Toward a Victim-Centered Approach: Strategies for Preventing Sexual Harassment in Nepali Higher Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Despite sexual harassment being rampant in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) of Nepal, there are no sexual harassment prevention policies or mechanisms in universities. The Government of Nepal formulated the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act 2014, but it is insufficient in the context of universities. Moreover, due to the lack of policies and mechanisms in place, decisions regarding complaints against sexual harassment are made on an ad-hoc basis. This review paper aims to analyze the shortcomings of existing policies and mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment in Nepali HEIs, to identify relevant strategies that can be adopted by Nepal from other HEIs around the world, and to make proposals for developing effective sexual harassment prevention strategies and mechanisms. It includes an examination of governmental acts, university regulations, and case studies. The findings indicate the current governmental act is inadequate for addressing sexual harassment in universities. The lack of specific policies and systematic mechanisms in HEIs leads to arbitrary decision-making by predominantly male authorities. The paper concludes that there is an urgent need for HEIs in Nepal to develop and implement specific sexual harassment prevention policies and mechanisms. Recommendations include establishing clear procedures for handling

complaints, increasing awareness and training, and ensuring fair and transparent decision-making processes.

The number of sexual harassment cases reported in Nepal increases every year. The Women, Children, and Senior Citizen Service Center of Nepal Police has stated that cases of sexual harassment and gender-based violence have increased in Nepal by 20 times over the last 25 years (Bhul, 2021). According to the report of Nepal Police Headquarters, 17,000 cases of rape and 5000 cases of attempted rape have been filed over the past 25 years. The perpetrators have been all men (New Spotlight Magazine, 2022). However, besides the reported number of cases, what is more staggering is the number of invisible cases that go unreported (World Health Organization, 2016). This alarming trend extends into higher education institutions (HEIs) in Nepal, where sexual harassment remains rampant. Sharma et al. (2023) highlight the need for the urgent need for comprehensive attention to address this issue given that most of the cases go unreported in the university. Their narrative study with the female students at Tribhuvan University shed light on the growing trend of three major kinds of sexual harassment; verbal (negative comments, jokes, and name calling), physical (normalization of inappropriate touch by the people in the position of power), and cyber (lewd comments and coercive behaviour online) harassment. Despite this, there are no specific prevention policies or mechanisms in place (Gyawali & Karki, 2023).

Sexual harassment in universities is a pervasive global issue that affects individuals and institutions across diverse cultural contexts. A cross-sectional study among university students in Norway on sexual harassment and assault provides estimates of the prevalence of these incidents among both male and female students, demonstrating that this issue is not confined to a single gender or region (Sivertsen et al., 2019). Educational institutions have failed to be safe spaces for women, especially those from marginalized intersectional backgrounds (Gandhari, 2021). Despite the profusion of news, articles, stories, and experiences shared of sexual harassment in higher education, data is still lacking about how many cases go unreported in higher education institutions (Ali & Khuwaja, 2021). This shows there is distrust towards higher education institutions about their capability to handle cases of sexual harassment and for victims to seek support. Shannon and Bull (2024), revealed that this distrust is rooted in the normalization of gender-based harassment and the perception of institutional systems of gender-based harassment and the perception of institutional systems as effective. In the UK, an analysis of interview data from students and staff who reported sexual misconduct showed widespread scepticism about institutions' responses, highlighting the lack of trust in their

handling of such cases. Smith (2024) cites further significant deficiencies in the handling of sexual harassment and discrimination complaints in the handling of sexual harassment and discrimination complaints within the state college system in California, USA. Addressing these concerns is crucial, as the failure to effectively manage and support victims of sexual harassment can perpetuate a harmful environment in higher education institutions.

In the context of Nepal, HEIs have a hierarchical power structure, where upper caste and class cis-heterosexual men are in leadership and decision-making positions. Men in higher positions generally impose their superiority on women in lower positions, making them vulnerable to sexual harassment. (ILO, 2004). In the context of HEI, the power hierarchy exposes women and marginalized groups of students and staff to sexual harassment. When there is an imbalance in power, there are higher chances of people abusing their power, and sexual harassment is fundamentally about power and abuse of power (Mansfield et al., 2019).

