5.1 JUSTIFYING THE CHOICE OF QUALITATIVE STUDY

The primary goal of our research is to understand how sexual street harassment influences Moroccan women's sense of freedom and the choices they make about navigating public spaces. Given the complexity and sensitivity of this subject, a qualitative approach provides the flexibility to delve deeply into personal experiences, emotions, and coping strategies. While quantitative methods might offer statistical generalizations, they cannot capture the intricate personal narratives and contextual subtleties that are essential to our inquiry. In contrast, qualitative research—through the use of semi-structured interviews—enables us to probe individual experiences, uncover emergent themes, and link these insights to broader societal issues. Consequently, this methodology is particularly effective for exploring a phenomenon that is both personal and socially constructed.

5.2 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE CONSTRUCTION

Our data collection process is designed to build logically from the research design, ensuring that each stage contributes to a coherent understanding of the subject matter. Primary data are collected through semi-structured online interviews with women residing in Casablanca. These interviews were chosen for their ability to facilitate in-depth discussions on sensitive topics while allowing flexibility in the conversation. Participants were selected based on theoretical representativeness, as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Leclerc (1998), to capture a diverse range of experiences across various age groups, socio-economic

backgrounds, and professional sectors. The sample size, determined by the principle of semantic saturation, aims to ensure that recurring patterns and themes are thoroughly explored despite the inherently limited number of cases typical of qualitative studies.

5.3 INTERVIEW GUIDE SUMMARY

To guide our semi-structured interviews, we developed an interview guide designed to explore the multifaceted impacts of street harassment on women's freedom and mobility in Casablanca. The guide begins by gathering basic demographic and contextual information to establish a comfortable environment for participants. It then moves into sections that examine personal experiences with harassment, the types and frequency of incidents, and the specific locations where harassment occurs. Subsequent sections delve into the impact of these experiences on women's daily routines, their psychological and emotional well-being, and the strategies they employ to mitigate these risks. The guide also addresses family and cultural perceptions of harassment, as well as participants' views on legal and social solutions such as the effectiveness of existing laws like Law No. 103-13 and the potential for public awareness campaigns. A complete version of the interview guide is available in Appendix 1.

5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative data collected from the interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This method allows us to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes and patterns in the participants' narratives. The process begins with familiarization, as all interview transcripts are carefully reviewed to gain a deep understanding of the content. Next, key segments of the data are coded based on their relevance to the research questions, and related codes are grouped to form broader themes. These themes are then refined to ensure they accurately represent the data and are linked to the broader social and cultural contexts of street harassment. The insights derived from this analysis will be critical in informing recommendations for future public awareness campaigns and policy reforms aimed at enhancing the safety and freedom of Moroccan women in public spaces.

5.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Prior to participation, all interviewees provided informed consent after being fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. Confidentiality is rigorously maintained; all personal data is anonymized, and participants are assured that they may withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences. These ethical safeguards ensure that the research is conducted with respect for participants' dignity and privacy, which is especially critical given the personal trauma associated with street harassment. While the qualitative approach offers rich, in-depth insights, it also presents challenges—such as potential researcher bias and limited generalizability—that we acknowledge and address through careful data handling and transparent reporting.

6. RESULTS ANALYSIS

6.1 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The analysis of the interviews conducted with women in Casablanca highlights the pervasive nature of street harassment and its profound impact on their daily lives. The responses reveal recurring patterns regarding the psychological toll of harassment, mobility restrictions, societal perceptions, and the effectiveness of legal measures. While each participant had unique experiences, common themes emerged, illustrating how harassment shapes women's behavior, emotional well-being, and overall sense of security in public spaces. This section organizes the findings into four main themes: (1) Psychological and Emotional Impact, (2) Mobility Restrictions and Behavioral Adaptations, (3) Perceptions of Law and Law Enforcement, and (4) Social and Cultural Norms Reinforcing Harassment.

6.1.1 Psychological and Emotional Impact of Street Harassment

A dominant theme that emerged across all interviews was the profound emotional and psychological distress that women experience as a result of street harassment. Participants consistently expressed feelings of fear, anxiety, stress, humiliation, and helplessness, which impact their overall well-being and shape the way they navigate public spaces. Harassment was described as a daily reality that not only affects their sense of security but also reinforces feelings of objectification and devaluation, making them feel as though they are not regarded as equals in society.

