



Normalizing Online Harassment: Perceptions, Tolerance, and Coping Strategies among Female University Students

Snigdha Ghosh¹

1. Department of International Relations, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh. Email: snighdhaghosh07@gmail.com

HOW TO CITE

Ghosh, S. (2026). Normalising online harassment: Perceptions, tolerance, and coping strategies among female university students. *Development Compilation*, 19(1), 56–71. <https://bips.bd/journal>

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by **Development Compilation**, Bangladesh Institute of Professional Studies. This is an open-access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 22 June 2026

Revised: 09 July 2026

Accepted: 13 July 2026

Available online: 20 July 2026

**CC BY
4.0**

Abstract

This study examines the normalization of online harassment among female university students in Bangladesh, focusing on their perceptions, tolerance levels, and coping strategies within a gendered digital environment. A mixed-method approach was adopted, using both quantitative and qualitative data collected from 150 female students of public and private universities through random sampling. A structured questionnaire with close-ended and open-ended items was used to explore students' exposure to online harassment, perceived severity, normalization attitudes, and response mechanisms. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis. Findings reveal that online harassment is highly prevalent, with a majority of respondents reporting direct experiences of abusive online behaviour. Offensive comments, sexual harassment, and body shaming emerged as the most common forms of harassment. A significant proportion of students perceive online harassment as a normalized aspect of social media interaction, although most reject the idea that minor harassment should not be reported. Coping strategies are largely individual and platform-based, with blocking and reporting being the most commonly used responses. However, many respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the effectiveness of these strategies and reported limited confidence in institutional support systems such as university complaint mechanisms. The study highlights the interplay between cultural norms, victim-blaming attitudes, and institutional gaps in shaping women's responses to online harassment. The findings emphasize the urgent need for stronger institutional, legal, and digital platform interventions to address technology-facilitated gender-based violence in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Women Security, Online Harassment, Social Media, University Students, Female Students

1. Introduction

Online harassment has emerged as a pervasive and deeply gendered phenomenon in the digital age, disproportionately targeting women across social media platforms, online forums, and communication technologies. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence encompasses a broad spectrum of harmful behaviours, including cyberbullying, hate speech, doxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyberstalking, and persistent threatening messages (UN Women, 2024). The digital revolution has not only amplified pre-existing forms of gender-based violence but has also generated novel modes of abuse whose harms transcend the online–offline boundary, affecting women's physical safety, mental health, and civic participation (UN Women, 2024). Research consistently documents that women experience online abuse more frequently and more severely than men (Iroegbu et al., 2024), and global data suggest that between 16 and 58 per cent of women and girls have been subjected to some form of technology-facilitated violence (UN Women, 2024).

Female university students represent a particularly vulnerable population within this landscape. As digital natives who rely heavily on social media for academic networking, social connection, and self-expression, they encounter online harassment during a formative period in their lives (Rangaswami et al., 2019). Yet despite the scale of the problem, research reveals a troubling pattern: many women come to regard harassment as a routine feature of online life, normalising experiences that are objectively harmful (Lewis et al., 2017). This normalisation—whereby abusive conduct is minimised, dismissed, or absorbed into everyday expectation—represents a critical and underexplored dimension of the online harassment experience. The present literature review examines the existing evidence on how female university students perceive online harassment, the extent to which they tolerate it, and the coping strategies they employ, with particular attention to the processes through which harassment becomes normalised.

In Bangladesh, online harassment against women is increasingly recognized as a serious social issue, particularly among university students. Studies indicate that female students experience various forms of online abuse, including unwanted messages, offensive comments, and identity-based harassment, which negatively impact their mental well-being and academic performance (Mridha et al., 2024). However, despite growing evidence of prevalence, limited research has focused specifically on how female university students perceive, interpret, and respond to such harassment within the socio-cultural and institutional context of Bangladesh. Existing studies tend to emphasize prevalence and consequences rather than exploring normalization, tolerance, and coping mechanisms in depth.

Therefore, this study titled *“Normalising Online Harassment: Perceptions, Tolerance, and Coping Strategies among Female University Students”* aims to fill this gap by examining how female students in Bangladeshi universities understand online harassment, how they normalize or tolerate it, and what strategies they use to cope with such experiences.

The main objective of this study is to examine how female university students in Bangladesh perceive, experience, normalise, tolerate, and respond to online harassment within their cultural, institutional, and gendered social context.

2. Literature Review

Online harassment has emerged as a pervasive and deeply gendered phenomenon in the digital age, disproportionately targeting women across social media platforms, online forums, and communication technologies. Technology-facilitated gender-based violence encompasses a broad spectrum of harmful behaviours, including cyberbullying, hate speech, doxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyberstalking, and persistent threatening messages (UN Women, 2024). The digital revolution has not only amplified pre-existing forms of gender-based violence but has also generated novel modes of abuse whose harms transcend the online–offline boundary, affecting women's physical safety, mental health, and civic participation (UN Women, 2024). Research consistently documents that women experience online abuse more frequently and more severely than

men (Iroegbu et al., 2024), and global data suggest that between 16 and 58 per cent of women and girls have been subjected to some form of technology-facilitated violence (UN Women, 2024).

Female university students represent a particularly vulnerable population within this landscape. As digital natives who rely heavily on social media for academic networking, social connection, and self-expression, they encounter online harassment during a formative period in their lives (Rangaswami et al., 2019). Yet despite the scale of the problem, research reveals a troubling pattern: many women come to regard harassment as a routine feature of online life, normalising experiences that are objectively harmful (Lewis et al., 2017).

Prevalence studies document the gendered nature of online harassment with considerable consistency. A UN Women (2024) synthesis of global research found that between 16 and 58 per cent of women and girls have been directly targeted by digital violence, while 85 per cent of women who spend time online have witnessed abuse directed at other women. A European study found women to be 27 times more likely to face online harassment than men, and 92 per cent of women who experienced it reported negative effects on their wellbeing (UN Women, 2024). Among the most common forms reported were misinformation and defamation (67 per cent), cyber harassment (66 per cent), hate speech (65 per cent), impersonation (63 per cent), and image-based abuse (57 per cent) (UN Women, 2024). Young women and girls, who are more likely to use technology for learning, peer connection, and information access, face heightened exposure to these harms (UN Women, 2024).

Research on how female university students perceive online harassment reveals a complex interplay between subjective experience, social norms, and institutional context. Faucher et al. (2014, as cited in Molluzzo & Lawler, 2019) found that female students report a wider range of negative impacts from cyberbullying on both their academic and personal lives compared to male peers. Molluzzo and Lawler (as cited in Marcum et al., 2019) established that while college students broadly perceive cyberbullying as a severe issue, the majority do not believe it to be a serious problem at their own institution—a discrepancy suggestive of a tolerance for harassment at the local level even when its harms are acknowledged in the abstract. Some students go further, viewing cyberbullying as a normal feature of online interaction despite its well-documented negative outcomes (Paullet & Pinchot, 2014, as cited in Marcum et al., 2019).

