#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED
HASHTAG TESTIMONIES OF CHILD-SEXUAL VIOLENCE

PREPARED FOR
HarassMap

PREPARED BY: REEM WAEL
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INTRODUCTION

01

Unregulated data floods the realm of social media, a phenomenon emerging in the last 10 years to open a few windows of opportunity. For researchers, this organic data offers unorthodox research methodologies. For users, social media provides space to share and engage with information for countless purposes: discussion, resource-sharing, marketing and awareness-raising, to name a few. Of significant importance, social media is used as a tool to make the private public. The easiness of sharing personal experiences allows people to inundate virtual public space with strides of personal data to demonstrate a social/political/legal issue. This trend – hashtag activism – has become increasingly popular in the last few years.

Launched briefly after the infamous 2017 ‘pamper rape case’ in which a man removed the diaper of a 3 years old girl to rape her, #FirstTimeIwasHarassed, provided a plethora of testimonies on sexual harassment against children in Egypt (Nader). Despite the criticism awarded to social media (see Best et al & Zafarani et al), this campaign as well as many others demonstrate that virtual public space can provide an alternative discussion floor on stigmatized sensitive issues especially in conservative society like Egypt. The virtual nature of social media buffered #FirstTimeIwasHarassed hashtaggers from the unforgiving judgments that have traditionally excused offenders of sexual violence. Furthermore, this hashtag provided an opportunity for anonymous testimonies which attracted even more participants. Consequently, this huge amount of data provided invaluable insights into a traditionally silenced topic – sexual harassment and abuse against children.

This paper explores the trends emanating from #FirstTimeIwasHarassed so as to shed light on the lived experiences of children subjected to sexual violence situating Egypt in the global context of hashtag activism on gender-based violence issues. The paper will start with a brief overview of hashtag activism on women’s rights, followed by a presentation of #FirstTimeIwasHarassed analysis results. The paper will conclude with recommendations for necessary action to be taken in relation to sexual violence against children in Egypt.
METHODOLOGY

02

This report is a product of a quick reaction to an opportunity that presented itself when data on sexual violence against children in Egypt was at the forefront of social media, namely Twitter and Facebook. Because of the nature of data collection, the research team did not have control over the details of these stories. Each narrator included the information they believed is important, and the information they were willing to share. Therefore, one remarkable weakness of the data is its incomplete nature which weakens the quantitative analysis component. The quantitative component of the research therefore focuses on demographics and key information that was included in most testimonies. The extracted data however provides very rich qualitative content on the personal and social dynamics of this crime – one of the most pristine areas of social research in Egypt.

The hashtag was circulated remarkably fast, offering a huge number of stories of sexual harassment and abuse against children to be documented and analyzed. HarassMap’s team therefore jumped to the opportunity to collect these stories. A few volunteers from HarassMap and a few from AUC assisted the author with data collection and processing. We collected data from testimonies using the hashtag #FirstTimeIwasHarassed from both Facebook and Twitter. In addition, we were contacted by a reporter who had set up an anonymous platform (sara7a) for people to send their stories directly to her, so that she can post them under her name to protect their identity. This mechanism brought forward even more stories with very sensitive details.

As shown on page 7 the total number of testimonies from all channels is 1913 testimonies. Some posts are excluded because they are opinions on the topic, rather than a testimony.

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used for quantitative data analysis. A list of variables was extracted including gender, age of the harassed and the harasser, place and time of the harassment incident, type of sexual harassment, and the relationship between harassed and harasser. This was the information most commonly found in testimonies. Otherwise, analysis was based on the qualitative data collected.
Social media provides space to share and engage with information for circulated remarkably fast, offering a huge number of stories of sexual harassment & abuse against children. Stories were documented by through a tool to make the private public.

Methodology

Advantages

- Very rich qualitative content presenting personal & social dynamics of this crime
- Sharing personal experiences to demonstrate a social/political/legal issue

Disadvantages

- No control over the information
- Inconsistent data

First step to sociolegal reform – opening the public space to discuss the topic.

Stories were documented by through

- HarassMap team
- Sarahah platform
- Facebook
- Twitter

#FirstTimeIwasHarassed
#FIRSTTIMEIWAHASHRASSED

**DISTRI BUTION OF TESTIMONIES ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE**

**NUMBER OF RECEIVED AND COLLECTED TESTIMONIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>1275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SPSS (STATISTICAL PACKAGE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE) was used for quantitative data analysis.

**THE TOTAL NUMBER OF TESTIMONIES FROM ALL CHANNELS IS 1913 TESTIMONIES**

Some posts are excluded because they are opinions on the topic, rather than a testimony.

**NUMBER OF INCLUDED TESTIMONIES IN THE ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
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</tr>
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First step to sociolegal reform – opening the public space to discuss the topic.
Collective action refers to the pursuit of a common goal by more than one person’ (Agarwal 100)

There is an emerging need to redefine the conventional understanding of collective action to include people’s engagement on social media to advocate for a cause including “posting a status; supporting or ‘liking’ something on Facebook, Tumblr, or Pinterest; tweeting or retweeting a political message on Twitter; and disseminating a photograph” as these are “tiny acts of participation adding rungs to the bottom end of the ladder” (Margetts et al 10). In doing so, people can turn the personal into political – a significant benefit of social media. Clark asks, “But how does discursive activism go beyond isolated personal expressions to form collective action?” (792). Bennett & Segerberg call it “connective action” and differentiate this from ‘collective action’; the former does not require formal organization and does not need identified leadership (748). Connective action is also self-motivated, and primarily relies on technology (Bennett & Segerberg 750). When personal and individualized statements shared on social media are taken together, they form a collective message reflecting a specific ideology/experience that connects geographically scattered groups. In this way, individuals become active actors rather than passive receivers of information (Clark 798). To demonstrate, #Women2Drive, challenging the ban on women’s driving was propagated by the experiences of 20 individual women who took to the streets in their cars and posted demonstrative messages on Twitter (Agarwal 106). Connected by the same experiences, these women were able to form a collective network that transcended national boundaries.

