

Analysis of the #FirstSexualHarassmentCampaign: a continuum of sexual violence

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze the first experience of sexual violence that women have suffered through complaint tweets in the #FirstSexualHarassment Campaign. A total of 2,887 tweets were posted with #FirstSexualHarassment for one month, of which 688 were tweets and 2,199 were retweets. In addition, an analysis of the tweets posted confirmed that the 76% of the tweets were from cases of multiple violence suffered against female under the age of 18 (65% were situations of sexual abuse of minors and 11% peer sexual harassment) and 24% to multiple violence against women adults (21.3% sexual harassment, 1.6% harassment based on sex and 1.1% sexual assault). Therefore, sexual violence is a reality that women mostly suffer. Their first experience of violence in the childhood stage. Therefore, sex education is important to prevent sexual violence.

Key words: sexual violence, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual assault.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio es analizar la primera experiencia de violencia sexual que han sufrido las mujeres a través de los tuits de denuncia en la Campaña #PrimAcoso. Durante un mes se identificó un total de 2,887 tuits publicados con el hastag #PrimerAcoso, de los cuales 688 eran tuits y 2,199, retuits. Los resultados muestran que 76% de los tuits aluden a casos de múltiples violencias contra menores de 18 años (65% fueron situaciones de abuso sexual a menores, y 11% acoso sexual entre iguales) y 24% a múltiples violencias contra mujeres adultas (21.3% de acoso sexual, 1.6% de acoso por razón de sexo y 1.1% de agresión sexual). La violencia sexual es una realidad que sufren mayoritariamente las mujeres, y su primera experiencia se ubica en la infancia. Por ello es importante la educación sexual para prevenir ese problema.

Palabras clave: violencias sexuales, abuso sexual, acoso sexual, agresión sexual.

Introduction

Violence against women is a reality that transcends physical boundaries and acquires global dimensions, thus becoming the most widespread and least recognized violence in the world (Fitzgerald, 2017). Sexual violence experiences are not isolated events, but a continuum of multiple forms of violence that women suffer throughout their lives (Kelly, 1988; Hayes and Dragiewicz, 2018).

Based on the theoretical positioning of Kelly (1988) in the continuum of sexual violence experienced by women, they begin in childhood and are perpetuated throughout life, as a continuous and often invisible experience. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2005: 161) defines sexual violence as:

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality, using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including home and work.

This definition also considers as sexual violence coercion with a wide range of degrees of use of physical force (from mild and medium to severe), sexual organs assault and female mutilation, sexual harassment, harassment based on sex, forced marriage, virginity inspections, forced prostitution and all those acts that affect the sexual integrity of women (WHO, 2005).

In order to understand this perspective of sexual violence against female as an immutable reality and under the "continuum thinking" to become an inevitable part of the existence of being a woman (Tuerkheimer, 1997), it is important to frame it within the patriarchal ideology that reproduces gender inequalities in various contexts (public and private), relationships (intimate, family, school, acquaintances, strangers), temporal (once, repeatedly, continued) and cultural issues (Boyle, 2019). At the same time, it still perpetuates hegemonic masculinity, where men assume power and subjugate women using their bodies and sexuality (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2018).

In this way, as men feel supported by the advantageous conditions granted to them by patriarchal ideology, they deploy a wide range of sexual coercion strategies against women of any age (Lameiras *et al.*, 2010).

The beginning of sexual violence

It is in childhood and adolescence when the first sexual violence occurs (Dekeseredy et al., 2019); therefore, we will focus mainly on abuse of minors and peer sexual harassment.

Sexual abuse of minors

The WHO (2005) defines child sexual abuse as the involvement of a child in a sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, and for which they cannot give consent. Available global data show that child sexual abuse is a fairly frequent type of violence, especially against girls, after the physical and emotional one (Assink et al., 2019).