Gender shapes perceptions in important ways. Marcum et al. (2019), in a study of college students' perceptions of cyberbullying at a non-traditional campus, found that female students had over three times greater odds than male students of perceiving cyberbullying as a severe problem. Huang and Chou (2017) similarly found that girls more readily identified harassment and denigration scenarios as bullying instances and made stronger moral judgements about such behaviour, though no gender difference was observed in intentions to help victims. These patterns suggest that women's heightened recognition of harassment does not straightforwardly translate into reduced tolerance; rather, structural factors—including fear of retaliation, self-blame, and institutional inaction—may mediate the relationship between perception and response.

Afghan female university students provide a particularly instructive context. Ahmadzai et al. (2023) found that patterns of online harassment experience among this group were varied and often severe, encompassing unsolicited love messages, persistent unwanted contact, forced group additions, and offensive naming. Importantly, a substantial proportion of participants had not used available strategies such as blocking or reporting, reflecting barriers rooted in cultural norms, institutional gaps, and fear of further victimisation. This study illustrates how perceptions of what constitutes tolerable or inevitable harassment are shaped not only by individual psychology but by cultural, institutional, and socio-political contexts.

Victim-blaming discourse constitutes a particularly consequential mechanism through which tolerance of online harassment is sustained and reproduced. Powell and Henry (2017, as cited in Iroegbu et al., 2024) documented how responses to online sexual harassment frequently locate responsibility with the victim rather than the perpetrator. Loney-Howes et al. (2026) found that victim-blaming justifications in digital discourse create a fear of judgment and retaliation that dramatically reduces disclosure among sexual harassment victims. The responsabilisation of women

for their own harassment—whether through advice to restrict online behaviour, manage privacy settings, or avoid provocative content—reflects a neo-liberal framing that depoliticises structural gender inequality and places the burden of safety on individuals rather than perpetrators or platforms (Powell & Henry, 2017, as cited in Iroegbu et al., 2024).

Individual technical mechanisms—including blocking harassers, reporting abusive content, and adjusting privacy settings—are the most commonly employed protective responses, though their effectiveness is contested. Durán et al. (2025) found in a qualitative study of adult women's experiences of online sexual violence that coping strategies were predominantly individual in nature, centring on blocking and reporting, while social support was frequently absent or perceived as inadequate. The reliance on individual technical solutions reflects platform design philosophies that prioritise individual user management over structural intervention (Benesch, 2014, as cited in Lu et al., 2025). Ahmadzai et al. (2023) found that many Afghan female university students had not adopted even these individual strategies, reflecting how cultural and institutional barriers limit access to protective mechanisms.

Social media platforms have taken some steps to address harassment—between April and June 2024, Facebook acted on 7.8 million posts, Instagram removed over 10 million for bullying and harassment, and platform X suspended one million accounts for abuse (Milutinovic, 2025)—but the scale of these removals relative to total platform activity suggests that technological moderation remains insufficient. Survivor of Technology-Facilitated Violence researchers argue that platform-level mechanisms such as reporting buttons and blocking tools are inadequate because they do not address harm already incurred by victims and place the burden of safety on targeted individuals (Benesch, 2014, as cited in Lu et al., 2025). Legal frameworks similarly lag behind the pace of technological change: Loney-Howes et al. (2026) found that new forms of abuse such as deepfakes and non-consensual image sharing are outpacing legislative responses, while jurisdictional difficulties, insufficient gender-specific provisions, and weak platform regulation compound the problem.

There is a lack of Bangladesh-based empirical research on how female university students perceive, normalise, tolerate, and respond to online harassment within the country's cultural, institutional, and gendered social context.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method research design to examine female university students' perceptions and experiences of online harassment in Bangladesh. Data were collected from 150 female students selected from both public and private universities using random sampling to ensure diversity in institutional background. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary research instrument, incorporating both close-ended items for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative insights. The quantitative component captured information on demographic characteristics, exposure to online harassment, perceived severity of different forms of abuse, and coping or reporting behaviours, while the qualitative component explored students' personal experiences, interpretations, and the social and cultural factors influencing tolerance or underreporting of harassment. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage distributions, whereas qualitative responses were examined through thematic analysis to identify key patterns, including normalization of harassment, victim-blaming, fear of stigma, and reliance on individual coping strategies. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained through informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses throughout the study.

4. Result and Discussion with the Findings from the Primary Data

4.1. Age

Among the **150 valid responses** provided, the **20–22 age group** represents the largest proportion of participants with **64 respondents (42.6%)**, indicating that most respondents are in the typical undergraduate age range. The **23–25 age group** is almost equally represented with **60 respondents (39.9%)**, showing strong participation from slightly older students, likely those in advanced years of study or extended academic programs. Smaller proportions are found in the **26+ age group** with **17 respondents (11.4%)** and the **17-19 age group** with **9 respondents (6.1%)**, suggesting comparatively lower representation of both mature and younger students.

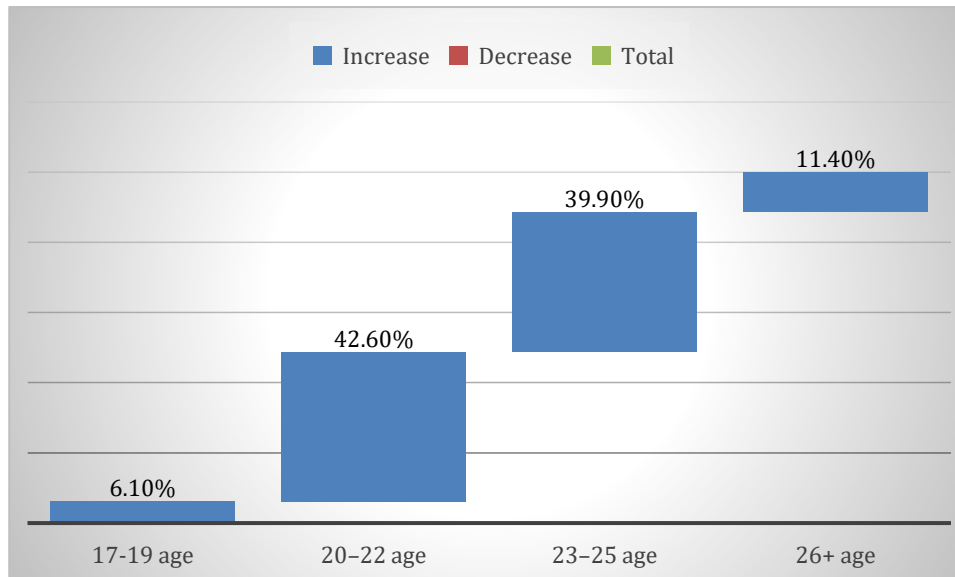


Figure-1, Source: Field Data 2026

4.2. Year of study

The findings indicate that **3rd Year students constitute the largest group 51 respondents (34.0%)**, suggesting that students in the middle stage of their academic journey are the most represented in the sample. **2nd Year students account for 41 (27.3%)** of respondents, demonstrating substantial participation from those progressing through the early years of university education. Both **1st Year students response 28 (18.7%)** and **4th Year and above students represent 30 (20.0%)**, reflecting balanced participation from students at the beginning and advanced stages of their studies.