The motivation behind this activism and its impact will be discussed in this section.
GOALS AND TRIGGERS

A survey of the use of hashtags for feminist and women’s rights issues shows a variety of goals and triggers which often overlap. Awareness-raising is always an element of the goal of hashtag campaigns, whether standing independently or as part of a wider agenda. Other goals include celebrating women’s rights, advocating for reform in law and policy, challenging a court decision or public stance by state officials, demanding action by national and international authorities, and building solidarity between victims who with similar experiences.

Triggers of these campaigns vary. International or national events such as International Women’s Day or the 16 Days of Activism may encourage a wave of tweets and posts. These posts center on statistics and facts although often spiced up with personal stories. However, they usually are not emotionally intense. The milieu completely shifts once personal stories come into play, exemplified by #SurvivorLoveLetter which is a movement called for by Tani Ikeda – filmmaker and founder of imMEDi-Ate Justice. Tani’s organization empowers survivors of sexual violence to come forward with their personal experiences following her initiative as a survivor of sexual assault. On Valentine’s Day in 2015 she started a trend where she wrote a personal love letter to herself after 10 years of trying to cope with an incident of rape (Larson) and encouraged other women to do so. Ikeda’s initiative is a good example of using an internationally recognized and celebrated day to the benefit of awareness-raising for an important issue.
Anger is at the foundation of most emotionally charged hashtag campaigns. It can be triggered by court decisions or policy reform that perpetuates sexism. #justiceforliz is a product of such injustice; Liz was gang raped and left to die in a latrine pit in Nairobi. She survived the attack and named three of the rapists to the police whose prison time was substituted by community service, specifically ‘cutting grass’ in the police station garden. Local activists started this hashtag that went viral globally and eventually took Liz’s case to court, highlighting the sexism embedded in the Kenyan justice system (Higgs). These campaigns produce personal and emotional stories that successfully engages the public with the lived realities of sexual violence—the power of storytelling. #askthicke was also triggered by public anger towards sexist art; the hashtag was initiated by VH1 to connect the public with Robin Thicke to promote his new album. However, it backfired to become a feminist outcry against his hit song Blurred Lines which loosens the boundaries of the definition of rape and therefore has been “castigated as a rape anthem” (Horeck 1106). Similarly, #YesAllWomen was a reaction to the 2014 Isla Vista killings in California in which a man killed 6 people and injured 14 others in retribution to women who have rejected him. The incident shocked the public and prompted victims/survivors of misogyny to share their personal stories through #YesAllWomen “creating a digital archive of more than 1.5 million personal testimonials in its first four days alone” (Thirft, 1091). #WhyIStayed is another example of women rising on social media to challenge the victim blaming discourse following Ray Rice’s (NFL football player) physical violence against his then fiancé Janay Palmer, which was caught on camera (Clark). Public opinion diverted from the act of violence towards questioning why Janay decided to marry Ray shortly after the incident. Survivors of domestic violence started to share stories on why they stayed in abusive relationships so as to shed light on the complexity of a situation commonly simplified by the public. These stories “politicized the personal through acts of public testimony that challenged the victim-blaming myths framing the dominant discourse concerning domestic and sexual violence” (Clark 798).

It is difficult to concretely identify the trigger of #FirstTimeIwasHarassed; however, it closely followed the above mentioned ‘pampers rape’ case and was spontaneously spreading without an identified ‘influencer’. Since the public was quite shocked at this incident, the hashtag challenged this surprise, educating the public that this is not an isolated event but a prevalent crime to which society has consistently turned a blind eye. There was no call for action in the hashtag campaign but it was a definite cry for attention towards children who silently suffer.
Social Media as a Platform for Activism

Collective action refers to the pursuit of a common goal by more than one person.

Isolated personal expressions
- Self-motivated
- Individualized statements

Social Media

Do not need
- Formal organisation
- Identified leadership

“Collective action”
- Collective message reflecting a specific ideology/experience that connects geographically scattered groups

Goals & Triggers

Motivation behind this activism and its impact

Awareness-raising
- Celebrating women’s rights

Goals
- Building solidarity between victims with similar experiences
- Challenging a court decision or public stance by state officials
- Demanding action by national and international authorities
- Advocating for reform in law and policy

Anger

Triggers
- International or national events

#JusticeforLiz is an emotionally charged hashtag campaign that local activists started and took Liz’s case to court. Liz was gang raped and left to die in a latrine pit in Nairobi. She survived the attack and named 3 of the rapists to the police whose prison time was substituted by community service.
The anonymity component has been a recurrent matter of discussion in relation to activism on ICT. Is anonymity a favorable option? One blogger explored the subject of suicide by comparing posts on social media platforms that offer anonymity to ones that do not. When looking up ‘want to die’ on Google Plus, Facebook and Twitter, the author found general posts about animal shelters scheduled for euthanasia or people “using the phrase lightly for purposes of emphasis and drama” (Pfander). In contrast, anonymous social media platforms like Whisper included more serious posts about real suicidal thoughts or emotional trauma (Pfander). Likewise, another article highlighted the intensity of Whisper posts shared by men recounting their experiences with fear, violence, and the social stigma because of abusive relationships (Zarell). Commenting on the platform Whisper, White confirms that the anonymity component of Whisper offers us a “harrowing, intimate view of people’s daily struggles”, exemplifying with a few posts: ‘I haven’t left my house since I was diagnosed with HIV this week. I am too ashamed to face my family and friends’ (White). Similarly, in 2014, HarassMap examined the weight of anonymous testimonies as part of a research study comparing data collected via traditional research methodologies to crowdsourced data. Analysis showed that anonymous reports were “fuller and more comprehensive” as compared to face-to-face testimonies (6).

As mentioned in the methodology section of this paper, the current study, #FirstTimeIwasHarassed had offered a channel for anonymous confessions. This opportunity encouraged more people to give testimonies who would have otherwise refrained, either because of the persistent public shaming towards people who publicize their experiences with sexual violence, or because of the gravity of the incident. Not only do the testimonies include details that would be considered ‘embarrassing’, but they also offer a profound perspective into the pain, shame, and fear experienced by child victims of sexual violence.

Page 7 shows the division of the testimonies collected, indicating the number of anonymous testimonies, in comparison to the other testimonies.
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Regardless of the goals, triggers and anonymity component in hashtag campaigns, they definitely bring important issues to light. However, their impact beyond the awareness-raising goal remains a matter of debate. This section will discuss some key factors affecting the impact and reach of hashtag campaigns.