Moreover, the victim is often responsible for providing evidence of abuse or assault because of the existing legal notion of "innocent until proven guilty". The right to be treated as innocent until proven guilty is a fundamental constitutional right and it is protected in Article 20 (5) of the Constitution. Similarly, section 12 of the National Penal Code (Act), 2017 perpetuates the presumption of innocence in criminal laws. However, different forms of violence often leave no trace of evidence, pushing the victims toward a more vulnerable position and further exposing them to victim blaming. The need to provide evidence also comes from a place of protecting the accused. Currently, no system in place holds people accountable and makes victims feel safe. Similarly, the existing system is deeply rooted in a patriarchy where there is victim blaming, and decisions are made on an ad-hoc basis by upper-caste men in leadership positions. The lack of awareness to maintain confidentiality stems from the lack of respect towards victims. There is an Act on sexual harassment at the workplace (prevention) in Nepal (Nepal Law Commission, 2014); however, it is insufficient to cater to HEI, where the context, dynamics, and needs are different than at a regular workplace. Moreover, no HEI has a policy and mechanism in place to handle cases of sexual harassment (Gyawali & Karki, 2023).

Establishing inclusive guiding policies and mechanisms to handle sexual harassment would set a foundation to tackle various fronts of this systemic problem. The guiding policies and mechanisms must take a victim-centric approach that ensures the victim's privacy, safety, and dignity throughout the process. A victim-centric approach to addressing sexual harassment is a framework that prioritizes the rights, needs, and well-being of victims or survivors. This approach is characterized by the core principles of ensuring a supportive and respectful response to incidents of sexual harassment (UNHCR, 2020).

This review paper aims to analyze the shortcomings of existing policies and mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment in Nepali HEIs, to identify

relevant strategies that can be adopted by Nepal from other HEIs around the world, and to make proposals for developing effective sexual harassment prevention strategies and mechanisms.

The study is based on a comprehensive literature review of governmental acts, university regulations and case studies of the current sexual harassment prevention policies and mechanisms in Nepali HEIs. Based on the analysis, it proposes victim-centric strategies for higher education institutions to prevent sexual harassment and grievance handling mechanisms.

Power Hierarchy in the Higher Education System

Even when efforts are made to increase women's representation, masculine hegemony is still being upheld. Article 269 of the Constitution of Nepal states that there must be a provision of such inclusive representation in its executive committees at various levels as may reflect the diversity of Nepal. Clause 15 (4) of the Political Party Registration Act says that a political party should have at least one-third women representation in all its committees. Moreover, to increase the representation of women in the political sphere, political parties at the local government level must have a woman in the position of either mayor or deputy mayor for urban municipalities or between chair and deputy chair for rural municipalities. However, the structure of institutions in Nepal, particularly at HEI, is also largely patriarchal. According to the University Grants Commission (UGC) report on higher education 2018-2019, in Kathmandu University (KU), only one out of 23 professors is a woman and only 11 out of 86 lecturers are women (Baral, 2023). Amongst the few women present, the majority come from upper-caste communities like Brahmin and Chhetri, consequently, placing indigenous and Dalit women on the margins (Bhetwal, 2023). The caste system is a crucial factor in the Nepali education context as the system has created deep-rooted social hierarchies that significantly affect the access to education perpetuating a cycle of poverty, limited socio-economic mobility, and exacerbating educational inequalities. While the upper-caste communities like Brahmin and Chhetri have historically had better access to resources and educational opportunities, Dalit, who are also termed as so-called 'untouchables' and indigenous women face systemic discrimination and social exclusion further limiting their educational prospects (Lawoti, 2014).

