

# Example of sexual harassment: counteraction groups literature review

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



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## Introduction

Sexual harassment is the coercion or the bullying of a sexual nature. It refers to the inappropriate or the unwelcome promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors. Sexual harassment has been outlawed in many societies and legal action is usually taken against offenders. Sexual harassment usually increases when there is some unrest of any sort. Women demonstrators are targets of rape and other forms of sexual harassment during demonstrations as happened during the Arab uprising. Women demonstrators who opt to join counteraction groups sometimes face harassments not only from their oppressors but also from fellow male members of their counteraction groups. This topic is worth examining in order to dispel the misguided cultural justifications that demean women. News paper articles, books and journal articles are some of the sources to be used to address this issue. It is imperative for societies to abandon retrogressive cultural beliefs that sexually demean certain genders and especially among counteraction groups.

## **Egypt after the 2011 revolution**

The Egyptian revolution of 2011 was originally targeted to be a non-violent civil resistance to topple the government of President Hosni Mubarak. The protests started peacefully but they soon degenerated to violent clashes between the protesters and Egyptian security forces. More than 846 people were killed and 6, 000 others were injured (Foxnews. com, 2013). Sexual harassment has gotten worse after the 2011 uprising due to constant protests and the deterioration of security in the country. According to Azza Kamel head of the Appropriate Communication Techniques Center for Development (ACTCD) two out of every three Egyptian girls have been sexually harassed (Foxnews. com, 2013). Tahrir Square previously used as the epicenter to oust Mubarak from power became a hotspot for sexual harassment of women. In July 2012, there was an outcry after increased cases of sexual harassment of women who led the uprising as protesters, activists, fighters or even medics. In one incident, Egyptian security troops were captured on video stomping on a bare-chested woman as others pulled her by her arms on the ground. The Egypt is a male-dominated culture and women are deemed inferior to men. The state has been blamed for general passivity towards the issue because it has run down security organs that should arrest sex offenders. Moreover, there is a lack of awareness of women's rights and there are no deterrent laws put in place to protect women (Joseph & Afsaneh, 24).

Egypt's leading counteraction group, The Muslim Brotherhood has been accused of instigating and paying its members to rape women and beat up men who are against the rule of President Mohammed Morsi. An article in

FoxNews. com titled Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood accused of paying gangs to rape women the group was said to pay gangs of thugs to rape women and beat up men who gather at the Tahrir square in protest of the new regime led by Mohammed Morsi. A protester identified as Yasmine confessed to having been attacked by a gang of men while she was videotaping the demonstrations. She said the men tore at her clothes, grabbed her breasts and raped her. She suffered internal injuries and could not walk for a week. One member of the gangs being used confessed that, “ We are told to go and sexually harass the girls so that they leave the demonstration”

(Foxnews. com, 2013)

The Egyptian Center for Women Rights (ECWR) has been strengthened since the 2011 uprising. Various activists have volunteered to hold awareness days at youth centers and undertaking outreach and education with schools and the media. Egypt has for a long time lacked legal definition of sexual harassment. The women rights groups formed after the 2011 uprising as well as the strengthening of preexisting ones such as the ECWR started campaigns such as “ making Egypt’s Streets Safe for all” in 2011. The groups had slogans such as “ Be a man and protect her instead of sexually harassing her”, “ A woman’s body is her business alone. Keep your hands, your looks and your judgements away from it”. These and other messages have continually been borne on placards during protests in a bid to lower sexual harassment in the Egyptian society.

An article by Alaa Al Aswany titled Women are women too explains how she witnessed a woman being harassed, the offender being arrested and the people the victim encountered persuading her to drop the charges against

the sex offender. She raises concerns over what she sees as excessive sex domination of women by men to an extent of letting offenders free regardless of the sex crime they commit. According to Al-Aswany, sex offenses are treated lightly under Egyptian laws in comparison to other crimes such as murder or stealing. She firmly states, “ Egyptians are generally not forgiving toward any manner of crime, with the exception of sexual harassment”. (Al-Aswany, 2013). Al Aswany asserts that in spite of men in her society seeming to appreciate women there lays deep contempt for women which are now manifest as sexual harassment in the society. To the general Egyptian society, grabbing a woman’s body does not amount to sexual harassment. This perspective is wrong and misguided as it leads to deep emotional turmoil and loss of dignity on the part of the victims. It is therefore in order that retrogressive perspectives regarding women sexuality be discarded and their place genuine respect and respect for women’s rights be allowed to take root.

### **Islamic views vs the liberal views about the topic**

Culture and religion usually play crucial roles in determining the extent of sexual harassment a given society. In male dominated societies, sexual harassment cases are usually higher since the formulation and enforcement of laws to safeguard the interests of all people regardless of gender are subdued. In Islamic culture women second fiddle to men. They are supposed to be home makers and they are in most cases relegated to household chores. Islamic laws stipulate that women are to live in the shadow of dominant male relatives. The Islamic laws state that a woman should take

legal action if she is “ seriously” sexually harassed at work or school. Islamic laws state that women should demand to be respected and defend themselves from emotional or physical abuse. In case a woman is in doubt whether her offender’s actions amount to sexual harassment she should consult a local scholar.