Literature shows that the impact of hashtag campaigns has been measured using various indicators. Impact may be narrow but deep. The aforementioned #SurvivorLoveLetter hashtag campaign was not designed to have broad reach; however, it did touch a few people quite deeply. One survivor of violence who came across #SurvivorLoveLetter explained, “I just knew, as I pored through the hashtag and read letter after letter, that I’d found true solidarity with fellow sexual assault survivors—and that it was loosening and unmooring some of the pain and self-loathing that had kept me anchored in the depths” (Larson). From another perspective, social media campaigns can be useful to complement a ‘networked social movement’ acting as an ‘attention mobilizer’ (Wang et al 853). This is because of the speed and power of penetration of social media that provide a cost and time efficient solution to mobilize large crowds (Higgs 345). Kunina and Abdulmelik, activists who worked on #JusticeforLiz, confirmed this advantage, but emphasized that social media campaigns must be “deployed strategically” – advice that they followed so as to hold the justice system in Kenya accountable (Higgs 346). The content of the tweets/posts may play a pivotal role in the reach of the campaign and the interest it garners from the public. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan analyzed two data sets of 165,000 tweets and found that emotional messages receive more attention and have a higher chance of effective retweeting than bland ones. A similar observation on #WhyIStayed which stipulates that posts expressing “outrage about breaches of gender justice” circulate faster (Clark 789).
Offline reaction to the online activism may also offer another reference to the success of the hashtag campaigns. After the Ray Rice scandal and the online movement, National Football League in the US (NFL) responded to the ‘overwhelming public outcry’ by partnering with ‘No More’ campaign to make public announcements preceding football game broadcasts that condemn violence (Clark 799). Women’s rights to drive in Saudi Arabia is another example, as the government loosened its grip on social media as the only resort for citizens to ‘vent out’ their frustrations with the extreme social conservatism (Chaudry 955). The state however did not foresee the impact of social media especially regarding the #Women2Drive campaign that has “generated both local and global interest in the status of women in Saudi Arabia” (Chaudry 952).

Shortcomings of hashtag campaigns must also be carefully considered. Barriers to internet accessibility especially among some unprivileged socio-economic classes is an important limitation (Clark 789). However, “Slacktivism” is perhaps the most serious red flag of social media activism – it is activism which grants emotional fulfillment to users while at the same protecting them from risk and not incurring high cost (Lee and Hsieh 2013). #BringBackOurGirls is a good demonstration of campaigns that had a very wide reach yet zero political gain (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 270). Another problem with hashtag campaigns that can also be demonstrated by #BringBackOurGirls is whether the chosen narrative has a positive impact on the long term. This campaign chose an imperialist stance that perpetuates gender stereotypes as it framed third world women as ‘our girls’ that need to be brought back (Loken, and Arit). On a similar note, some direct risks of social media campaigns include the re-victimization of the victims who are blamed and bullied about the experiences they choose to share online (Dailey). Internet trolls generate hate and make threats to women hashtagging about feminism and women’s rights (Kristi K. Cole 2015). This could be seen in #FirstTimeIwasHarassed as a group of men challenged the hashtag testimonies, questioning children’s memories (Saad El Din). Last, the speed of dissemination of social media messages is a double-edged tool as it spreads the message fast but may jeopardize accuracy – an “inaccurate image or tweet goes twice around the world before the truth has time to put on his tie” (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 270).

In any case, to properly measure the impact of the campaign one must know the objectives and goals of the campaign, information that is quite often absent as a lot of campaigns start and end organically. In the case of #FirstTimeIwasHarassed, the campaign was neither formally nor informally organized and therefore there was no clear objective. However, this campaign was the first public discussion of sexual violence against children on a large scale. In that sense, it has shaken solid ground on which the Egyptian culture rests – this can be established as the strongest impact of this hashtag campaign, the content of which will be discussed in the following section.
In the global context, it seems that many societies have passed through a state of denial coupled with inaction to address sexual violence against children. A scandal or a series of scandals are usually the tipping points for both state and society to start addressing the problem. For example, it became impossible for British society to deny the prevalence of this crime in the 1980s when multiple cases of abuse in educational and religious institutions came to light (Martin et al); the same social denial happened in the US in the 1970s (Bannister p 9). It was only in the last ten years that a discussion on sexual harassment was imposed in the public discourse in Egypt by civil society actors. This discussion however centered on street harassment by and towards adults, sidelining the countless other elements of the crime. It remains challenging to explore sexual violence against children because speaking about sexuality is a prerequisite to speak about sexual violence, and both issues remain highly stigmatized in this seemingly conservative country. It was the recent pampers rape case that stirred up a public conversation to reevaluate perceptions on the normalization of sexual violence against children, and the insistence to silence it. Consequently, #FirstTimeIwasHarassed is the first step to sociolegal reform – opening the public space to discuss the topic.

This section will divert from the general outlook of hashtag campaigns and will zoom in on content of #FirstTimeIwasHarassed. It aims to shed light on the stories that drove their owners to challenge the social stigma around the topic and share their experiences online. These stories show how this hashtag campaign is an accurate reflection to the suffering of Egyptian children which is very similar to their global counterparts. In this sense, the ‘value’ of the campaign lies in the discussion that it started around this topic, and the richness of information.