Despite claims of diversity, equality, and inclusion, in the 2012 report on HEIs by the UGC, the total number of women faculty members was only 1,322 (7.9 %) in comparison to 15,365 (92.1%) of faculty members who are men. This is far from the bare minimum of the required 33% representation. The new report of 2018/19 does not go into the details to show the difference between the total number of faculty based on gender. However, there is a visible lack of women faculty in academia and even if they are, they are still underrepresented and working on the margins (Baral, 2023).

Furthermore, there is no data to show the number of women in senior positions of leadership in HEIs. Women teachers from affiliated colleges of Tribhuvan University (TU), the largest university in Nepal, have protested and demanded at least 33% of reservations for women in leadership positions on campuses across TU (People's Review, 2019). This protest came after the remark made by the Vice Chancellor of TU said that TU was not obligated to have 33% reservations for women in leadership positions on campus.

Power, Violence, and Gender in Higher Education in Nepal

Sexual harassment is more likely in men-dominated organizations (Hegewisch et al., 2015). In an HEI environment, sexual harassment is created by structural power imbalances, such as between faculty-student, student-student, or faculty-faculty. There are many cases of sexual harassment in universities and schools in Nepal where a girl is harassed by her professor or teacher, or employees are harassed by their seniors or teachers (NepalNews, 2022). This violence is enacted even more on queer, disabled, or underprivileged students. Students who are queer, disabled, or underprivileged experience more physical violence, along with sexist comments, behaviors, and stereotyping (Bahing, 2021).

Looking at the power imbalance from a gendered lens is essential. It is imperative to look at the intersection of identities based on gender, class, caste, sexuality, ability, disability, age, religion, and geography. Comparing how women of color at the intersection of race and gender experience domestic violence and rape qualitatively differently than white women. (Crenshaw, 1991), a queer student from a lower caste and lower economic background, a marginalized person in Nepal's context, is likely to experience violence differently than someone from a higher caste and class.

Similarly, in reporting violence, when men are positioned at the top of the power structure and women as subordinates, women are not taken seriously when they try to report sexual harassment (ILO, 2019). From an intersectional lens, women from marginalized communities are more likely to be subjected to harsher negligence and carelessness. Thus, while looking at cases of violence and harassment in HEIs, we need to be cognizant of how intersectional identities influence experiences and how existing structural hierarchy and power imbalance perpetuate violence.

Relevant Current Legal and Policy Framework and Multilateral Agreements

Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention Act) in Nepal

On February 20, 2015, the Government of Nepal enacted legislation, 'The Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act, 2015', addressing sexual harassment at the workplace to protect the right of every individual to work in a safe environment. Sexual Harassment Prevention Act prevents sexual harassment

at the workplace; defined to include any place used by (a) government entities, (b) entities owned (fully or partly) by the government, (c) corporate bodies or institutions established under the prevailing laws; and (d) any firm, institution or corporate body registered or licensed to carry out any business, trade, or provide services (together the "Entities"), in the course of conducting their business." Sexual Harassment in the Workplace (Prevention) Act, 2014 also requires all organizations to develop a grievance-handling mechanism to tackle complaints related to sexual harassment. (Nepal Law Commission, 2014). According to the Act, education bodies would also fall under the workplace. However, with the increasing number of the diverse nature of harassment within the educational institutions of Nepal, it is important to note that there needs to be an Act specifically catered to education institutions and the contextualized needs, particularly of HEIs (Rizwana & Rudi, 2016).

Relevant National Acts, Laws, and Provisions

In addition to the Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Act 2015, various national acts, laws, and provisions establish diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice as essential pillars for an organization's legal existence.

- The Constitution of Nepal provides the right to a dignified life (art. 16), prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex, equality before the law (art. 18), right to work and choose occupation (art. 33), protection of women against any physical, sexual, psychological or any other acts of violence and exploitation (art.38).
- The Electronic Transactions Act, 2063 (2008), Section 47 prohibits teasing, harassing, insulting, or similar indecent activities against women using computers, the internet, and other electronic communication.
- Article 18's Right to Equality, Article 38 Rights to Women, and Article 42 Rights to Social Justice are recognized as fundamental rights within the Constitution of Nepal (article 18).
- There are separate acts and provisions to prohibit discrimination against minorities, like the Act Related to Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2074 (2017) and the Caste-Based Discrimination and Untouchability (Offense and Punishment) Act 2068 (2011).
- The Labor Act of 2074 (2017) also prohibits team member discrimination based on religion, color, gender, caste, tribe, origin, language, ideological conviction, or other grounds. Section 150 of the National Penal (Code) Act of 2074 (2017) recognizes discrimination as a criminal offense, along with other aspects of campus climate, like offenses relating to defamation (including libel and slander) in Section 300 and sexual harassment in Section 224.