International research provides a wide range of prevalence: between 12% and 46.7% of girls and boys have experienced child sexual abuse (Allroggen et al., 2017; Morrison-Beedy and Grove, 2018). In Spain, some studies indicate a prevalence range between 13.9% and 36.5% (López et al., 2017; Pereda et al., 2018). According to some studies, this type of behavior is also perpetrated during adolescence, making this stage the most vulnerable to sexual abuse, especially between the ages of 12 and 18 (Chandraratne et al., 2018; Karayianni et al., 2017). However, other researches indicate that such abuse began at the age of seven, showing a prevalence of 10% to 22.5% (Pereda et al., 2018; Marcos et al. 2017).

Peer sexual harassment

Peer sexual harassment is another type of sexual violence that we will address, which occurs during pre-adolescence and adolescence. According to Vega-Gea et al. (2016), peer sexual harassment can be understood as an unwanted behavior of a sexual nature that causes distress and discomfort to the victims, which can interfere with the normal life of students in school. This type of harassment includes “various behaviors such as insults, rumors, sexual comments, looks, gestures, attempts at physical contacts, and physical attacks” (Ortega et al., 2010: 248).

International studies point to high prevalence rate of sexual harassment among adolescents, where range from 20% to 84% (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Charmaraman et al., 2013), with boys showing more involvement as aggressors than girls (Attar-Schwartz, 2013). Along the same lines, there is

evidence in the work of Kaltiala-Heino *et al.* (2018) showing that 36.9% of adolescents suffered sexual orientation harassment among peers, 9.6% unwanted sexual attention, and 3% sexual coercion, with girls suffering the most from these three forms of sexual harassment compared to boys.

In line with this, Spanish researchers show similar prevalence rates. The work of Vega-Gea *et al.* (2016), for example, reveals that sexual harassment is a reality that affects between 3.7% and 7.1% of Spanish girls and adolescents. It also stresses that most of the time it is perpetuated mainly through both nonverbal and verbal behaviors.

Other studies focused on the analysis of sexual orientation harassment among peers, such as the one of Morales *et al.* (2016), showing how masculinity-instrumentality is related to greater participation as an aggressor, regardless of the biological sex of the perpetrator, and expressivity-femininity to less involvement as an aggressor, especially for girls.

The course of the sexual violence continuum

The continuum of sexual violence “endures” into a woman’s adulthood, becoming sexual harassment, harassment based on sex and sexual assault.

Sexual harassment and harassment based on sex

The term sexual harassment was coined in 1974 by a group of feminists during a class at Cornell University in the United States. They analyzed the sexual harassment experiences of women in the professional sphere by men (Pernas *et al.*, 2000). The first complaints of these situations were made in the United States, and then in Europe, which allowed sexual harassment in the workplace to get on the political agenda; thus, it went from being a “problem” of a private nature to become a public one (Cuenca-Piqueras, 2017; Rodríguez *et al.*, 2019).

Despite the conceptual diversity of sexual harassment and harassment based on sex, there is a certain consensus at the European level –reflected in the Spanish Organic Law 3/2007 March 22nd on the effective equality of women and men (Gobierno de España, 2007)– to define sexual harassment as any verbal or physical behavior of a sexual nature that has the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, especially when it creates an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment.

Harassment based on sex is also defined as any behavior carried out on the basis of the sex of a person, with the purpose or effect of violating the

dignity of that person and creating an intimidating, degrading or offensive environment (Government of Spain, 2007: 12). Therefore, we may point out that sexual harassment is a concept strongly defined by its sexual nature, while harassment based on sex includes discrimination against women or sexual minorities who do not conform to the gender norm, but does not necessarily involve sexual behavior (Bosch *et al.*, 2012).

In the research of Kearl (2018), in the United States, 65% of women stated that they were victims of whistling, honking, leering, and gestures of a sexual nature on the streets of New York. In addition, 57% of women suffered verbal harassment through unwanted comments and 46% received sexist insults.