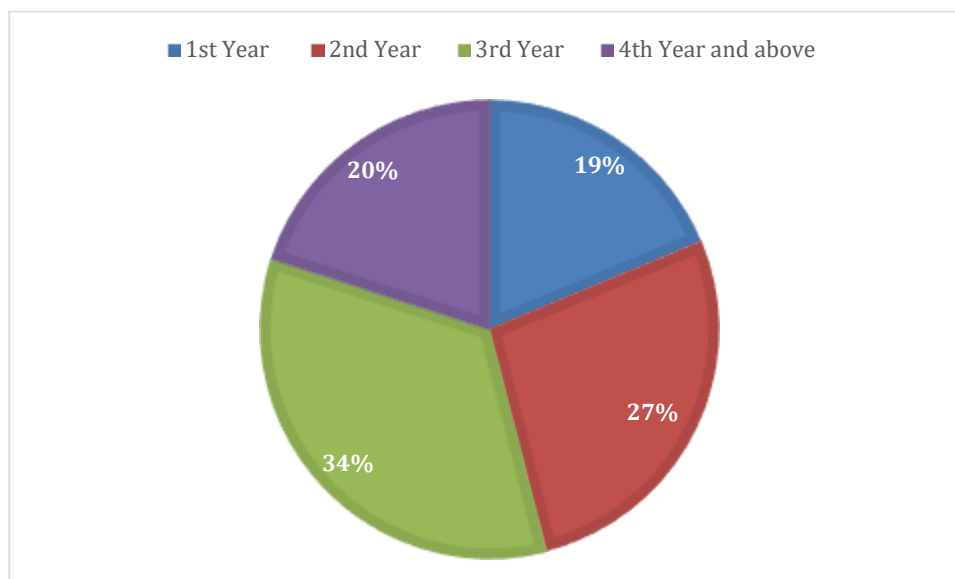


Figure-2, Source: Field Data 2026

4.3. University type

The findings show that students from **public universities constitute the majority of respondents 103 (69.3%)**, indicating that public-sector perspectives are most strongly represented in the study. In contrast, **47(30.7%) of respondents are from private universities**, providing a substantial but smaller representation of the private higher education sector.



Figure-3, Source: Field Data 2026

4.4. Average daily social media usage

The findings indicate that **heavy social media usage is highly prevalent**, with more than half of the respondents **80 (53.3%)** reporting that they spend **5 or more hours per day** on social media platforms. A further **63(41.7%)** of respondents use social media for **3–4 hours daily**, showing that moderate-to-high usage is common among the sample. Only a small proportion of **respondents 4** spend **1–2 hours (2.7%)** and **less than 1 hour respondent 3 (2.3%)** on social media each day, suggesting that limited usage is relatively uncommon. Overall, the results demonstrate that **94.0% of respondents spend at least three hours per day on social media**, highlighting the significant role of social networking platforms in students' daily lives.

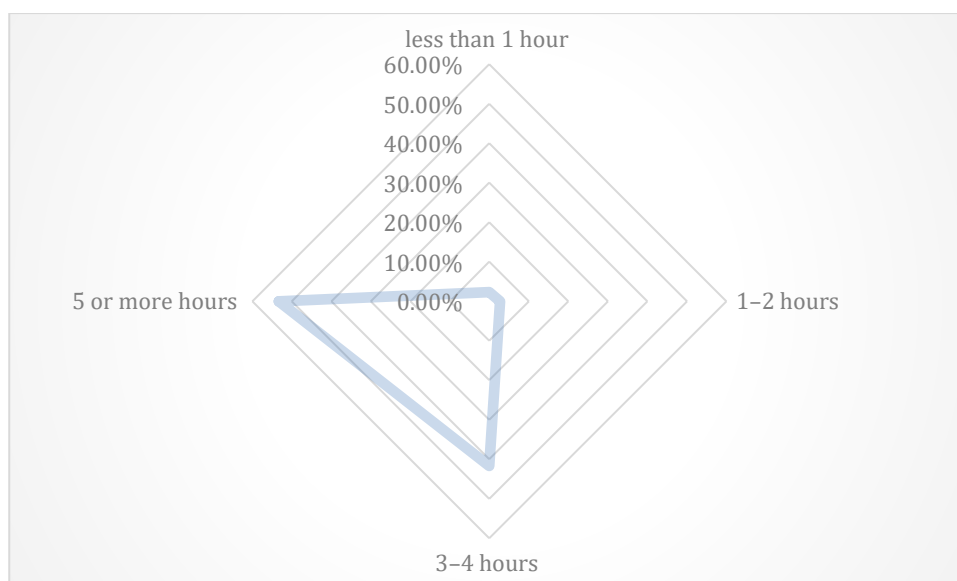


Figure-4, Source: Field Data 2026

4.5. Most frequently used social media platform

The findings reveal that **Facebook is the most frequently used social media platform 68 (45.3%)**, making it the dominant platform among respondents. **Instagram ranks second 60 (39.7%)**, indicating that visual-content-based social networking is also highly popular among students. Smaller proportions of respondents identify **TikTok 8 (5.3%)**, **WhatsApp 6 (4.4%)**, and **other platforms 8 (5.3%)** as their primary social media channel, reflecting a degree of diversity in platform preferences. Overall, the results suggest that **Facebook and Instagram collectively account for 84.0% of respondents' primary platform choices**, highlighting their central role in students' online communication, information sharing, and social engagement.

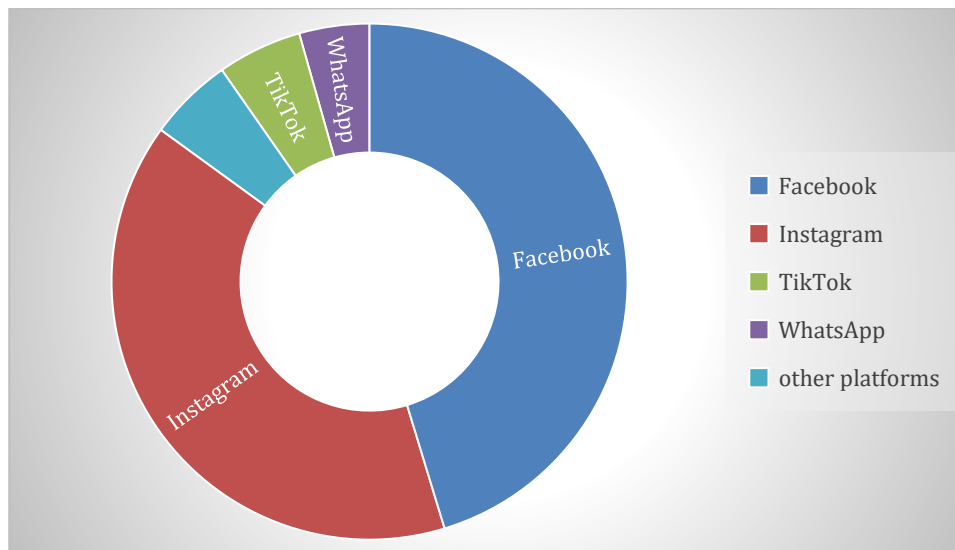


Figure-5, Source: Field Data 2026

4.6. Have you experienced harassment on social media?

The findings indicate that a substantial majority of respondents 111(74.0%) have experienced harassment on social media, suggesting that online harassment is a widespread issue among the study population. In contrast, 39(26.0%) of respondents reported that they have not encountered harassment, representing a considerably smaller proportion of the sample. The high prevalence of reported harassment highlights the vulnerability of social media users to negative online interactions and harmful digital behaviors.