It is important to note that testimonies were limited to 140 characters on Twitter, a little longer on Facebook and even longer on the anonymous platform. Hardly enough space to recount all details of the violence incident, let alone recapture and demonstrate the emotions of victims/survivors. The content in these testimonies therefore reflects the most vivid memories of the harassed/abused person and the elements of the crime which they chose to highlight as they deem most important.
‘harassers are young males.’ This is because sexual harassment remains to be seen as a sexual issue and not a power issue; second, the age group of the harasser may not have been an important fact for the harassed except when the harasser belonged to the age group that is socially framed as ‘respected’. This shock may have stemmed from the trust awarded to older people and the prevalent instruction of ‘respect the elders’ with which children in Egypt have been inoculated; third, women may have chosen to include their ages in most testimonies to preempt any victim blaming responses from the public — in other words, confirm that they were ‘innocent children’ who did not demonstrate any form of sexuality to invite sexual harassment.

he was the age of my father/grandfather”

The figures on page 17 show that the majority of testimonies were made by females, and the majority of harassers were males. The figure on page 18 shows the ages of the harassed, with a peak during primary school years. The age of the harasser was not mentioned in most of the testimonies (67.5%). The methodology section demonstrated that we had no control over the kind of data in the testimonies, which means that it is inevitable to miss important demographics such as the age of the harasser. However, there is one important cluster in this data set: 11.5% of commentators described the harasser as an ‘old man’ or indicated this fact in other words like “he was the age of my father/grandfather”. The fact that the majority of people chose to include their own age/age group in their testimonies, but not their harassers’ age/age group except when it was an ‘old man’ suggests three important observations; First, irony was expressed when the harasser was an ‘old man’ because the characteristics of the harasser remain to be that ‘harassers are young males.’ This is because sexual harassment remains to be seen as a sexual issue and not a power issue; second, the age group of the harasser may not have been an important fact for the harassed except when the harasser belonged to the age group that is socially framed as ‘respected’. This shock may have stemmed from the trust awarded to older people and the prevalent instruction of ‘respect the elders’ with which children in Egypt have been inoculated; third, women may have chosen to include their ages in most testimonies to preempt any victim blaming responses from the public — in other words, confirm that they were ‘innocent children’ who did not demonstrate any form of sexuality to invite sexual harassment.
#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED

REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

DEMOGRAPHICS

HARASSER AND HARASSED GENDER

![Graph showing demographics of harasser and harassed gender.]

- **Harasser Gender**: 87.0% male, 7.8% female, 5.1% other.
- **Harassed Gender**: 85.8% female, 13.3% male, 0.9% other.

Discussion Resource-sharing Marketing Awareness-raising

Advantages

Disadvantages

First step to sociolegal reform – opening the public space to discuss the topic.

Harassmap team sarahah platform twitter facebook
#FirstTimeIwasHarassed

REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

DEMOGRAPHICS

AGE OF THE HARASSED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 years</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary education (6-11 years)</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparatory education (12-14 years)</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education (15-17 years)</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(18-25 years)</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not mentioned</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 67.5% of the testimonies, the age of the harasser was not mentioned. 11.5% of commentators described the harasser as an “old man” or indicated this fact in other words like “he was the age of my father/grandfather.”
The potential long-term impact of child sexual abuse has been established since the 1980s by Finkelhor and Browne who identified four main repercussions “traumatic sexualization, betrayal, stigmatization, and powerlessness”. Likewise, disaggregating data from a combination of research studies on the topic, Blakemore et al identify additional long-term repercussions such as “psychological distress, trauma symptoms and mental health disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, personality disorders, suicidality and self-harm, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and mood disorders” (39). They also found some relational difficulties including feelings of shame, guilt and self-blame, re-victimization, and alcohol and substance abuse (Blakemore et al 40). In a Harvard study investigating long term impact of sexual harassment and abuse as children, participants noted that when they did remember the incidents they had an array of negative emotions including inability to trust others, and loss of self-esteem and alienation (Cromie). These long-term effects are undeniable and have been documented in numerous studies (Coffey et al 1996; Widom 1999; Hall 2011).

#FirstTimeIwasHarassed gives us a vivid glimpse on the lived experiences of survivors of sexual abuse as children, echoing the abovementioned psychological distress and trauma. Perhaps most clearly identified are long-term anxiety and fear (Beitchman). One female did not specify any details on the harassment but only said that the effects of the incident remained with her for 24 years - until now. In another testimony, the female who loved to cycle since she was a child was harassed by the man who fixed her bike. He physically approached her while he was fixing the bicycle, so she ran away. She stated, “He made me hate the thing that I love most in life. I never took my bike back from him and have not ridden a bike for the last nine years”. Another female recounted two events of group harassment that kept her scared of public space for years after the incident. In another testimony, a female declared that she still remembered the ‘filthy smell of his breath’, referring to her cousin who used to physically harassed her, and then slapped her when she tried to scream. Furthermore, whenever she passed by his home, she trembled and immediately remembered his smell. A 35 years old man who was gang raped by his cousins as a child, revealed his great fear of being physically close to people even if it is just for the purpose of greeting. He remembered his rapists and longed for their death or torture. Now, when he sees a child in the company of an adult, he follows them to check that the child will not be sexually violated.
Few confessions asserted that time does not heal these negative emotions, but some form of retribution allows victims to regain some confidence and relief. One girl said that she saw her harasser years later in a supermarket with his wife and children. She approaches him and introduced herself asking “do you remember me?” When he recognized her and extended his hand to greet her, she slapped him in public. She ended her testimony with great pride for her strength and ability to retribute. One male recounted how he was harassed as boy by an older man while he was queuing to buy bread for his family. The boy felt the harasser’s erection on his back. Twelve years later, he still associated the chore of buying bread with sexual harassment. In fact, shortly before he made the testimony, he was passing by the spot where he had been harassed and he found the same man in the same position with another boy who was crying. He intervened to beat up the harasser – an action that brought him peace of mind.

These testimonies show that going into such a level of personal trauma creates a dramatic effect that strengthens the hashtag campaign as it reveals the real personal pain behind the hashtag, as discussed in section 04 (Misinformation).
Egypt is a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), and has even uplifted some reservations in 2015 that were made at the time of ratification in 1990 (Al Masry Al Youm). Article 19 obliges the state to take appropriate educational measures to protect children from all kinds of violence including sexual abuse. The Egyptian Constitution also incorporates such principles particularly Article 80 which obliges the state to care for children and protect them from “violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial and sexual exploitation”. The most significant and important preventive methods of sexual violence against children is “universal educational programs generally delivered in schools and aimed at potential victims,” (Collin-Vézina et al 5). These measures have not been met. Even the minimum standards to educate children and adolescents on sexual violence and encourage society to support the victim are absent. There is no obligatory sex education or awareness about sexual violence at schools, and even sexual and reproductive health content has been scrapped in 2010 (Dahshan). Civil society representatives confirm that sex education is a “need not a privilege” and it must be significantly improved in Egypt as a measure to curb violence against women – the subject of a campaign launched in 2013 by a coalition of civil society organizations (Mokbel). Furthermore, one study confirmed that students in the three governorates of Cairo, Giza and Gharbia deem what they learn at school on sexual education as insufficient (Geel). The leader to the movement to end sexual violence against children, and the first to approach the issue in Egypt was SAFE, an initiative founded in 2012 to “empower society by giving children, parents, and teachers the knowledge and skills to prevent sexual abuse, as well as supporting those who have been victims” (Ahmed).