Relevant Multilateral Agreements

The Government of Nepal is committed to international human rights and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to address Violence Against Women (VAW) (Government of Nepal Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, 2010). However, it is also a matter of question why Nepal has not signed and ratified the C190-violence and harassment convention, 2019.

Complaint Mechanisms for Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Based on Existing Laws

As per the laws in the country, and according to Section 19, the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act does not prohibit a person from seeking legal remedy. (ILO, 2019) There are many ways a person can seek legal remedies (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Complaint mechanism for sexual harassment at the workplace as per different laws
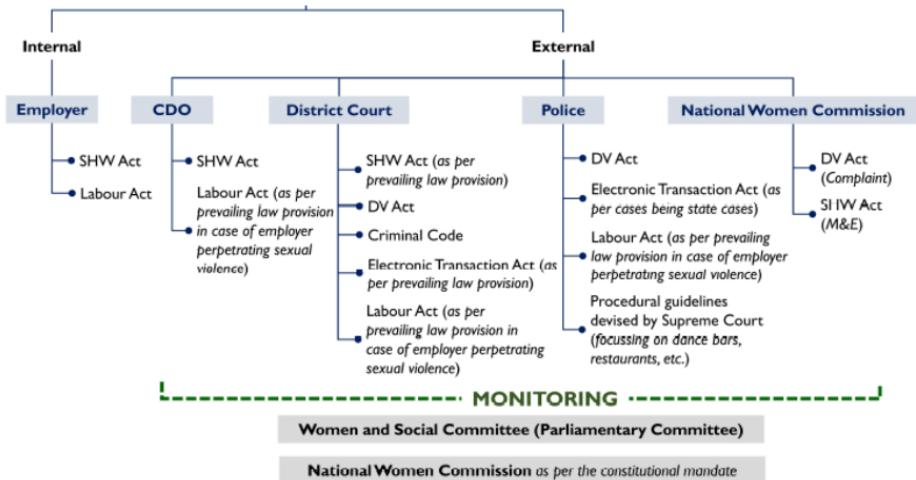
Note; figure apadted from (ILO, 2019)

While the government acknowledges VAW as a violation of human rights and has laws, plans, and policies in place, the cases of violence against women are still increasing. Despite the prevailing laws and policies, victims of violence are still uninformed about the services in place, and due to their socioeconomic conditions, they cannot access justice (Rawal & Karki, 2022). Furthermore, due to the limited implementation and scope of the Sexual Harassment Act, low awareness, limited data, and prevailing stigma attached to sexual harassment (ILO, 2019), most violence cases go unreported.

Concerns Related to the Current Landscape of Sexual Harassment Reporting in Higher Education in Nepal

Lack of sensitivity among the leaders

The higher education sector in Nepal is expanding rapidly to meet the public's demand for quality education, with new universities opening each year and increasing student enrollment (Upadhyay, 2018). However, despite this expansion, challenges remain constant, including the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions. Those in positions with decision-making power, usually upper-caste men, are not equipped to handle cases of harassment (Tripathi & Azhar, 2021). They often need more sensitivity and cognizance to deal with such cases. They need to be trained, and policies and mechanisms are in place to facilitate the process. There is a considerable need to streamline this process of preventing and handling cases of harassment for faculty, staff, and students at HEIs.