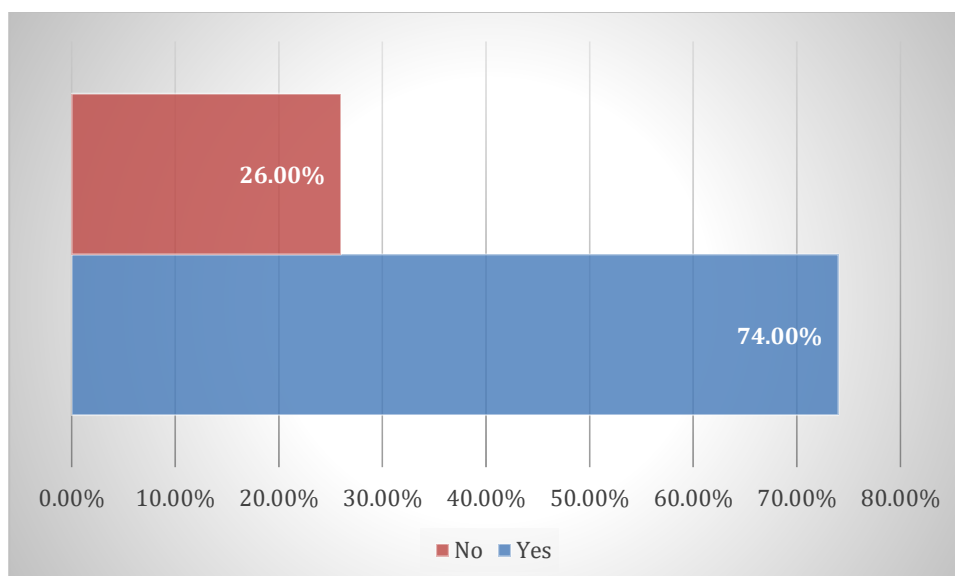


Figure-6, Source: Field Data 2026

4.7. If yes, what types of harassment have they faced?

The findings indicate that **offensive comments or messages 43 (27.7%)** are the most commonly reported form of social media harassment, suggesting that verbal abuse and negative interactions are widespread among respondents. **Sexual harassment 30 (20.0%)** and **body shaming or appearance-related comments 28 (18.7%)** are also highly prevalent, highlighting concerns related to personal dignity, privacy, and self-image in online environments. Smaller but notable proportions of respondents reported experiencing **threats or intimidation 16 (10.7%)**, **spreading of false information or rumors 15 (10.5%)**, and **other forms of harassment 18 (12.4%)**. Overall, the results demonstrate that social media harassment takes multiple forms, with offensive communication, sexual harassment, and body shaming emerging as the most significant challenges faced by participants.

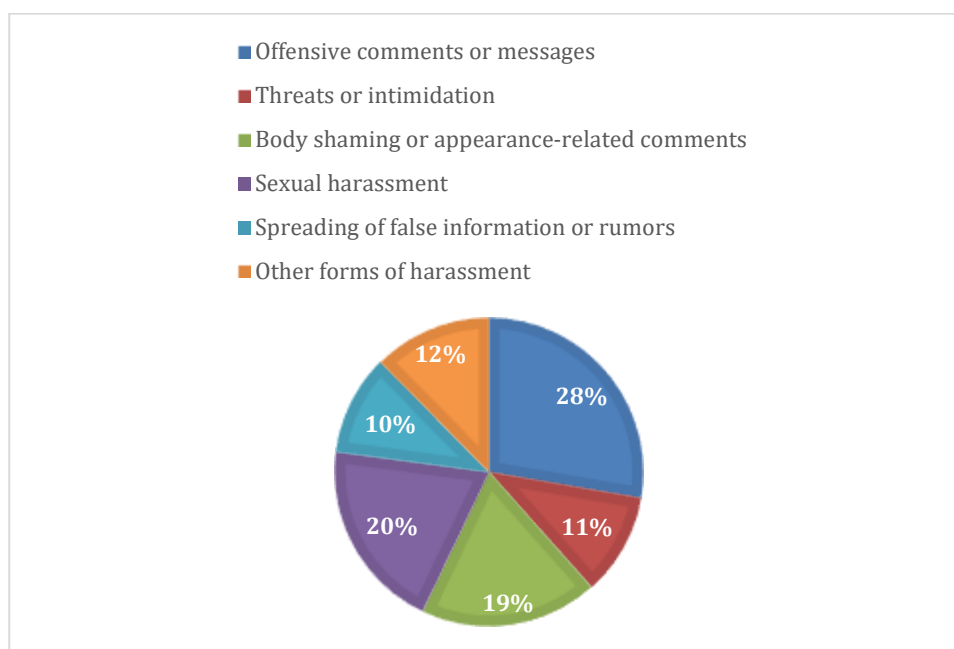


Figure-7, Source: Field Data 2026

4.8. Frequency of harassment in the past 6 months:

The findings indicate that **very rare harassment 48 (1–2 times) is the most commonly reported experience (32.0%)**, suggesting that many respondents encountered harassment only occasionally during the previous six months. Similar proportions of respondents reported **rare harassment 43 (28.9%)** and **moderate harassment 47(31.7%)**, indicating that repeated exposure to online harassment is also relatively common. Only a small percentage of respondents experienced **frequent 9(5.2%)** or **very frequent harassment 3 (2.2%)**, showing that persistent harassment affects a minority of participants. Overall, the results suggest that while most harassment incidents occur at low to moderate frequencies, a considerable number of students continue to face recurring negative experiences on social media platforms.