Considering the lack of sexual education and awareness in schools, the confusion and misinformation in the testimonies are not surprising. Even though #FirstTimewasHarassed called for stories of sexual harassment, 37.4% of cases were about assault and even rape. Hashtaggers were able to identify rape when it happened to them; however, the line was not as clearly drawn between sexual assault and sexual harassment. Furthermore, the word ‘rape’ was quite stretched in some cases. For instance, one girl started the testimony by “my friend’s brother raped me” but explained in detail that he was touching and kissing her. Another girl described the day she underwent FGM as the ‘first time she was harassed’, indicating that she was harassed by the doctor, her family and everyone who contributed to the crime.
In the testimonies, there was no mention of any advice or information received from parents or schools. In fact, most of the testimonies included phrases like “I felt something was wrong” or “I knew this was wrong”. In one case, a female who was physically harassed reported that she remained emotionally tortured for years after the incident because she believed that her physical contact with the harasser had led to their marriage and that she would become pregnant. The data also confirms how misinformation about sexual violence perfectly serves the benefit of pedophiles and is used in the scenarios they develop to lure children. One girl recounted the first time she was harassed: she was leaving the school bathroom when she found an unzipped man exposing his genitals. He told the girl that his penis is hurting, and she suggested that he rubs an ointment. He proceeded to ask her to touch it to ease the pain. She was just about to obey when her friend called for her and told her that this is a ‘bad man,’ showing that this was not his first offence – in fact he had a reputation in school among children yet still worked there.

“\nI felt something was wrong.\n”

A recurrent note in many testimonies is how children were forced by their parents to go to the place where they got harassed and see the harasser despite pleading their parents to spare them the visit. These children were exercising a well-recognized coping mechanism for stressful situations common used among children. “Physically distancing oneself” (Walsh et al 2). Their parents however were clueless about alarming signs given by children and about teaching children to create and respect their boundaries. This shows how misinformation is a problem among parents as much as it is among children.
TRENDS: GROOMING, INDUCING FEAR AND PROMISING REWARDS

Stories emerging of the hashtag campaign mirror some of the most common narratives of sexual abuse and harassment against children globally. One interesting observation in the quantitative data is the relationship between the offender and victim, mentioned in almost 90% of the testimonies. To identify a relationship of sexual violence against children, Finkelhor drew three broad categories, one of them must exist in any case of harassment and/or abuse against a child: “when a large age or maturational difference exists between the partners; – when the partner is in a position of authority over or in a care-taking relationship with the child; – when the acts are carried out against the child by using violence or trickery” (101). He proceeds to flag incidents that happen within a relationship of trust between the abused and the abuser including interfamilial violence as the most serious kind of sexual abuse (Finkelhor 103). All of our data conforms to Finkelhor’s identification of sexual harassment, as outlined on Page 24. Furthermore, in 55.4% of the testimonies the harasser was a trusted person, whether a family member or a trusted professional such as a teacher, family friend, religious figure or policeman. This was reiterated by SAFE—SAFE’s Director states: “predators tend to be those closest to the children” because of circumstantial conditions such as proximity and trust which gives way to a long term relationship of sexual harassment and abuse (Ahmed).
#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED
REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE HARASSED AND THE HARASSER

FAMILY MEMBERS / RELATIVES / ACQUAINTANCES

- Siblings: 4.5%
- Parents: 2.2%
- Family friend: 2.1%
- Sister’s husband: 0.2%
- Friend: 0.8%
- Step-father: 0.1%
- Friend’s brother/father: 0.3%
- Friend of friends: 0.4%
- Grandparent: 0.7%
- Sheikh/priest: 2.3%
- Relative: 5.7%
- Aunt/uncle: 5.7%
- Neighbor: 0.5%
- Cousin: 13.4%

55.4% of the testimonies report that the harasser was a trusted person, whether a family member or a trusted professional such as a teacher, family friend, religious figure or policeman.
#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED
REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE HARASSED AND THE HARASSER

TRUSTED OCCUPATIONS

- **Doctor**: 0.5%
- **Sports Trainer**: 0.3%
- **Barber**: 0.3%
- **School Staff**: 0.3%
- **Security Guard/Policeman**: 1.3%
- **Home Services**: 0.6%
- **Teacher**: 5.3%
- **House Keeper**: 0.1%

8.5%

PROTECTED GROUPS

Social or occupational status often protects perpetrators from accusations of sexual violence against children, including teachers and religious figures. They have the opportunities to access victims, exploit power, and for abuse to remain undetected.
#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED

REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

DISTRIBUTION OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE HARASSED AND THE HARASSER

STRANGERS / UNKNOWN

44.7%

DRIVER
0.7%

ANOTHER CHILD
3.1%

NOT MENTIONED
10.3%

SHOP/CLUB STAFF
7.7%

STRANGER
23.4%
Manipulation techniques observed from the testimonies also conform to global trends. Grooming is an integral part of sexually abusing children, defined as “a process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child’s compliance and maintaining the child’s secrecy to avoid disclosure” (Craven et al 297). Grooming entails one or more of the following: identifying and targeting the victim, gaining trust and access, playing a role in the child’s life, isolating the child, creating secrecy around the relationship, initiating sexual content and controlling the relationship (Center for Victims of Crime). This control may be emphasized in different ways such as threats or rewards, as noted in numerous studies looking at the power relation between abuser–abused (Caprioli & Crenshaw & McElvany et al). The abuser employs the technique that best suits the situation such as instilling feelings of guilt, self-blame, fear and concern for loved ones (Caprioli & Crenshaw 193–194).