Fear of reporting: Victim blaming and perpetrator bias

Victims hesitate to come forward and share their harassment accounts due to the fear of being blamed, shamed, and further harassed (Tripathi & Azhar, 2021). The victims also see other victims being blamed and shamed when the media broadcasts harassment accounts. It is not only the public empathizing with the victim, but even the victims blame themselves and empathize with the perpetrator. Women also have the tendency to discount the harassment in many ways by saying, "That is just the way it is," or "Boys will be boys." Studies show that women who consciously use avoidance as a coping mechanism experience fewer stress-related problems (Berryman, 2001). This shows a strong need for the victim to feel safe, understood, and empowered, whether they come forward with their accounts or not. Thus, HEIs ought to mandate educating and sensitizing what constitutes harassment and how to support the victim.

Patriarchal history of the judicial system

The history of the judicial system is deeply entrenched in patriarchy and casteism, where the ruling castes have had the privilege of influencing the laws to make them work in their favor (Magar, 2016). Moreover, Muluki Ain 1854 – the first legal national code of Nepal, including the civil and criminal code along with the code of procedures of Nepal was based on Manu Smriti, a discriminatory Hindu religious text (Kafle, 2023).

Despite the government of Nepal formulating new constitutions that adhere to fundamental human rights and oblige with international laws that criminalize discrimination and harassment, the ripples of the historically discriminatory legal code can still be felt, especially by marginalized

communities, through caste-based discrimination and violence. For example, despite the legal provisions, crimes against Dalits are not correctly registered or investigated. Dalit rights activists claim that perpetrators are often protected politically, which is one of the main reasons for such impunity (Amnesty International, 2020).

Based on the Diversity, Inclusion & Campus Environment Survey (2021) – an exploratory inquiry of diversity profile and team member perception about campus climate/environment conducted for full-time staff and faculty members at King's College, Nepal – the authors found that 62% of full-time employees were men and 63% belonged to the Brahmin/Chhetri (upper caste). Of the full-time teaching faculty, 76% were men (OSRL, 2021). The power and majority are still in the hands of upper-caste men. So, when a case of harassment against a Dalit student comes up and is mishandled, it is not a coincidence – it follows the same historical pattern.

Relevant Mechanisms to Prevent Sexual Harassment in HEI Around the World Universities

Given that the current policies face numerous challenges, including effective implementations, Nepali HEIs can benefit from adopting best practices and mechanisms adopted by universities worldwide.

Comprehensive Policies and Frameworks

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment (PoSH) Act, enacted in India in 2013, aims to provide a safe working environment for women by addressing sexual harassment in workplaces. This legislation mandates organizations to establish Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) to address grievances and ensure confidentiality throughout the process. The act covers all employees, including temporary and contract workers, making it comprehensive in its scope (Poshequili, 2023). This Act holds significant relevance in HEIs in India as compliance with PoSH guidelines is essential for HEIs to maintain their credibility and ensure the well-being of their community members. UGC has laid down specific regulations for preventing sexual harassment in HEIs which serve as a foundational framework to ensure the safety and dignity of all individuals within the institution (Ungender, 2022). Learning from India's experiences and addressing the challenges can help Nepali institutions create effective policies tailored to specific needs.

Similarly, in Pakistan, the policy enforced by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) on protection against sexual harassment in HEIs aims to create a safe and respectful environment for all members of the academic community (UNESCO, 2020). As per the policy, HEIs are required to establish Harassment Complaint Cells (HCCs) to monitor and address complaints of sexual harassment. These cells ensure that victims have a dedicated and confidential mechanism to report incidents. As a part of the policy, specific

guidelines and procedures for addressing sexual harassment, including the definitions of harassment, procedures for filing complaints, and the responsibilities of the institution in handling such cases have been laid out. Regular monitoring and compliance checks are conducted to ensure that HEIs adhere to those guidelines (Higher Education Commission, 2022).