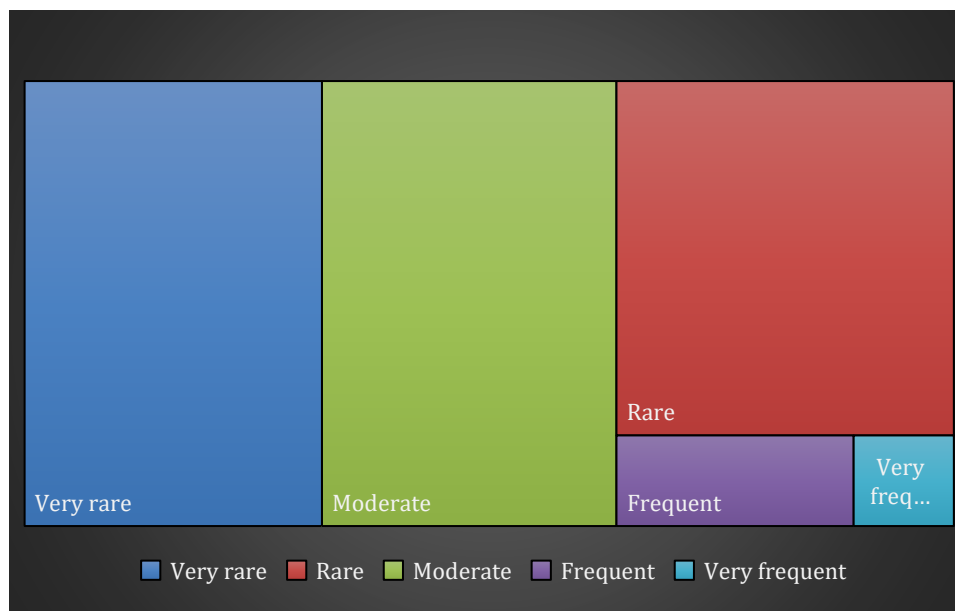


Figure-8, Source: Field Data 2026

4.9. I believe nowadays online harassment is a normal part of social media interaction.

The findings reveal that a majority of respondents perceive online harassment as a normalized aspect of social media interaction, with 58(39.3%)agreeing and 39(25.3%)strongly agreeing with the statement. Nearly one-quarter of respondents 37 (24.7%) remain neutral, suggesting uncertainty or mixed views regarding the extent to which harassment has become normalized online. In contrast, only a small proportion of respondents disagree 9 (6.0%) or strongly disagree 7 (4.7%), indicating limited opposition to the idea that harassment is a common feature of social media environments. Overall, the results suggest that the normalization of online harassment is a widely held perception among respondents, reflecting concerns about the increasing acceptance and prevalence of harmful online behaviors.

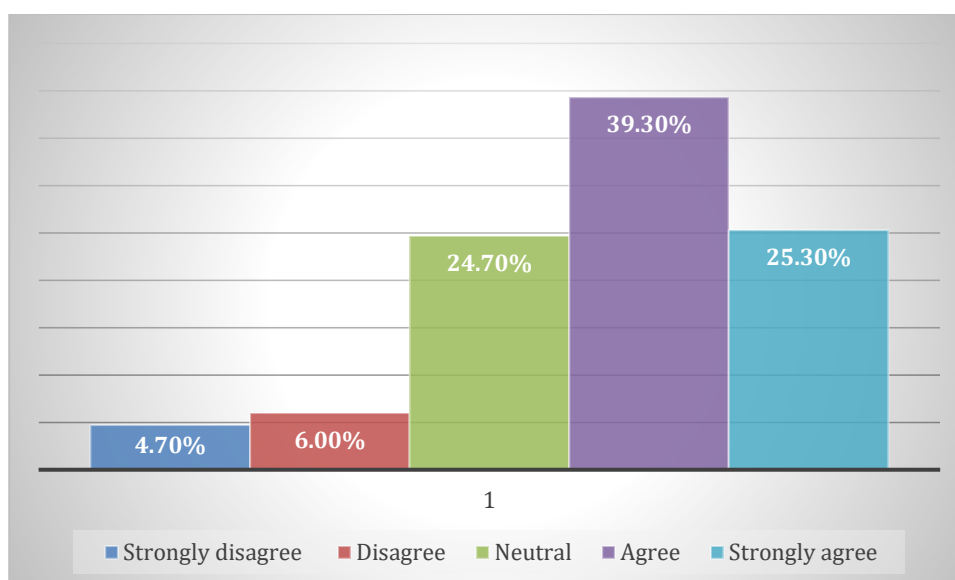


Figure-9, Source: Field Data 2026

4.10. Some forms of online harassment (e.g., teasing, offensive comments) are not serious enough to report.

The findings indicate that most respondents reject the idea that certain forms of online harassment are too minor to report, with **45 (30.7%) disagreeing** and **33 (21.7%) strongly disagreeing** with the statement. A smaller proportion of respondents **agree 25 (16.7%)** or **strongly agree 7 (4.7%)**, suggesting that only a minority perceive teasing or offensive comments as insufficiently serious to warrant reporting. Notably, **40 (26.2%) of respondents selected a neutral response**, indicating some uncertainty regarding the seriousness of less severe forms of online harassment. Overall, the results suggest a general recognition among respondents that even seemingly minor forms of online harassment can be harmful and may deserve attention or reporting.

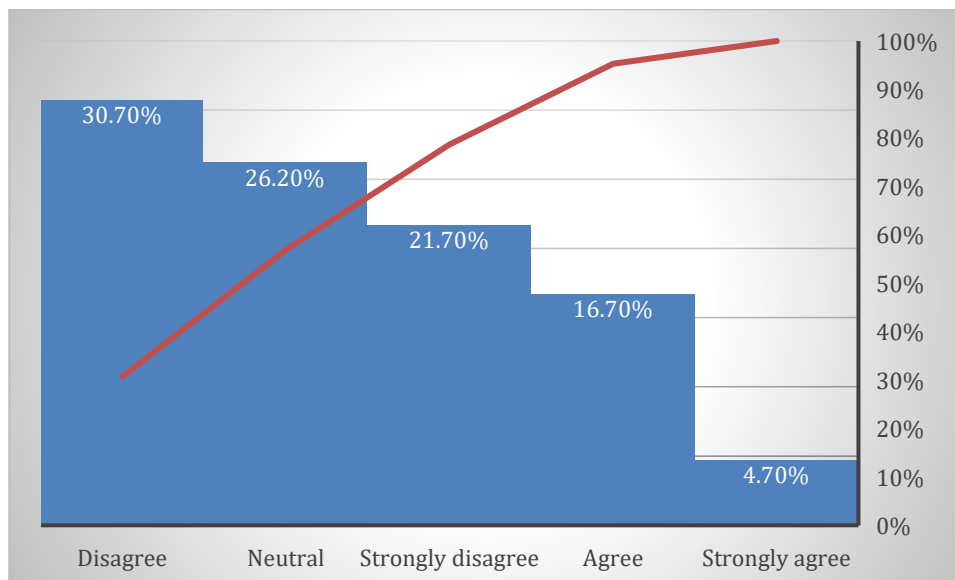
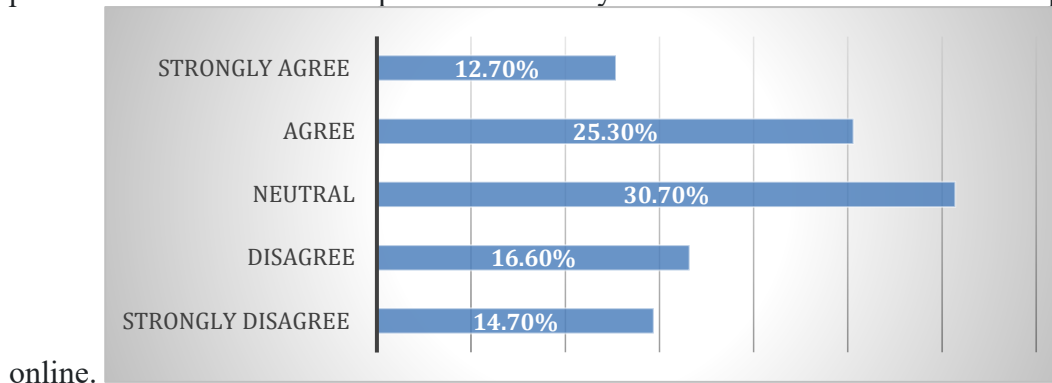


Figure-10, Source: Field Data 2026

4.11. Female students are expected to tolerate online harassment without complaint.

The findings show that **38 (25.3%) of respondents agree and strongly agree 19(12.7%)** that female students are expected to tolerate online harassment without complaint, suggesting that many perceive the existence of social norms that discourage reporting or resistance. Meanwhile, **25(16.6%) disagree and strongly disagree 23(14.7%)**, indicating that a substantial proportion of respondents reject the notion that such expectations should exist. The largest single group of respondents **45 (30.7%) selected a neutral response**, reflecting uncertainty or mixed perceptions regarding societal attitudes toward female victims of online harassment. Overall, the results suggest that perceptions of gendered expectations surrounding online harassment remain divided, with many respondents recognizing the

presence of cultural or social pressures that may influence how female students respond to harassment



online.