European data are along the same lines. The report of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) indicates that between 83 and 102 million of women (45-55% of women) in the 28 countries of the European Union have experienced at least one form of sexual harassment, but very few dare to report it. The recent report of the Jean Jaurés Foundation (Clavaud *et al.*, 2018) shows that between 49% and 61% of women revealed having suffered sexist insults or rude gestures with sexual connotations at least once in their lifetime, and that more than 50% have experienced sexual harassment at some point in their lives.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault is one of the cruelest forms of violation of women's human rights and has devastating consequences on their quality of life. As women are very likely to experience it throughout their lives, it is not an isolated attack (Igareda and Bodelón, 2014). Sexual assault is defined as any act that violates the sexual freedom of another person, using violence or intimidation (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2014). It includes a number of behaviors ranging from touching, submissive behavior in which indecent attitudes are involved and a person is forced to undress, to penetration without consent. Ultimately, these acts violate the freedom and denigrate, humiliate and offend women and sexual minorities (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2014).

Most of the knowledge on the prevalence and impact of sexual assault is provided by reports and studies conducted in North America and, increasingly, in Western Europe (Fedina *et al.*, 2018; Schuster and Krahé, 2019). In a 2015 national report on sexual violence in the United States (Smith *et al.*, 2018), it was found that one in five women experienced rape or attempted rape throughout their lifetime; 21.3% claimed to be victims

of rape and 37% experienced unwanted sexual contact. Likewise, in a more recent report for the organization Stop Street Harassment (Kearl, 2018) 27% of women claimed to have experienced sexual assault, with their first experience occurring between 14 and 17 years of age.

At European level, the Jean Jaurés Foundation report (Clavaud *et al.*, 2018) shows that 48% of European women and 45% of American women have experienced some type of sexual assault as rub, unwanted sexual touching or a penetrative sexual assault in their lifetime; with women under 25 years of age being the most vulnerable group in all cases. In this regard, the meta-analysis study by Dworkin *et al.* (2017) identifies that 28% of women suffered sexual assault at some point in their lives and 34% experienced this assault through coercion.

In Spain, the recent report *Que se sepa. El macrocuestionario sobre violencias sexuales* [Let it be known. The macro-questionnaire on sexual violence] (Cillán *et al.*, 2020) collects the experiences of women who were victims of sexual violence. Their findings show that 53.14% suffered sexual assault without penetration; 17.75% stated that they took advantage of them to have sexual relations when under the influence of alcohol or other substances or being unconscious; 41.64% reported having suffered non-consensual sexual practices and 15.74% said they were forced to have sexual intercourse. Nevertheless, only 3.12% of women reported these incidents, which would amount to 2,675 reports of attempted rape.

Therefore, in the last five years, sexual violence has gained great scientific attention (Bows, 2018). Feminists such as Cobo (2019) place it at the center of the demands of the fourth feminist wave, which is using both the physical and the virtual plane. The ubiquity of the Internet has offered victims a space for complaint with the hashtag #MeToo to expose what they have suffered throughout their lives. This initiative was implemented by Alyssa Milano and was quickly replicated in more than 85 countries, becoming an international movement whose aim is to make visible the various sexual violence that girls and women have endured (Morrison-Beedy and Grove, 2018). These virtual tools have allowed victims to express themselves and have contact with other victims for support and visibility (Khatua *et al.*, 2018).

In this light, the aim of this study was to analyze testimonies of women about the sexual violence they have suffered through Twitter using the hashtag #FirstSexualHarassment, which works in a very similar way to the #MeToo movement. In particular, girls and women were encouraged to recount their first experience of sexual harassment.

Methodology

Source of information

The Office of Equality of the City Council of Pontevedra, located in the southwest of the autonomous community of Galicia and the northwest of Spain, promoted a campaign –within the activities against macho violence– through Twitter, in which women were asked to: “share with us the first time you felt harassed for being a woman”, by way of complaint. For this purpose, the hashtag #FirstSexualHarassment¹ was created, and a total of 2,887 tweets were identified for a month, of which 688 were tweets and 2,199 were retweets.

Procedure and data analysis

The analysis of the comments linked to the hashtag #FirstSexualHarassment was carried out through qualitative methodology, which allows “to understand, explain, describe or predict a phenomenon” (Izcara-Palacios, 2014: 17), in this case, experiences of the first sexual harassment that women suffered, sharing them on social media.