Formation of the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)

Many universities around the world have established dedicated committees similar to ICC to handle complaints, provide support, and ensure proper redressal mechanisms. Alliance University in India has an ICC dedicated to handling issues related to sexual harassment on campus. A similar internal committee has been established at the universities in the USA. Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley has Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) and the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) respectively. ODR is responsible for investigating complaints of sexual and gender-based harassment involving students, faculty and staff. It operates independently to ensure unbiased investigations and proper resolution of complaints. OPHD also handles complaints of discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence, providing resources and support to complaints. It ensures compliance with university policies and federal regulations. University of Oxford, UK has a harassment advisory service that offers confidential support and advice to students and staff experiencing harassment. It provides a network of trained advisors who can guide individuals through the process of lodging a formal complaint if necessary. Australian National University has a Respectful Relationships Unit (RRU) that focuses on preventing and responding to sexual harassment and violence. It provides education, support services, and a clear process for reporting and addressing complaints.

Anonymous Reporting System

A very important mechanism ensured by universities around the world is the anonymous reporting system to ensure that victims and witnesses of incidents such as harassment, discrimination, or violence can report without fear of retaliation. The purpose of this mechanism is to provide a safe and confidential way for individuals to voice their concerns and experiences. Researchers (University of Michigan, 2022) indicated that anonymous reporting systems in schools can reduce violence and increase student connectedness as it fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment. The University of Cambridge also provides an anonymous reporting form for students, staff, and visitors to report inappropriate behaviour and has reported that this approach has helped them gather data on incidents and improve the system (University of Cambridge, 2024). This mechanism has encouraged a culture of openness, and trust, and enabled universities to address issues more effectively and create a safer educational environment.

Recommended Road Map Toward a Victim-centric Approach to Prevent Sexual Harassment in HEIs in Nepal

Understanding of the relevant Gender Theories

HEIs need to better understand the feminist, queer, and intersectionality theory as an institution. The core concepts of feminist theory, queer theory and intersectional theory, believe that systems of power and oppression discriminate and exclude people based on their gender, sexuality, race, class, and other social identities (Crenshaw, 1991). It seeks to understand the intersection of social identities and their social realities to dismantle inequalities that try to maintain hierarchies. Implementing these concepts transcends to acknowledging the social identity of the victim and the victim feeling more comfortable sharing their account with a particular gender and in their native language while filing a complaint.

Advocacy and Participatory Method

Shifting the HEI towards empowering the victim requires a lot of investment, intentionality, and refocusing the organizational culture of the institutions and continuous engagement with the stakeholders (Richards & Dolamore, 2020). Along with drafting the policy and developing mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment, continuous advocacy is a crucial aspect of implementing the policies and mechanisms and simultaneously bringing a long-term cultural shift in the institution. Advocacy and participatory methods suggest disseminating information on what constitutes harassment and the newly established sexual harassment prevention policy and mechanisms in place; Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) sensitization sessions for students, staff, and faculty; identifying allies and empowering the allies in the process to champion the cause; and forming an internal committee driven by the values of feminism, empathy, and democracy.

Theory of Change

A theory of change is a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. The following table, prepared by the authors based on the literature review of the strategies being implemented among HEIs around the world illustrates a model of the theory of change proposal of how the mechanism works, showing a step-by-step process of how successfully implementing certain activities would lead to a short-term output, followed by a mid-term outcome, and finally attain a desired long-term impact.

Input →	Output (Short term) →	Outcome (Mid-term) →	Impact
Form an inclusive committee	Sexual harassment at HEI (Prevention) policy is drafted.	People, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, trust the institution and feel safe and encouraged to use the informal or formal complaint mechanism.	Create a safe space in the education institution. Cases are not mishandled. Victims feel safe filing a report
Design a process for formal and informal grievance handling mechanism	Formal and informal grievance handling mechanisms established	Privacy and confidentiality during the grievance handling process are maintained.	Victims are respected and supported and will be able to pursue their activities. Victims will get justice.
Design GESI sensitization workshops, sessions, and training for students, staff, and faculty	Information on policies, formal and informal grievance handling mechanisms disseminated	Students and staff are aware and able to identify issues of harassment and the existing policies and mechanism in place.	Increased allies and built solidarities Reduced bystander effect Conscious and respectful towards people's identities, space, and autonomy Accountability for their actions
Off-campus advocacy	Information and learning outcomes shared with other higher	Other higher education institution establish a sexual harassment prevention policy and grievance	Inter-institutional accountability Enrich the HEI ecosystem of Nepal

	education institution	handling mechanism.	