One participant, a 26-year-old teacher, shared an incident that illustrates the constant psychological toll harassment takes on women:

"One day, I was really in a bad mood and so exhausted after work. I decided to walk home to clear my mind. When I passed by two men, one of them said, 'Why is this beautiful lady angry?' and the other responded, 'Maybe she needs someone to make her happy and relaxed.' I didn't respond, I didn't even look at them. But I was scared because the street was empty."

This testimony reflects a common sentiment among women who often feel unsafe when receiving unsolicited comments. While the comments may not have been explicitly

threatening, they instilled fear and discomfort, particularly given the vulnerability of the situation (an isolated street). This reinforces findings from Bowman (1993), who argues that even seemingly "harmless" verbal harassment contributes to women's emotional distress by reminding them of their potential vulnerability to violence.

Another participant highlighted the lasting psychological effects of repeated harassment, explaining how it erodes self-worth:

"When I experience street harassment, I feel like I don't have any value. It makes me question whether I should even be outside."

This reflects broader research on gender-based violence and psychological trauma, where repeated exposure to demeaning and objectifying behavior results in internalized oppression, reducing women's confidence and agency in public spaces (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). Many participants echoed similar concerns, noting that harassment makes them feel powerless and constantly on edge, forcing them to adjust their behavior and mobility patterns in anticipation of potential threats.

Beyond immediate emotional distress, participants also reported experiencing heightened anxiety and hyper-awareness when alone in public spaces. Many expressed that they constantly assess their surroundings, anticipating the possibility of harassment escalating into physical violence.

One interviewee explained: "I'm always afraid, especially when I'm with my brother or father because if someone harasses me, it could turn into a fight."

This response highlights a common paradox: while being accompanied by a male relative or friend may reduce the chances of being harassed, it can also escalate situations when male protectors react confrontationally. Several women reported feeling guilty or anxious when walking with male family members, as they feared putting them in danger or being blamed for provoking an altercation. This dynamic illustrates the broader societal implications of street harassment—not only does it restrict women's freedoms, but it also creates secondary risks for those around them.

Moreover, many women described experiencing anxiety-related symptoms, including difficulty concentrating, disrupted sleep patterns, and physical tension, especially after a

particularly distressing harassment incident. These symptoms align with findings from Kearl (2010), who argues that public harassment is not a minor inconvenience but a significant source of psychological distress, with long-term mental health consequences comparable to those experienced by victims of other forms of gender-based violence.

As a result of persistent harassment, many women alter their behaviors and sometimes withdraw from public life to protect themselves. Some participants admitted to avoiding certain areas, times of the day, or modes of transportation due to previous traumatic experiences. One woman shared:

"There are places in Casablanca I haven't gone to in years because I know what will happen if I go there alone. I don't want to deal with the stress."

This illustrates the spatial exclusion women experience as a result of street harassment. Instead of feeling free to move around their city, women are forced to limit their mobility, ultimately reinforcing the gendered division of space, where men are seen as the rightful occupants of public areas, while women's presence is conditional and contested (Valentine, 1989).

Furthermore, some participants mentioned that they have stopped engaging in certain activities they once enjoyed, such as jogging outdoors, sitting in cafés alone, or taking evening strolls. These findings align with Chafai's (2017) research on gendered urban experiences, which highlights how women in Morocco often self-censor their movements as a protective strategy, even though it reinforces gender inequalities by restricting their participation in public life.

The psychological consequences described by the participants are consistent with global research on gender-based violence. Studies conducted in various cultural contexts (Vera-Gray, 2016; Fileborn & Vera-Gray, 2017) show that street harassment contributes to chronic stress, which in turn affects women's ability to focus at work or school, their interpersonal relationships, and their overall mental well-being. This aligns with the participants' accounts, many of whom expressed frustration, helplessness, and exhaustion, feeling that harassment is an inescapable reality that they must constantly manage.