In the wake of massive global interactions, many of the societies that idolized one gender over the other have revolutionized their social institutions to be all inclusive and non-discriminatory. Liberal views on sexuality regard sexual harassment as any activity, or gesture of a sexual nature that are unwelcome. It includes simple teasing, grabbing, and offhand comments among other isolated incidents at work, school, and home among other places. Various companies and organizations have put in place policies to guard all sexes against sexual harassment. In case where counteraction groups engage in sexual harassment, the leaders and the individual members are culpable of an offence punishable by life imprisonments under intercontinental legal systems such as the International Criminal Court (ICC). The recent cases of counteraction groups in the Arab countries being accused of sexual harassment arouse memories of similar incidences in the past. Counteraction groups have for long had a history of sexual harassment to members from within their group or to their opponents. The Black Panther Party was an American counteraction made up of African-American revolutionary socialists existed from 1966 to 1982. The group was fighting for the protection of African-American neighborhoods from was deemed to be police brutality. Upon its inception, the group wanted to affirm masculinity and called upon women to “ stand behind black men” and to

support them. This stance was seen as oppressive to women and the group later institutionalized changes that saw the involvement of women as equals to men. However, the group saw several instances of women such as Assata Shakur and Regina Jennings denouncing the group after being sexually harassed by members of the Black Panthers. In Oakland the group also faced issues of sexual harassment and divisions among gender the biggest fall out being the incarceration of 21 members of the group after displaying chauvinistic attitudes towards the New York Panther women group.

The sources relevant to this topic is numerous with each addressing pertinent issue relating to this topic. The article by Al-Aswany presents the perspectives of a woman in a society oppressive to women. Culture and religion that idolizes men at the expense of women have been largely blamed for the increment in sexual harassment especially during civil strife. The book *Feminism and Women's Rights Worldwide: Heritage, Roles and Issues* by Michelle Paludi discuss the impacts of culture and religion in influencing sexual harassment in societies in the Middle East. According to Paludi sexual harassment is rampant in schools and the general society in Middle East (6). The issue is further compounded when there are political unrests and other forms of civil strife. This book combines several books in a series that challenges the readers' views about feminism, women, sexual victimization, education, equal rights and gender role socialization. Accounts of women experiences especially those who have faced some form of sexual harassment give strength to stakeholders and champions of women rights to effect interpersonal, organizational and societal changes in regard to upholding equal rights for all genders (Paludi, 12).

The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt can be compared to the rise of the Black Panther Party in the United States in the 1960s. In a book by Charles Jones titled *The Black Panther Party (reconsidered)* Jones (21) explains about the role of women in counteraction groups and the sexual harassment cases that taint the movements.

The Book *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures* by Joseph Suad and Afsaneh Najmabadi presents the issues affecting women in Islamic cultures. Among the issues discussed are the cultural inclinations that disregard women sexuality and the loose legal structures to safeguard women against sexual harassment. The Book *Encyclopedia of Women in Today's World* by Stange, Mary Z, Carol K. Oyster, and Jane Sloan presents the liberation of sexuality among women in non-Muslim countries in comparison to those in Islamic especially in the Middle East. These books present contrasts between women and sexuality and explains why sexual harassment is rampant in some part of the world as compared to others. Though in a subtle way, these books explain why a counteraction group would resort to sexual harassment as a means to achieving its objectives.

## **Conclusion**

Sexual harassment takes various forms from offhand comments about someone's looks to violent rape and defilements. Incidents of sexual harassment are usually on the rise whenever there is civil strife. The actions are usually conducted or masterminded by counteraction groups. The recent Arab uprising saw an upsurge in sexual harassment cases. In Egypt, the leading counteraction group- the Muslim Brotherhood has been accused of

paying gangs to rape and sexually harass women who take part in protests aimed at ousting the incumbent president Mohamed Morsi. Various human and women activists have condemned the actions. The actions by The Muslim Brotherhood are comparable to those of the Black panther party (1966-1982) in the US. Activists such as Alaa Al Aswany have complained of loose and discriminative laws that disregard women sexuality and a culture that causes women to be subjects of sexual harassment. Various other articles have highlighted the incidences of sexual harassment in the society while authors have also written books on same issue. Future research into this topic could involve the prospects of universal laws to safeguard against sexual harassment in all part of the world. The inception of the international criminal court to handle gross sex violations is a step in the right direction and more measures should be taken towards this end. It is imperative that societies abandon cultural beliefs and inclinations that demean certain genders especially in sexuality matters.

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