Figure-11, Source: Field Data 2026

4.12. I tend to ignore offensive messages/comments rather than reacting.

The findings indicate that **moderate tolerance is the most common response 61 (40.7%)**, suggesting that many respondents sometimes choose to ignore offensive messages or comments rather than react immediately. Smaller but notable proportions report **low 31 (20.7%)** or **very low tolerance 24 (16.6%)**, indicating a tendency among these respondents to be less willing to overlook offensive online behavior. Meanwhile, **25 (16.7%) report high tolerance and 9 (5.3%) report very high tolerance**, suggesting that a minority are more likely to ignore harassment without responding. Overall, the results imply that while many students adopt a moderate coping strategy toward online harassment, opinions differ considerably regarding how much offensive online behavior should be tolerated.

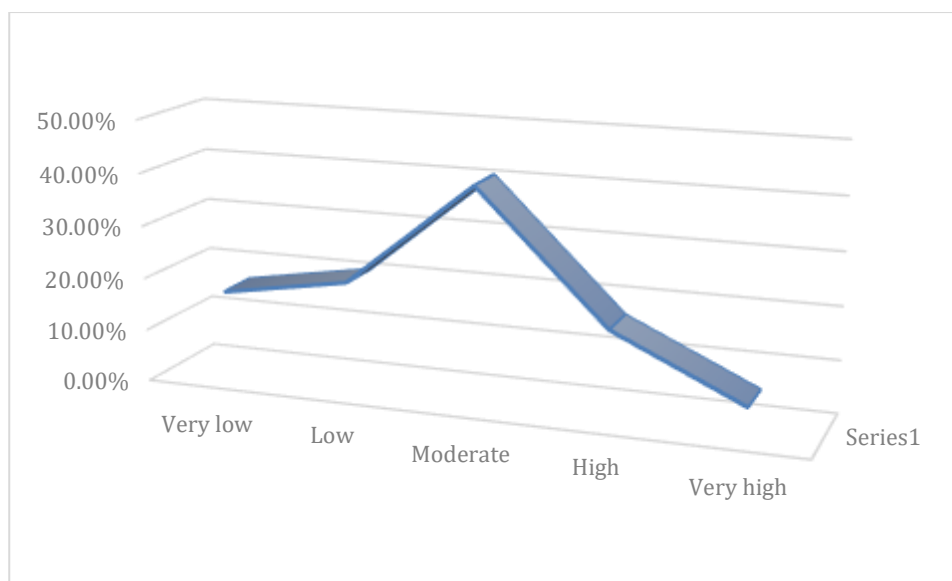


Figure-12, Source: Field Data 2026

4.13. I feel comfortable confronting the harasser online.

The findings indicate that **moderate comfort in confronting online harassers is the most common response 64 (42.7%)**, suggesting that many respondents feel somewhat capable of addressing harassment directly but may still have reservations. A substantial proportion report **low 34 (22.6%)** or **very low comfort 31 (20.7%)**, indicating that many students are reluctant to engage directly with individuals who harass them online. In contrast, **only 18 (12.0%) report high comfort and 3 (2.0%) report very high comfort**, showing that confidence in confronting harassers is relatively uncommon. Overall, the results suggest that while some respondents are willing to challenge online harassment, most exhibit only moderate or limited confidence in directly confronting perpetrators.

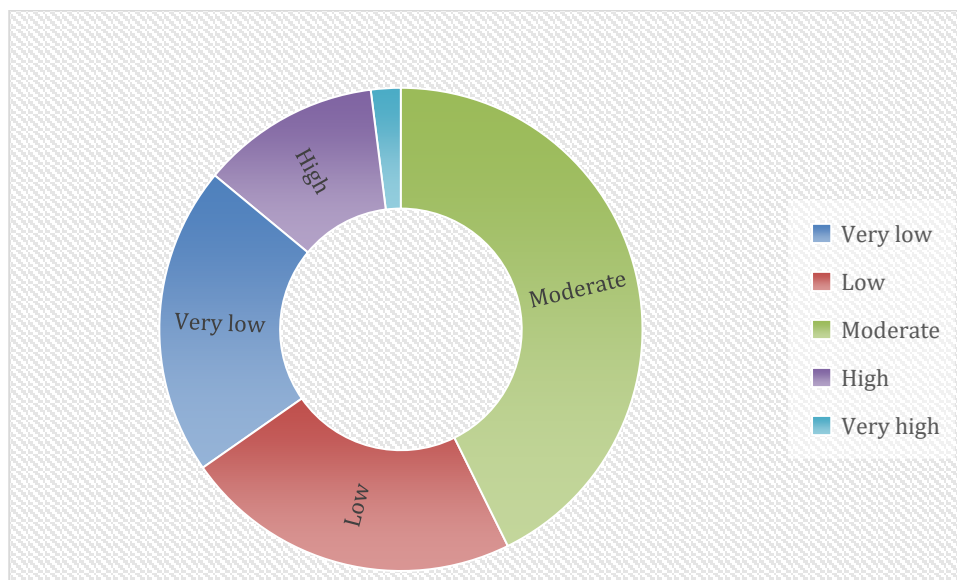


Figure-13, Source: Field Data 2026

4.14. Which coping strategies have you used in response to harassment?

The findings indicate that **blocking the harasser 61 (40.6%)** is the most frequently used coping strategy, suggesting that respondents prefer immediate actions that limit further contact with perpetrators. Nearly half of the respondents **34 (22.7%)** reported harassment to social media platforms, while **32 (21.3%)** chose to ignore offensive messages or comments, reflecting a combination of active and passive coping approaches. Less commonly used strategies include **reducing or stopping social media use 11 (7.3%)**, **confronting the harasser 7(4.6%)**, and **confiding in friends or family 3 (2.2%)**, and others **2(1.3%)** indicating that direct confrontation and seeking social support are less preferred responses. Overall, the results suggest that students primarily rely on protective platform-based measures, particularly blocking and reporting, rather than engaging directly with harassers or withdrawing completely from social media.