Additionally, studies in psychology and trauma research suggest that the repeated, cumulative effects of harassment create a form of gendered PTSD, where women develop avoidance behaviors, hyper-vigilance, and long-term anxiety disorders (Kelly, 2015). This underscores why street harassment is not simply a minor inconvenience but a serious issue that affects the quality of life, mental health, and personal freedom of women in Morocco.

6.1.2 Mobility Restrictions and Behavioural Adaptations

The fear of harassment has significantly altered the way women in Casablanca navigate public spaces, leading them to modify their daily routines, behaviors, and even their clothing choices in an attempt to avoid unwanted attention. Many participants described how street harassment forces them to plan their movements carefully, often prioritizing safety over convenience. Avoiding certain streets, changing walking routes, and choosing specific times to go out have become common strategies to minimize exposure to harassment.

A 27-year-old university student expressed the frustration of feeling confined by these precautions: "Street harassment makes me feel like I don't have the right to go wherever I want. I avoid certain areas, especially at night, because I know what will happen if I go there alone." This sentiment echoes the broader concept of spatial exclusion, as described by Valentine (1989), where women are effectively pushed out of certain public spaces due to safety concerns. The necessity of constant vigilance not only restricts their physical mobility but also limits their autonomy, as they must constantly assess potential risks before stepping outside.

In addition to avoiding specific areas, participants reported adjusting their clothing choices as a precautionary measure. Many women believe that dressing conservatively reduces the likelihood of being targeted, leading them to opt for loose-fitting garments, long dresses, or traditional clothing in public settings. One participant explained: "If I'm going to crowded areas, I usually wear something more modest and long. But if I'm going to a fancy place, I feel more comfortable wearing whatever I want." This suggests that while women may dress according to social expectations in certain contexts, they still wish to exercise their personal freedom when they feel the environment is safer.

However, the interviews revealed that clothing modifications do not necessarily deter harassment. Another participant recounted a moment that challenged the assumption that

modest attire provides protection: "I once wore a long traditional dress and still got harassed. It doesn't matter what you wear, they will always find something to say." This reflects the findings of Chafai (2017), who argues that harassment is not driven by women's clothing but rather by entrenched power dynamics in male-dominated public spaces. The idea that women can avoid harassment by dressing conservatively reinforces victim-blaming narratives while failing to hold perpetrators accountable.

Furthermore, several participants described adopting behavioral adaptations such as walking quickly, avoiding eye contact, and pretending to be engaged in phone conversations to deter harassers. Traveling in groups was also a common strategy, as women felt safer when accompanied by friends or family members. One woman emphasized the importance of this approach: "Whenever I'm with a group of friends, I feel much safer. Harassers are less likely to say something when you're not alone." This strategy, while practical in reducing immediate threats, also underscores the reality that women feel they must rely on external factors rather than systemic protections to ensure their safety.

Ultimately, the accounts of the participants illustrate how street harassment forces women to compromise their independence, making strategic choices that prioritize safety over personal freedom. These adaptations highlight the unequal power dynamics in public spaces, where women are expected to modify their behavior to navigate an environment that does not fully accommodate their right to move freely. This reinforces the need for broader societal change, including stronger legal enforcement and cultural shifts that challenge the normalization of harassment and empower women to reclaim public spaces without fear.

6.1.3 Perceptions of Law and Law Enforcement

Despite the introduction of Morocco's Law 103-13, which criminalizes sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence, the majority of interviewees expressed skepticism regarding its effectiveness. While the legal framework represents a significant step forward in addressing harassment, the women interviewed highlighted key issues such as a lack of awareness about the law, weak enforcement, and societal attitudes that continue to normalize harassment. These factors contribute to a persistent sense of impunity for perpetrators and discourage women from seeking legal recourse.

Many participants admitted that they were either unaware of the specifics of Law 103-13 or had little faith in its implementation. One participant expressed her doubts: "I've heard that harassment is now illegal, but I don't see any difference. The police don't take these cases seriously, and most women don't even bother reporting it." This statement reflects a broader concern that laws, while existing on paper, often fail to translate into meaningful protections due to gaps in enforcement. Sadiqi (2016) similarly argues that while legal reforms are a necessary foundation for gender equality, their impact is limited when societal attitudes and institutional structures do not support their implementation.