The tweets posted on Twitter with the hashtag #FirstSexualHarassment were downloaded into an Excel table using the Twlets application (Twitter to Excel). They were subsequently transferred to an *.rft* file extension for analysis of their content with the information processing and management program Atlas.Ti, v.8, which allowed researchers to examine the information through a pair-wise classification. Thus, the hermeneutic unit was studied with one primary document, 85 codes, 1,440 quotations, one memo and 10 families. The tweets were coded using the sex of the person (W= Woman) and the number of quote of the tweet.

Finally, 688 tweets were selected from the total number (n=2887) for study, since the retweets shared the tweet of another person and did not provide any new data. Therefore, the analysis of the tweets was organized into two main categories: in the first one, the cases of *multiple violence against girls* were collected; in the second one, the cases of *multiple violence suffered against adult women* were included. In turn, these categories were disaggregated into secondary and tertiary categories, which are developed in the results section.

1 <https://twitter.com/PrimeiroAcoso>

Results

Through the analysis of the 688 tweets of the campaign with the hashtag #FirstSexualHarassment we identified the continuum of multiple violence suffered against girls, adolescents and women throughout their lives. Thus, 76% of the tweets were from cases against female under the age of 18, and 24% cases against women over the age of 18.

Multiple violence against minors

A total of 516 tweets were identified in this category, of which 447 reported situations of sexual abuse and assault of minors, and 69 involved situations of peer sexual harassment.

Sexual abuse and assault of minors

When examining the tweets of the victims, it was possible to identify the type of abuse experienced, the characteristics of the victim, the place and the characteristics of the aggressor.

a) Type of abuse

Regarding the types of sexual abuse and assault during childhood/adolescence recounted, we identified abuses that occur with no physical contact and other with physical contact.

As for the cases with *no physical contact*, the participants suffered direct or indirect threats and *unwanted* sexual comments about their physical appearance and sexed body, as well as nasty looks and exhibitionism. A quarter said they had been verbally abused with sexual connotations.

He got my phone number and told me he was going to rape me (W, 1:13).

He threatened me with a knife (W, 1:502).

He yelled things at me on the street (W, 1:22).

He flashes his penis at us on the street (W, 1:126).

Regarding sexual abuse with *physical contact*, women recounted situations they experienced as children and adolescents in which their bodies became an object of desire for the aggressors, who touched some part of their bodies without consent.

He grabbed my ass (W, 1:67).

He pinched my breasts and said: "You're quite a woman" (W, 1:109).

He rubbed his hand over my pubis and said: "You must have a black pubis by now." (W, 1:959).

He'd touch my legs and tried to put his fingers inside my panties (W, 1:449).

He took me in his arms and got an erection. My dress was soaked (W, 1:1027).

It should be noted that several women reported having been victims of "attempted sexual assault", pointing out how the aggressors grabbed or pushed them violently or how they tried to get them into a car.

On one occasion they wanted to force me to have sex, I ran away (W, 1:398).

On my way home, a rapist jumped on me and wouldn't let go (W, 1:945).

He opened the door and tried to get me into his car against my will (W, 1:237).

b) Characteristics of the victim

Two subcategories regarding *gender* and *age* at the time of their first sexual abuse emerge here.

Despite the gender of the person was not explicitly identified, in all tweets that were cases of sexual abuse we found they were women through an analysis of their discourse.

I was a harassed girl too (W, 1:39).

I was sexually abused as a nine- or ten-year-old girl (W, 1:267).

Regarding the *age of the victim*, we observed they suffered sexual abuse between the ages of four and 18; in 90% of the cases the victims were under the age of 16. Nevertheless, between 8 and 12 years of age these people experienced more abuse, with 10 being the most reported age.

It was at the age of four (W, 1:934).

I think I must have been between five and seven years old the first time (W, 1:126).

As a nine- or ten-year-old girl (W, 1:267).

At the age of 10 or 12 (W, 1:289).

c) Place where sexual abuse was perpetrated

Women recounted having been sexually abused as children in both public and private places, but more frequently in the latter. One third of all cases occurred in a public space such as the street, a road or a fair. They also recall

being attacked in places near their house, and even in their porch or on the stairs of their homes.