#FirstTimeIwasHarassed unveils these intricate details even if the harassment was a single incident rather than a long term abusive relationship. 25.8% of people mentioned in their testimonies that they have experienced sexual harassment frequently and, in some cases, sexual harassment/assault lasted for more than 7 years during which there were different scenarios of controlling the child. General threats, including threats to hurt the victim’s family were very common. One female remembered how her cousin used to anally penetrate her in their grandmother’s bathroom, threatening to kill her if she told anyone. A boy who harassed his cousin threatened to kill her whole family. Another girl was harassed by her great uncle who used to threaten to harass her younger sister if she rejected him. Another female explained that she tried to scream when her cousin harassed her; his response was, ‘next time I will kill you so that I can rape as you much as I want’. For another female, when her older cousin physically harassed her, he threatened to tell her mother that she was not ‘obedient’ In fact, one study noted that not wanting to upset parents was identified as a key reason for children’s silence over sexual harassment (McElvaney 942). Emotional blackmail is another form of control although not widely reported in the hashtag campaign. One female was regularly harassed by her older brother when she was eight. When she resented the action, he stopped harassing her but gave her the silent treatment, and as she stated, “I could not handle it when he was upset with me”. This shows that grooming practice need not be forceful, but rather “manipulative or emotionally coercive” (Plummer 41).
About 10.6% of the testimonies centered on the manipulation techniques and trickery based on the child’s lack of information. For instance, asking the child to touch the harasser’s ‘finger’ through the harasser’s pocket so that the child ends up touching the penis which they believe is a finger. Another hashtagger noted, “I was spending the night at my family’s friends. Their son and I were playing at night, pretending that he was giving me an injection. I felt something in my butt so I asked him to remove his finger. He said, ‘it is not my finger’. It was his penis.” Another female recounted that her uncle used to play with his nieces and always ‘punished’ the loser by touching her breasts. These are a few examples of countless testimonies that start with “we were playing,” demonstrating an alternative manipulation technique used by harassers.

Promising rewards is another manipulation technique found in testimonies, although not as common as inducing fear. One female was rewarded by gifts when she allowed her grandfather to sexually harass her. Another girl received chocolate every time the grocery store owner sexually assaulted her. In one testimony, the girl’s uncle told her “let me rub your back and I will give you 50 pounds”.

Even though the power dynamics found in the hashtag campaign closely resemble global trends, perhaps what makes this worse in the Egyptian culture is that inducing fear is a common and widely accepted method of disciplining children by family, which paves the way for harassers to intimidate their victims.
#FirstTimeIwasHarassed

Revealing Information on Sexual Violence against Children in Egypt

Trends: Grooming, Inducing Fear and Promising Rewards

25.8% of those who have experienced sexual harassment frequently and in some cases it lasted for more than 7 years. There were different scenarios on how the harasser controlled the child.

**Threats**

- To hurt victim or victim's family
  - "Next time I will kill you so that I can rape as you much as I want"

**Manipulation**

- Manipulative or emotionally coercive
  - "I could not handle it when he was upset with me"

10.6% of the testimonies centered on the manipulation techniques and trickery based on the child’s lack of information.

**The Game**

- Incorporating sexual harassment in the play
  - "We were playing"

Another manipulation technique found in testimonies, although not as common as inducing fear.

**Reward**

- Promising gifts/reward
  - "Let me rub your back and I will give you 50 pounds"

Even though the power dynamics found in the hashtag campaign closely resemble global trends, perhaps what makes this worse in the Egyptian culture is that inducing fear is a common and widely accepted method of disciplining children by family, which paves the way for harassers to intimidate their victims.
Social or occupational status often protects perpetrators from accusations of sexual violence against children, including teachers and religious figures (Finkelhor 104). This is expected considering that “institutional settings and their characteristic structures, policies, practices and cultural climates can, and have provided perpetrators with opportunities to access victims, exploit power and for abuse to remain undetected” (Blakemore, 37).  

#FirstTimeIwasHarassed demonstrate some cases perpetrated by ‘protected’ individuals – in most of these cases, the hashtaggers express irony that people in positions of trust can commit such a heinous crime. The analyzed testimonies show that 2.3% of the reports disclosed that perpetrators were members of the clergy, in addition to 5.6% where offenders were teachers and school staff, and in 2.5% offenders belonged to other professions that enjoyed a ‘trusted’ status such as doctors and policemen.  

In fact, some of the gravest sexual violations against children globally happen in religious institutions and these have been the subject of the biggest number of research studies related to institutional sexual harassment against children (Blakemore et al 36). Zalcberg explores similar patterns among ultra-Orthodox Jewish men who were victims of sexual harassment and abuse as children and notes the strong tendency to cover up these incidents by families, institutions and the whole community. In addition, Jay noted that in 1950–2002 in the US, there were sexual abuse allegations against 4,392 priests amounting to 4% of the total number of priests during this period (4). Not only does #FirstTimeIwasHarassed show the violations committed on part of clergy, but it also indicates the irony that ‘holy’ men can perform such unholy actions – a popular social belief that makes it harder for the community to accept the allegations of a child. One male described the harasser, “it was my uncle, he had a beard,” referring to the practice of growing a beard as Sunna, taking after Prophet Muhammad.
Another male recounted how a sheikh kissed him and exposed his penis while telling him, “I’m a sheikh, do you really think I would do something wrong?” In one unique testimony, the female explained how she attempted to repel the group of men who were about to rape her. One of her defense techniques that reflects the strong social correlation between religiosity and ‘goodness’ was reminding the rapists that it was Ramadan and asking them not to taint the holy month; another one of her techniques was claiming that she was Christian, hoping that they would not want a Christian female in the first place. Even in the broader scheme, the hashtag campaign as well as the media coverage reflect the shock that such atrocities “happen in a conservative Muslim society” (Fareed). The testimonies further show how offenders used this stereotypical negative correlation between clergy and sexual harassment to their benefit whether to attract children or to divert suspicion. One girl said that she and her friends were harassed by a man who claimed to fight the evil eye by reciting the Quran, asking the children to touch his penis while he did his ‘job’.