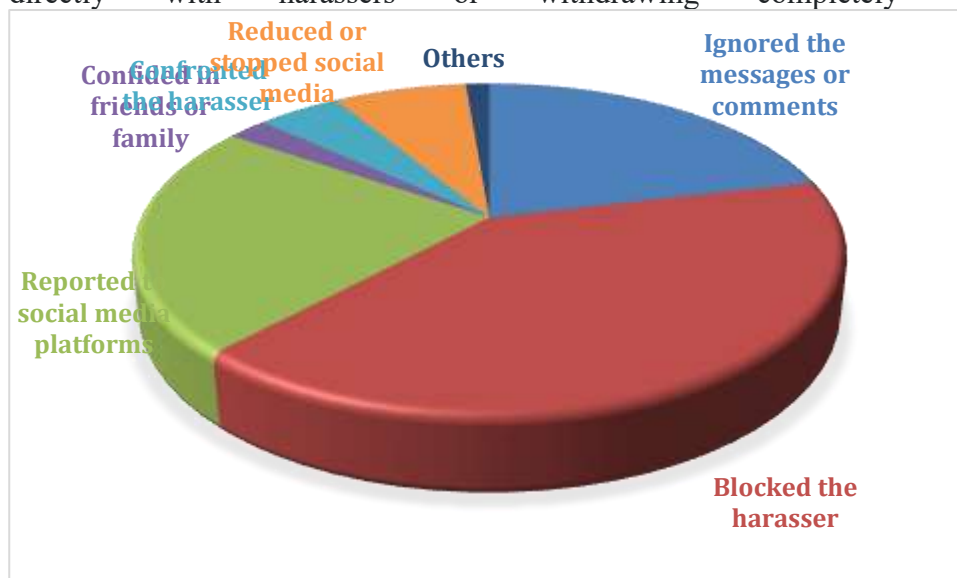


Figure-13, Source: Field Data 2026

4.15. How effective do you feel these coping strategies are in reducing harassment?

The findings indicate that **moderate effectiveness 52 (34.7%)** is the most common perception, suggesting that many respondents believe coping strategies provide some relief from harassment but do not completely resolve the problem. A substantial proportion of respondents consider these

strategies **ineffective 45(30.6%)** or **very ineffective 27 (18.0%)**, highlighting concerns about their ability to prevent or reduce future harassment. In contrast, **only 23(14.7%) perceive the strategies as effective and 3 (2.0%) as very effective**, indicating limited confidence in the overall success of existing coping mechanisms. Overall, the results suggest that while students continue to employ various coping strategies, many remain uncertain about their effectiveness and perceive online harassment as a challenge that is not easily addressed through individual actions alone.

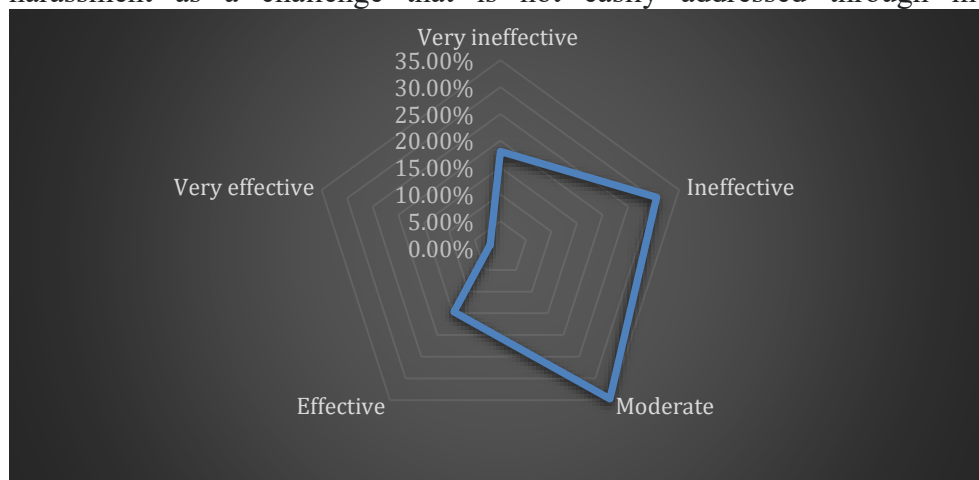


Figure-14, Source: Field Data 2026

4.16. I believe university support systems (complaints, reporting mechanisms) are helpful in addressing online harassment.

The findings indicate that **neutral responses are the most common 53 (35.3%)**, suggesting that many respondents are uncertain about the effectiveness of university support systems in addressing online harassment. While **respondents of agree 31(20.7%) and strongly agree 10(5.7%)** that university complaint and reporting mechanisms are helpful, **29(19.6%) disagree and strongly disagree 27(18.7%)** with this view. This pattern suggests that confidence in institutional support systems is relatively limited among the participants. Overall, the results indicate mixed perceptions of university support services, with many students expressing uncertainty or skepticism regarding their ability to effectively address online harassment cases.

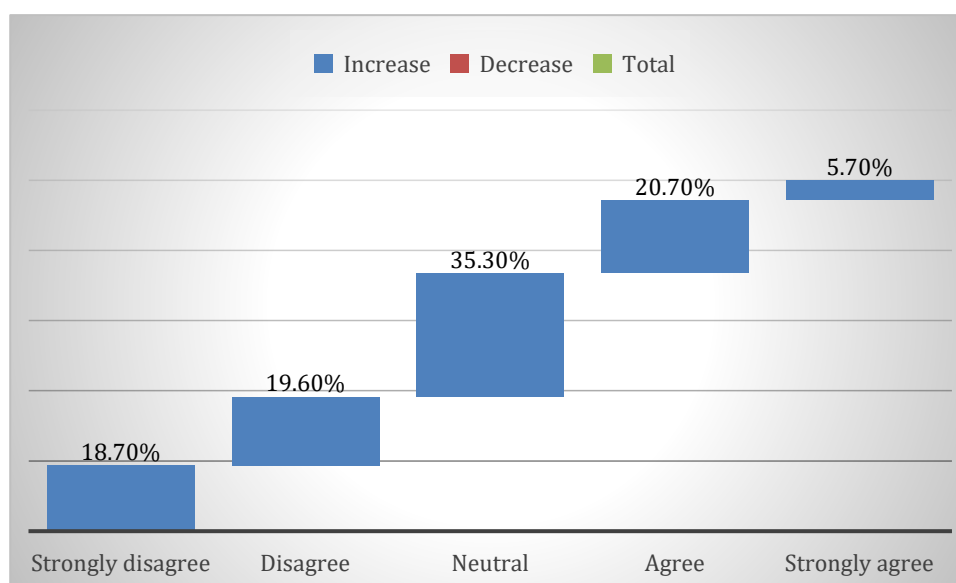


Figure-16, Source: Field Data 2026

4.17. Please describe a personal experience of online harassment you faced and its emotional or social impact.

The responses reveal that **sexual harassment, offensive messages, body shaming, and cyberbullying** are the most common forms of online harassment experienced by participants, often

involving unwanted explicit images, insulting comments, repeated messaging, and gender-based abuse. Many respondents reported significant **emotional impacts**, including stress, anxiety, fear, disgust, low self-esteem, trauma, and reduced confidence, with several describing long-lasting psychological effects. The harassment also had notable **social consequences**, such as limiting social media activity, avoiding online discussions, restricting personal content sharing, withdrawing from online interactions, and developing concerns about privacy and personal safety. Although some respondents reported no direct experience of harassment, the overall narratives suggest that online harassment can substantially affect students' emotional well-being, sense of security, and participation in digital spaces.

4.18. What changes or support mechanisms would you like universities or social media platforms to implement to reduce harassment for female students?