Another common frustration among interviewees was the lack of accountability for offenders. Many women felt that even if they reported harassment, the consequences for perpetrators were minimal or nonexistent. One participant shared her experience: "Even if you report harassment, what happens next? Nothing. They might scare the guy for a moment, but he will be back on the streets the next day doing the same thing." This sense of futility in the justice system discourages victims from coming forward, reinforcing a cycle where harassment continues unchecked. This perspective is supported by research from El Ghazouani (2018), who notes that the effectiveness of legal measures is heavily dependent on cultural shifts and institutional reforms that ensure proper enforcement.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the perception that law enforcement officers often dismiss or trivialize cases of harassment. Participants described instances where police officers failed to take complaints seriously or blamed the victims for their experiences. One woman recounted: "I once went to the police station after a man followed me home, and they asked me what I was wearing. As if that justifies what happened!" This illustrates how victim-blaming narratives persist even within institutions meant to protect women, making legal recourse an intimidating and often discouraging process. Such attitudes not only weaken the effectiveness of the law but also reinforce societal norms that place the responsibility of avoiding harassment on women rather than on perpetrators.

Moreover, the bureaucratic complexity and lack of accessible reporting mechanisms further hinder women's ability to seek justice. Many participants felt that reporting harassment was a time-consuming process that rarely led to tangible results. As one interviewee explained: "Even if I wanted to report someone, I don't have the time to go through all the procedures

just for nothing to happen." This highlights the need for streamlined and victim-centered reporting mechanisms that minimize the barriers to seeking legal support.

Ultimately, the participants' perspectives underscore the gap between legal provisions and their enforcement. While Morocco has taken legislative steps to address harassment, the reluctance of victims to report incidents, the failure of authorities to respond effectively, and the persistence of cultural norms that tolerate harassment all contribute to the law's limited impact. These findings highlight the importance of complementing legal reforms with broader societal changes, including police training programs, public awareness campaigns, and community engagement initiatives that challenge deep-rooted gender biases. Without these structural and cultural transformations, Law 103-13 will remain largely symbolic, failing to provide the protection and justice that Moroccan women need.

6.1.4 Social and Cultural Norms Reinforcing Harassment

Social and cultural norms play a significant role in perpetuating street harassment in Morocco, as highlighted by the participants in this study. Many interviewees pointed to the way men are socialized from a young age, growing up with a sense of entitlement over public spaces and the belief that commenting on women's appearances is both acceptable and expected. This normalization of harassment is reinforced by family structures, community attitudes, and media representations that fail to challenge harmful gender dynamics.

One participant emphasized how these behaviors are learned early in life: "Men grow up thinking they have the right to comment on women's appearances. They learn this from their fathers, their uncles, and even the media." This observation aligns with the arguments of Sadiqi & Ennaji (2006), who assert that Moroccan gender roles are deeply ingrained in societal structures, reinforcing male dominance in public spaces while relegating women to a subordinate position. The persistence of such norms means that harassment is often viewed as trivial, making it difficult to challenge or report.

Another common theme among interviewees was the way families, particularly mothers, place the responsibility for avoiding harassment on women rather than addressing the behavior of men. A 25-year-old respondent explained: "My mother always tells me to dress modestly and avoid certain areas. But no one tells men to respect women." This cultural double standard reflects a broader issue where women are expected to modify their behavior

to avoid harassment, while men's actions remain largely unchallenged. El Ghazouani (2018) discusses how such attitudes contribute to a cycle in which women's freedom is restricted under the guise of "protection," rather than addressing the root causes of male aggression and entitlement.

Many participants also mentioned how harassment is often dismissed as playful behavior rather than recognized as a serious violation of personal space and dignity. One woman noted: "Some men don't even see it as harassment. They think it's funny, or that we should take it as a compliment." This highlights the widespread acceptance of harassment as a normal aspect of daily life, making it difficult for women to challenge these behaviors without being accused of overreacting. Such attitudes reinforce the findings of Bourqia (2010), who argues that tackling gender-based violence requires comprehensive societal change, starting with education and community awareness. If young boys grow up seeing their male relatives engage in harassment without consequence, they are likely to adopt similar behaviors.