“I’m a sheikh, do you really think I would do something wrong?”
VICTIM-BLAMING AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

Family support is “the most consistent predictor of the impact of sexual abuse on a child” (Finkelhor 112). This is why perpetrators of long term child sexual abuse seek victims who have little adult supervision and support, and low self-esteem (Caprioli & Crenshaw 193). With the pervasiveness of sexism in Egypt, making it a haven for child sexual predators, it is hardly surprising that the collected testimonies showed very limited parental and familial support, and that none of the testimonies indicated any kind of psychological and/or emotional professional support that the harassed may have received after the incident.

#FirstTimeIwasHarassed revealed strong trends of secondary victimization and victim-blaming. Beating the harassed was a commonly cited family reaction and one girl was even burnt. However, some families took it a step further and inflicted violent and life-changing punishments. For instance, FGM was a grandmother’s response when her 8 years old granddaughter revealed that her uncle had physically harassed her. Another female reported that in addition to the beating, her parents forced her to wear the veil when they knew she had been harassed.
Hashtags often focused on the trauma resulting from the family reaction rather than the violence. This usually happens when honor is preserved and therefore the family ignores the incident and turns a blind eye towards it. Tainted family honor in this sense indicates protecting female’s virginity and male’s heterosexual preferences. In an anonymous testimony recounted by a male, the boy was raped almost every day by his older brother who slept in the same room. When the father found out, his first reaction was to beat up the raped son, but this quickly subsided because the father had a bigger concern, suspecting that his eldest son’s homosexual tendencies were driving him to rape his brother. The father then changed tactics and nicely approach his eldest son to probe on his sexual orientation. The raped son who posted the testimony stated “when confronted, my brother apologized to my father, not to me. He was not gay, he was just horny.” The father was relieved that his eldest son was heterosexual, and the matter was put to rest. Another vivid testimony by a female who was molested by her neighbor when she was 5 years-old focused on her secondary victimization. Upon learning about the incident, the mother and the harasser’s mother took the girl to the doctor to confirm that her virginity was intact. A reassurance from the doctor reinstated their peace of mind and the matter was dropped forever. The girl ended her testimony asserting, “I cannot forget the humiliation, as I laid on the bed waiting for the doctor to check on my virginity”. Unsurprisingly, virginity concerns have been at the center of the discourse on a global level and have been commonly reported in the literature. For instance, looking at this issue in Ghana, girls were found to value virginity, reporting a “great concern with “protecting” it and avoiding risks” in fear of being labelled as “damaged” or blamed for provoking sexual attention (Bohm 820). Confirmed in another testimony, a female was harassed by her uncle and confided in her grandmother was brutally beaten and had her hair pulled. In the testimony, the girl recollects the moment of humiliation stating, “He (the harasser uncle) was standing outside watching, and so was my aunt. I will never forget how broken I was in front of them. They punished the victim and left the offender just because he was a man”.

"I cannot forget the humiliation, as I laid on the bed waiting for the doctor to check on my virginity"
While in the abovementioned examples, the narrators were quite aware of the additional trauma they suffered. In other testimonies in the hashtag campaign, victims succumbed to the blame and consequently developed low self-esteem, self-loathing emotions, and perceptions that perpetuate gender stereotypes. A 26 years old commentator said that she will never get married because she is not “an innocent girl anymore,” since she was raped as a child and lost her virginity – a finding that is not unique to Egypt. This correlation is mirrored in a Ghanian study on the perceived impact of sexual harassment against children, one persistent issue that came up was the ‘lost innocence’ as participants believed that “sexual abuse was assumed to “ruin” the presumed innocence of childhood, equated to giving a child “bad ideas” and leading to a sexual initiation and future promiscuity” (Bohm 825). Another 21 years old girl said, “I hate the day that I was a girl”, after recounting how her Quran teacher used to harasser her. One woman remembered how her cousin took advantage of the empty house and attempted to sexually harass her instead of ‘preserving her honor’. Her shock centered on the cousin’s failure to protect ‘his’ own flesh and blood, and her mother interest was in the preserved virginity rather than the harassment incident. Another girl who vividly remembers a rape incident perpetrated by her uncle did not understand the repercussions on her body; she had suicidal thoughts stemming from the uncertainty of how this rape will affect her prospects of marriage.

Silence is another common repercussion of blaming and stigmatizing the victim – a convenient status quo that keeps the matter of sexual violence out of public discussion. This was reflected in a few testimonies. One girl was molested by her brother and beaten by her father and as a result, she stated “he taught me how to shut up every time I was molested.” (Fareed). Finally, another female explained that she did not report her brother’s rape even to the parents because she knew she would have been blamed. She now does not want to get married as she knows no man will trust her. While victim blaming in Egypt contributes to the silence of child victims of sexual harassment and abuse, a low level of reporting is not specific to Egypt. In fact, Caprioli & Crenshaw note that modern surveys of adults who were subjected to child sexual abuse reveal that only 10% of the respondents have disclosed this abuse in their childhood (191).

Silence and victim-blaming strongly reflect social norms embedded in unequal gender power dynamics that is the root of this violence. When UNICEF asked Egyptian boys from the three governorates (Cairo, Alexandria, Assuit) about their views on sexual harassment, they asserted that some cases of sexual harassment should not be considered ‘violence’ “because girls may have invited this abuse by wearing the wrong type of clothes or by displaying inappropriate attitudes” (30).
They added that the girls’ reactions to the attempted harassment is what makes her ‘decent and respectful’ identifying the appropriate reaction as to “simply avoid the boys and/or pretend she did not hear anything abusive” (Unicef 30). It is important to note that victim blaming is a global practice that prevails despite the enormous effort exerted by civil society and women’s rights activists to debunk it. As the hashtag #Break_Your_Silence_Speak_Up broke out early in 2017 to encourage Saudi women to expose untold stories of sexual violence, one woman said that she had been “locked up for a year inside the house after her mother learned that her father had raped her over three years.” (Fareed).