The responses highlight a strong demand for **more effective reporting and response mechanisms**, with many participants calling for confidential complaint systems, quicker investigation procedures, and immediate action against individuals responsible for online harassment. Another prominent theme is the need for **stricter enforcement and punishment**, including stronger university disciplinary measures, legal action, account suspension, identity verification, and public accountability for offenders. Participants also emphasized the importance of **awareness, education, and prevention**, recommending digital safety training, gender-sensitivity programs, cyberbullying awareness campaigns, and efforts to promote respectful online behavior among students. Finally, many respondents stressed the need for **victim support services**, such as mental health counseling, legal assistance, anonymous reporting options, and safe spaces where female students can seek help without fear of stigma, judgment, or retaliation.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that online harassment is a widespread and normalized experience among female university students in Bangladesh, significantly affecting their emotional well-being, social participation, and digital engagement. Although most respondents recognize online harassment as harmful, a considerable proportion perceive it as a routine or unavoidable aspect of social media use. The findings demonstrate that tolerance and normalization are shaped by repeated exposure, cultural expectations, fear of stigma, and weak institutional response mechanisms. Furthermore, while students actively use coping strategies such as blocking and reporting, these measures are often perceived as only moderately effective, highlighting a gap between individual-level responses and structural support systems. Overall, the study underscores that online harassment is not only a technological issue but also a deeply social and gendered problem embedded within broader cultural and institutional contexts in Bangladesh.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthening University Reporting Systems**

Universities should establish confidential, accessible, and responsive complaint mechanisms specifically addressing online harassment, ensuring timely investigation and action.

2. **Digital Literacy and Awareness Programs**

Educational institutions should implement mandatory awareness programs on cyber safety, digital rights, and gender-sensitive online behaviour to empower students.

3. **Mental Health and Victim Support Services**

Universities should provide counselling services and psychological support for victims of online harassment to reduce emotional and psychological harm.

4. Collaboration with Social Media Platforms

Stronger coordination with social media companies is needed to improve reporting efficiency, content moderation, and rapid removal of abusive content.

5. Legal and Policy Enforcement

Government and regulatory bodies should strengthen enforcement of cybercrime laws and ensure faster legal action against perpetrators of online harassment.

6. Challenging Victim-Blaming Culture

Awareness campaigns should be introduced to address victim-blaming attitudes and promote a culture of accountability, shifting responsibility from victims to perpetrators.

7. Further Research

Future studies should explore longitudinal impacts of online harassment and include comparative studies across genders, disciplines, and rural–urban contexts in Bangladesh.

7. References

- Ahmadzai, H., Haidari, M. A., & Rahimi, A. (2023). Investigating experiences of Afghan female university students towards online harassment. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(1), Article 2192440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2192440>
- Amnesty International. (2024). Online violence. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/technology/online-violence/>
- Alabi, O., Osman, M., & Chen, M. (2024). Cyberbullying on social media: Definitions, prevalence, and impact challenges. *Journal of Cybersecurity*, 10(1), Article tyae026. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cybsec/tyae026>
- Bondestam, F., & Lundqvist, M. (2020). Non-physical and ambient sexual harassment of women undergraduate university students in Canada: A diary study. *PLoS ONE*, 19(5), Article e0303489. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0303489>
- Cortina, A., López-Cepero, J., & García-Leiva, P. (2023). University students' experiences of sexual harassment: The role of gender and psychological resilience. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1166024. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1166024>
- Durán, M., Rodríguez-Domínguez, C., & Díaz-Aguado, M. J. (2025). Technology-facilitated online sexual violence, consent negotiation, and coping among adult women: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 22(3), Article 347. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph22030347>
- Fox, J., & Ralston, R. (2016). Queer identity online: Informal learning and teaching experiences of LGBTQ individuals on social media. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 65, 635–642. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.06.009>
- Herry, A., Osman, S. L., & Tate, K. (2023). Gender-based cyberbullying: Understanding expected bystander behavior online. *Journal of Social Issues*, 79(2), 629–652. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12503>
- Huang, Y.-Y., & Chou, C. (2017). Cyberbullying: Topics, strategies, and sex differences. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 67, 233–240. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.10.063>
- Iroegbu, M., O'Brien, F., Muñoz, L. C., & Parsons, G. (2024). Investigating the psychological impact of cyber-sexual harassment. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 39(15–16), 3424–3445. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241231615>
- Lewis, R., Rowe, M., & Wiper, C. (2017). Online abuse of feminists as an emerging form of violence against women and girls. *British Journal of Criminology*, 57(6), 1462–1481. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azw073>

- Loney-Howes, R., Fileborn, B., & Downes, J. (2026). Safeguarding women in digital spaces: Legal responses to cyber harassment and objectification on social media. *Development Policy Review*, e70039. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.70039>
- Lu, Z., Kim, J., & Park, S. (2025). Effectively detecting and responding to online harassment with large language models. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2512.14700>
- Marcum, C. D., Higgins, G. E., & Nicholson, J. (2019). College students' perceptions of cyberbullying on a nontraditional campus: An assessment of victims and witnesses. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 101, 273–280. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.09.032>
- Milutinovic, V. (2025). The digital age and the escalation of cyber gender-based violence. *Human Rights Research Journal*. <https://www.humanrightsresearch.org/post/the-digital-age-and-the-escalation-of-cyber-gender-based-violence>
- Rangaswami, K., Graham, S., & Oliva, J. (2019). Online sexual harassment amongst women students at Santa Clara University. *Silicon Valley Review of Social Science*, 19(1). <https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/svsr/vol19/iss1/6/>
- Ringrose, J., Lawrence, E., & Regehr, K. (2021). Resisting rape culture online and at school: The pedagogy of digital defence and feminist activism lessons. In K. Lumsden & E. Harmer (Eds.), *Online Othering* (pp. 247–275). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sindermann, C., Cooper, A., & Montag, C. (2024). Divided by discipline? A systematic literature review on the quantification of online sexism and misogyny using a semi-automated approach. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2409.20204>
- Sojka, B., Chmielewska-Dudek, I., & Gruszka, M. (2024). Anxiety, depression, self-esteem, internet addiction and predictors of cyberbullying and cybervictimization among female nursing university students: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(5), Article e0303489. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20063344>
- Stahl, N., & Denhag, I. (2021). Online and offline sexual harassment associations of anxiety and depression in an adolescent sample. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 14, 571–580. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-020-00340-2>
- Truong, L. A., Nguyen, T. H., & Pham, Q. V. (2026). Students' awareness of sexual harassment forms at Vietnamese universities. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 10(14), 159–175. <https://rsisinternational.org/journals/ijriss/>
- UN Women. (2024). FAQs: Digital abuse, trolling, stalking, and other forms of technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/faqs/digital-abuse-trolling-stalking-and-other-forms-of-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women>
- Veletsianos, G., Houlden, S., Hodson, J., & Gosse, C. (2018). Women scholars' experiences with online harassment and abuse: Self-protection, resistance, acceptance, and self-blame. *New Media & Society*, 20(12), 4689–4708. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818781324>
- Vera-Gray, F., McGlynn, C., & Johnson, K. (2024). Gendered inequalities in online harms: Fear, safety work, and online participation. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2403.19037>
- Watson, S., & Loney-Howes, R. (2023). Online abuse of women: An interdisciplinary scoping review of the literature. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(6), 2958–2976. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2181136>