The media also plays a crucial role in reinforcing these norms by often portraying street harassment as a form of male bravado or humor rather than a serious social problem. Several participants noted that television shows and films frequently depict women as passive objects of male attention, sending a message that catcalling and persistent advances are part of normal gender interactions. These representations further desensitize society to the realities of harassment and diminish the urgency of addressing it.

Given the pervasive nature of these social and cultural norms, the need for education and awareness campaigns targeting men and boys is particularly urgent. Public initiatives should focus on redefining masculinity in a way that promotes respect for women and challenges the normalization of harassment. As several participants pointed out, change must begin at the community level, within families and educational institutions, to create a culture where women's safety and dignity are prioritized over outdated patriarchal expectations.

6.2 COMPARISON WITH EXISTING RESEARCH

The findings of this study align with broader academic discussions on street harassment and gender-based violence, reinforcing global patterns observed in similar research. The psychological toll, restrictions on mobility, and societal normalization of harassment

identified in the interviews echo conclusions drawn by scholars in various contexts, including the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and beyond. Studies by Kern (2020) and Chafai (2017) highlight how harassment serves as a mechanism of social control, reinforcing patriarchal structures by limiting women's freedom and reinforcing gendered power dynamics in public spaces. The experiences shared by participants in this study reflect these findings, demonstrating that harassment is not merely an isolated issue but a systemic one that affects women's mental health, autonomy, and participation in society.

One of the most striking parallels between this study and previous research is the psychological toll harassment takes on women. Kern (2020) discusses how street harassment contributes to chronic stress, anxiety, and hyper-vigilance, leading women to alter their behavior and self-regulate their movements in an attempt to avoid harassment. This is consistent with the testimonies from interviewees in this study, many of whom described heightened anxiety, fear, and a sense of helplessness when navigating public spaces. Similarly, Chafai (2017) emphasizes that women's lived experiences of street harassment extend beyond momentary discomfort, often resulting in long-term psychological consequences such as diminished self-esteem and social withdrawal. This study's findings reinforce this argument, as multiple participants reported feeling devalued and objectified, questioning their right to occupy public spaces freely.

The restriction of mobility due to street harassment is another key theme that aligns with existing literature. Valentine (1989) describes this phenomenon as "spatial exclusion," whereby women avoid certain areas, modify their routes, and change their schedules to minimize the risk of encountering harassment. This concept is mirrored in the findings of this study, as many participants reported avoiding specific neighborhoods, refraining from going out at night, or traveling in groups as precautionary measures. El Ghazouani (2018) similarly notes that in Morocco, social norms reinforce the idea that women's presence in public spaces must be regulated, leading to self-imposed restrictions on movement. The interviews conducted in this study confirm these observations, demonstrating how harassment shapes women's everyday decision-making and limits their access to urban environments.

Furthermore, the normalization of street harassment in Moroccan society, as reported by participants, aligns with broader research on gender-based violence in the MENA region.

Studies by Sadiqi (2016) and Bourqia (2010) argue that harassment is often trivialized or dismissed as a cultural norm, with victims frequently blamed for their experiences rather than perpetrators being held accountable. This study's participants expressed similar frustrations, noting that many people perceive harassment as harmless or as a normal part of male-female interactions. This normalization, combined with the lack of enforcement of anti-harassment laws, perpetuates a culture of impunity where harassers do not fear legal consequences.

Another key point of comparison is the enforcement—or lack thereof—of Morocco's Law 103-13. El Ghazouani (2018) discusses how legal frameworks addressing gender-based violence in the MENA region often suffer from implementation gaps, where progressive laws exist on paper but are not effectively enforced. This study's findings confirm this challenge, as most participants expressed skepticism about the law's impact, citing weak enforcement and lack of police responsiveness. Many interviewees noted that they were unaware of their rights under the law or felt that reporting harassment would be futile, reinforcing existing research that highlights the disconnect between legal protections and practical application.