Along the same line, media and public responses of a high profile sexual abuse case in 2009 where Dr. Earl Bradley that abused over 100 victims were analyzed in a study. The results show that the popular discourse overwhelmingly explained the abuse as the fault of the victims’ parents, especially the mothers (Miller et al). There is a reason why victim blaming is pervasive in sexual violence: distancing ourselves – “it is a way of collectively assuring ourselves that it cannot touch our lives or the lives of our children because the victim differs from us in some fundamental way that caused their victimization” (Caprioli & Crenshaw 195). These trends discourage children from revealing the violation in fear of being victimized or at best, not believed – one of the most common reasons for not disclosing sexual harassment as documented in McElvaney’s study (934). Consequently, a culture of silence is perpetuated, which is even stronger in family violence cases. Abd El Rahman provides one of the few studies done on the topic in Egypt by looking at cases in court. She notes that in the study, harassers were mostly strangers – a contradiction to the global trends placing “known and trusted people” as the most common offenders.” She suggests that this may be due to the shame, secrecy, and denial associated with familial sexual violence against children that prevent it being reported.” (Abd El Rahman et al 314).

Serious intervention, especially on part of the state, is a prerequisite to end the silence, victim-blaming and provide support to sexually violated children. Currently, there are neither preventive measures to curb the problem of sexual violence against children, nor are there any attempts on part of the state to end the culture of exoneration enjoyed by offenders. In addition to the aforementioned state obligation under the CRC to protect children from sexual violence, Article 17 holds the state responsible to “encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child,” and general recommendation 18 from the CRC demonstrates measures to be taken by the state to eliminate social norms and practices that contribute to violence and various forms of inequality and discrimination against children.
#FIRSTTIMEIWASHARASSED

REVEALING INFORMATION ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN EGYPT

VICTIM-BLAMING AND THE CULTURE OF SILENCE

The collected testimonies showed very limited parental and familial support, and that none of the testimonies indicated any kind of psychological and/or emotional professional support that the harassed may have received after the incident.

## Methodology

Victim-blaming and the culture of silence

Secondary victimization and victim-blaming

- Family beatings/hurt to the harassed
- Family infliction of violent punishments
- "Forgotten" harassment by the family (preserving 'honor')

Victims developing self-loathing emotions "forgotten" harassment by the family

The collected testimonies showed very limited parental and familial support, and that none of the testimonies indicated any kind of psychological and/or emotional professional support that the harassed may have received after the incident.

Hashtaggers focused on the trauma resulting from the family reaction rather than the violence

- **Victims aware of the trauma they endured**
- **Hashtaggers focused on the trauma resulting from the family reaction rather than the violence**
- **Reflection of social norms that embedded unequal gender power dynamics**
- **Connected reactions**

### Reactions

- **Most common**
- **Less common**
Gender stereotypes may be equally detrimental to male children as some research suggest – also evident in #FirstTimeIwasHarassed content. Different reasons prevent boys and girls from revealing sexual violence experiences, strongly mirroring gender expectations. Finkelhor explains that boys are reluctant to reveal such information so as to conform to the social concept of manhood (102), unlike girls who do not reveal due to “personal and relational factors such as self-blame and fear of not being believed (Caprioli & Crenshaw 196). In addition, boys do not want to risk the ability to be independent and not seek help from adults, the fear of curtailing freedom if the harassment is revealed and the stigma of homosexuality if the offender is male, an even bigger challenge for male victims who belong to a culture that over emphasizes the notions of masculinity (Finkelhor 103; Caprioli & Crenshaw 196). Furthermore, harassment by females against boys is rarely reported or even considered traumatic to boys as they are culturally pressured to view any heterosexual experience as positive (Colsen). A study conducted by UNICEF Egypt revealed similar findings. When boys and girls were asked about their experiences with sexual violence, the boys hardly revealed any violence to which they have been exposed.

“

The assumption is that if sexual violence and harassment against girls is difficult to report or talk about, it might be even more difficult to report sexual assault against boys” (Unicef p 30).
Testimonies by men almost always included a component of irony, expression of pain, or surprise – a trend that is not specific to this hashtag campaign. Testimonies on domestic violence against males collected from Whisper, a social media platform allowing people to share posts anonymously is a case in point. Zarell collected some examples including, ‘I finally got the courage to report my abusive partners of two years to the police yesterday. My secret: I’m a man and my girlfriend was my abuser’. Another example, “my last girlfriend verbally abused me and let another female friend beat me until she left bruises. I tell my friends I left her because she was fat, because no one believes the real reason.”

In #FirstTimeIwasHarassed, most testimonies by men were preceded by a disclaimer, “I am a man, not a woman”. The testimonies centered on the gender of the harassed rather than the harassment itself. One male started his testimony with “these words are very hard for a man to say”. Notions of masculinity also played a role in the techniques and motivations of the harasser. One male remembers how he rejected his harasser who used to own a furniture store in the area. The harasser told him, “this is manly, if you refuse, you will be soft (طري).” In another testimony, a girl recounted when she was with her family friends, and her father’s friend instructed one of his sons to kiss her. When she refused, he told the other son to truss her up so that his brother can kiss her. She added that her mother blamed the boys’ mother who was in the car during the incident. This is because of the belief that “she should have stopped it”. The example shows how a father can encourage an offender behavior so as to “be a man”, as well as the embedded assumption that the woman will support the girl because she is also a woman.
CONCLUSION

This hashtag campaign did not lead to legal gains, but perhaps its strength centered on the revelations of such personal trauma related to a long time silenced topic. These testimonies may have impact beyond measurability: parents who read these stories may become aware of some trends, they may be more likely to hold the school accountable when claims of sexual harassment emerge. Schools as well may be encouraged to take a strong stance against harassment whether by implementing preventive and/or punitive measures. The documentation of the testimonies may encourage bystanders to speak up when they witness sexual violence against children. These are all differences that are not currently measurable but may be more evident in the medium-term future. However, it is undoubted that this hashtag campaign has stirred up a much-needed outcry from the public, joining the wave of feminist and women’s rights hashtag campaigns around the world.

After listening to former children’s stories of sexual violence, the course of action on part of the state, society and institutions become clearer. We cannot afford any more delay in implementing sexual education and awareness-raising sessions in schools. In HarassMap’s experience, a tiny minority of educational institutions have started to take some action against sexual harassment, but it is hardly enough to curb the problem in a country with a population reaching 100 million. Increased awareness will take us a long way in responding to this crime – an environment that has zero tolerance to sexual harassment against children will encourage children to speak up when they are exposed to sexual violence. It would also enable society to identify the cases and observe the trends and finally, it would push both the state and various institutions to write policy and take punitive measures against perpetrators.
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