Template of some Recommended Activities for HEIs through Stakeholder Mapping and Collaboration with Other Players

A stakeholder mapping and analysis is a technique used to identify and assess the interests of different people, groups, or institutions who can play a crucial role in strategic intervention to prevent sexual harassment in HEIs in Nepal (IFRC, 2010). The following table is a template prepared by the authors for the stakeholder mapping presented as an example that can be done by the HEI of Nepal, showing who the stakeholders are, their role in the strategic intervention in HEI's prevention of sexual harassment, and their interaction with the implementing team.

Stakeholder	Role in the Strategic Intervention to Prevent Sexual Harassment in HEI in Nepal	Interaction
Students	1. The direct beneficiary of the policy and complaint mechanism 2. Receive mandatory GESI sensitization sessions and information on policy & mechanism.	1. Orientation session at the beginning of their school year 2. Short term GESI sensitization module.
Full-time teaching faculty	1. The direct beneficiary of the policy and complaint mechanism 2. Mandatory GESI sensitization session and information on policy & mechanism	1. Monthly programs to sensitize them. 2. Semi-annual monthly update meeting

	3. Selected faculty will be part of the internal committee	
Full-time staff (non-teaching)	1. Mandatory gender sensitization sessions and information on policy & mechanism	2. Monthly programs to sensitize them. **3.** Semi-annual monthly update meeting
Part-time staff and faculty	1. Mandatory GESI session and information on policy & mechanism	1. Orientation during recruiting 2. Semi-annual update meeting
Other Higher Education Institutions	1. HEI implementing these techniques will share learnings and insights. 2. Share their best practices	1. Through meetings organized annually and as required
Education experts	1. Provide consultation to contextualize the policy to the educational institutions.	1. Through meetings for consultation before drafting the policy and after drafting the policy
UGC	1. Disseminate information to other colleges to draft a policy and mechanism	1. Invitation as a guest in a public advocacy series 2. Meetings for validation and potential collaboration
Legal experts	1. Provide consultation to draft the policy.	1. Through meetings for consultation

	2. Provide consultation to validate the complaint mechanism	before drafting the policy and after drafting the policy
Queer Alliance	1. Queer Alliances or clubs to be formed that will provide insight and consultation on creating a safe experience for marginalized communities.	1. Disseminating information on policy and complaint mechanism 2. Designing and facilitating modules

Conclusion

The paper provides a comprehensive overview of the state of policies related to sexual harassment, particularly within the context of HEI. Based on the literature review, the number of reported sexual harassment cases in Nepal has been increasing, with a notable rise in gender-based violence in the last 25 years and a 20-fold increase in reports at Nepal Police. However, the reported cases only represent a fraction of the actual incident due to fear of blame, shame, and further harassment.

Despite numerous reports of sexual harassment, there is a lack of data on unreported cases, reflecting a distrust in institutions' ability to handle such cases. HEI in Nepal exhibits a hierarchical power structure, with men in dominant positions. This power imbalance exposes women and marginalized groups to sexual harassment and discrimination. While Nepal enacted the Sexual Harassment at Workplace Prevention Act in 2015, there is a need for a specific act tailored to the unique needs of educational institutions, particularly in higher education. Gender disparities are evident in higher education, with women underrepresented among faculty members and in leadership positions. This underrepresentation contributes to issues like sexual harassment.

Addressing these challenges requires understanding intersectionality and acknowledging how gender, class, caste, sexuality, and other factors intersect to influence experiences of violence and discrimination. In conclusion, the discussion highlights the need for comprehensive reforms in HEI to address sexual harassment based on some of the strategies that have become helpful for

other HEIs around the world, with a focus on inclusivity, legal reform, and creating a safe and respectful environment for all students, faculty, and staff.

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