Overall, this study's findings align with and expand upon existing research on street harassment, demonstrating that the issue is deeply embedded within social, cultural, and legal structures. The psychological consequences, mobility restrictions, and societal normalization of harassment observed in this research are not unique to Casablanca but reflect broader global trends. The challenges related to legal enforcement further emphasize the need for comprehensive solutions that go beyond legislative reforms and address cultural attitudes, institutional responses, and public awareness. By situating these findings within existing academic discussions, this study contributes to a growing body of literature advocating for more effective strategies to combat street harassment and ensure women's safety and freedom in public spaces

6.3 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The analysis of street harassment in Casablanca underscores its profound impact on women's psychological well-being, personal freedom, and overall participation in public life. Firstly, it is evident that harassment is not merely a momentary inconvenience but rather

a persistent issue that instills long-term emotional distress. Indeed, many participants described feelings of fear, anxiety, and vulnerability, which ultimately erode their confidence and self-worth. Furthermore, this psychological toll aligns with global studies on gender-based violence, which highlight its adverse effects on mental health, including chronic stress, social withdrawal, and even depression (Kern, 2020; Chafai, 2017). Thus, harassment contributes to a broader climate of insecurity, forcing women to remain constantly on guard in public spaces.

Moreover, one of the most alarming consequences of harassment is its role in restricting women's mobility. As a result, many women in Casablanca are compelled to modify their daily routines, avoid certain locations, and adjust their clothing choices in an attempt to reduce the likelihood of being harassed. Nevertheless, despite these adaptations, participants repeatedly emphasized that no amount of precaution fully protects them from harassment. This demonstrates that harassment is not solely a reaction to individual behavior but rather a structural issue embedded in gender norms. In this regard, Valentine's (1989) concept of "spatial exclusion" is particularly relevant, as it highlights how harassment functions as a tool of social control, discouraging women from fully engaging in public life and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

In addition, although Morocco has introduced legal frameworks such as Law 103-13 to combat gender-based violence, the findings suggest that these measures remain largely ineffective due to weak enforcement. Indeed, many interviewees were either unaware of their legal rights or expressed skepticism about the ability of authorities to take meaningful action against harassers. Consequently, the lack of trust in law enforcement discourages victims from reporting incidents, further perpetuating a cycle of impunity. This is consistent with existing research (El Ghazouani, 2018; Sadiqi, 2016), which underscores a disconnect between legislative progress and real-world implementation. Moreover, cultural attitudes and institutional biases continue to hinder women's access to justice, making it difficult for legal reforms to bring about tangible improvements in their daily lives.

Furthermore, the persistence of cultural attitudes that normalize harassment shifts the responsibility onto women rather than perpetrators. For instance, several participants recounted being advised by family and friends to dress modestly or avoid certain areas, rather than being encouraged to hold harassers accountable. This reflects deeply ingrained

patriarchal structures that frame harassment as an inevitable aspect of public life rather than a violation of women's rights. To address this, it is crucial to implement educational initiatives that challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respect and gender equality. By raising awareness from an early age, both men and women can develop a shared understanding of the unacceptability of harassment in public spaces.

Therefore, to effectively combat street harassment in Casablanca, a multi-dimensional approach is required. First and foremost, legal reforms must be accompanied by rigorous enforcement mechanisms to ensure that perpetrators are held accountable and that women feel safe reporting harassment. Additionally, education programs in schools and universities should incorporate gender-sensitive curricula to challenge discriminatory gender norms. Moreover, community engagement initiatives should involve religious leaders, local influencers, and civil society organizations in spreading awareness and fostering cultural change. Finally, urban planning must prioritize women's safety by improving lighting, enhancing public transportation security, and designing inclusive public spaces that discourage predatory behavior.

7. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has provided a comprehensive examination of street harassment in Casablanca, shedding light on its psychological, social, and legal dimensions while exploring strategies for mitigation. Through a qualitative approach, this study has captured the lived experiences of Moroccan women, revealing how harassment affects their mental well-being, restricts their freedom of movement, and reinforces gender inequalities in public spaces. The findings confirm that street harassment is not an isolated issue but rather a deeply entrenched societal problem, influenced by cultural norms, gender power dynamics, and insufficient law enforcement.

The literature review established a strong theoretical foundation by exploring key conceptual frameworks, historical and sociocultural influences, legal responses, and psychological consequences of harassment. It also identified critical research gaps, particularly regarding the effectiveness of existing laws and the normalization of harassment in Moroccan society. Building on this foundation, the study's empirical findings demonstrated that despite the introduction of legal measures such as Morocco's Law 103-13, enforcement remains inconsistent, leaving many women feeling unprotected and discouraged from seeking justice. The absence of strong institutional support exacerbates the issue, further normalizing harassment and shifting the burden of responsibility onto women rather than addressing the root causes of the problem.

The qualitative methodology allowed for an in-depth exploration of these issues through semi-structured interviews with women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The results highlighted three major themes. First, the psychological and emotional impact of harassment was evident, with many participants reporting heightened anxiety, stress, and fear, which negatively affected their mental health and overall well-being. Second, the restriction of mobility emerged as a significant consequence, as women often modify their routines, avoid certain areas, and adjust their clothing choices to reduce the risk of harassment. This forced adaptation not only limits their freedom but also reinforces societal norms that exclude women from public spaces. Finally, the study found that perceptions of law enforcement remain largely negative, with many women expressing skepticism about the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks. While laws exist to criminalize harassment,

their weak enforcement and societal reluctance to hold perpetrators accountable create an environment of impunity, discouraging victims from reporting incidents.

Despite these significant findings, the study has certain limitations. One of the main constraints is the relatively small sample size, which, while suitable for qualitative research, does not fully capture the diversity of experiences among Moroccan women across different regions. Additionally, the brevity of some interviews limited the depth of responses, making it challenging to explore more nuanced aspects of harassment. Future research should consider expanding the sample size, incorporating mixed-method approaches, and conducting longitudinal studies to better understand the evolving nature of street harassment and its long-term consequences on women's lives.

Moving forward, several key areas require further attention and action. Strengthening legal enforcement should be a priority, with efforts focused on improving police training, ensuring legal accountability for offenders, and increasing public awareness of women's rights. Additionally, educational and social reforms are necessary to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms, with schools playing a vital role in promoting gender equality from an early age. Urban planning and safety measures, such as better street lighting, surveillance, and the implementation of women-friendly public transportation, should also be considered to create safer environments. Moreover, community engagement is essential in shifting cultural attitudes, encouraging open discussions within families, schools, and workplaces to foster a culture of respect and equality.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE: INTERVIEW GUIDE ON STREET HARASSMENT IN CASABLANCA

This appendix includes the semi-structured interview guide used as a research instrument in this thesis. The appendix provides materials that clarify the scope and methodology of the research, without interrupting the main narrative of the text. It includes the full set of interview questions designed to explore women's experiences with street harassment in Casablanca, as well as related psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. The interview guide serves as supplemental material and offers transparency in how the data were collected and thematically organized. The appendix is presented in alignment with the formatting requirements of the thesis and follows the same structural standards as tables and figures used in the main chapters. Its inclusion helps readers understand how participant narratives were elicited and interpreted during the qualitative research process.

A.1 PURPOSE OF THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

The purpose of the interview guide was to facilitate in-depth, participant-centered discussions that reflect the daily realities of women navigating public spaces in Casablanca. The questions were framed to allow flexibility in responses while ensuring the research remained focused on key thematic areas: experiences of harassment, its impact on mobility and personal freedom, emotional responses, and coping mechanisms. The guide was also designed to encourage participants to reflect on the broader cultural and societal factors shaping these experiences.

A.1.1 Structure of the Interview Guide

The interview guide is divided into eight sections. The first section gathers basic demographic information such as age, occupation, education level, and length of residence in Casablanca. The second section explores direct experiences with harassment, including verbal and physical forms. The third examines how such experiences affect the participant's freedom and mobility. The fourth assesses psychological and emotional impacts. The fifth identifies coping strategies, while the sixth looks into family and cultural influences. The

seventh section invites perspectives on potential legal and societal solutions. The final section allows participants to express any additional thoughts or recommendations for improving public safety and gender equality in Moroccan society.