On the street (W, 1:65).

In the afternoon, in front of my house (W, 1:602).

He got into the elevator of my building (W, 1:291).

The victims indicated that other public spaces where they suffered assault were: schools, ecclesiastical institutions, camps, swimming pools, cinema, and even means of transportation.

At school recess (W, 1:62).

In the sacristy, preparing for First Communion (W, 1:443).

In the camp (W, 1:575).

In the pool (W, 1:321).

On the school bus (W, 1:268).

It should be noted, however, that most sexual abuse took place in private spaces such as in their own house or in family or friends' house.

In my grandma's house (W, 1:388).

At home (W, 1:166).

At my friend's place (W, 1:189).

d) Characteristics of the aggressor

The analysis of the accounts allowed us to identify the type of *relationship between the aggressor and the victim*, highlighting known and unknown persons. Most of sexual abuse was perpetrated by persons *known* to the victim, and in one out of eight cases the abuser was a close relative: her father, grandfather or uncle.

A friend of my parents (W, 1:33).

The man from the sandwich bar (W, 1:827).

A neighbor (W, 1:227).

A relative (W, 1:927).

My grandfather (W, 1:928).

On the other hand, some women mentioned that their aggressors were *members of the educational community*, mainly teachers, instructors and janitors; as well as *ecclesiastical members* of various congregations: priest and monks.

The teacher would ask all girls go to his desk to make corrections, and take the opportunity to touch us (W, 1: 511).

My professor of Philosophy would rub his penis against us (W, 1: 675).

The janitor (W, 1:681).

The priest would start by tickling you and then touch you everything (W, 1:830).

Regarding abuse by persons *unknown to the victim*, women indicated that the aggressor was an unknown adult male. It is also notable that several victims recounted they were sexually abused by several men at the same time.

I didn't know that man (W, 1:808).

An older man in a beige Ford Fiesta (W, 1:236).

Six adult males (W, 1:788).

A bunch of boys (W, 1:112).

Peer sexual harassment

As part of *the multiple violence against minors*, the analysis showed cases of *peer sexual harassment*, representing 11% of the total number of situations reported in the tweets.

a) Type of peer sexual harassment

In this section, we identify harassment with no physical contact and with physical contact. Despite being the minority, the first ones were situations related to sexually offensive comments, mainly referring to the valuation of girl's bodies.

He wouldn't leave me alone, "Blondie, you're so hot" (W, 1:398).

He explained to me what it meant to fuck and told me that we could try it (W, 1:648).

Most cases of *peer sexual harassment* refer to behaviors that involve *physical contact*. The body of the girls becomes, again, an object of desire for their peers through unwanted touching, such as lifting their skirts to see their underwear and rubbing against their bodies, using violence and sometimes causing physical harm.

He'd lift up my skirt and grab my ass (W, 1:550).

They grab you and immobilize you on the desks (W, 1:801).

At that time he seized me and pinched my pubis hard (W, 1:413).

One third of the cases of *peer sexual harassment* reported that as children the victims suffered unwanted and non-consensual touching by several boys

at the same time. The aggressors would act as a “pack” and sometimes use playing as strategy to intimidate and abuse the victim.

They’d surround me to grab me (W, 1:387).

They’d play at grabbing girl’s buttocks and lift up our skirts at recess (W, 1:407).

Two boys would hunt girls and take them to their cave (in the courtyard arcade), and there they’d grab you (W, 1:839).

b) Characteristics of the victim

Through content analysis, we identified that girls are the main victims in most of the tweets.

c) Place where peer sexual harassment occurs

Despite most of the stories reveal situations in the school context such as in the classroom, during recess or on school transportations, they also include the non-school context associated with camps or after-school classes.

At school (W, 1:530).

School bus (W, 1:796).

The camp of the Regional Government of Galicia (W, 1:396).

Judo classes (W, 1:463).

d) Characteristics of the abuser

The analyzed tweets allowed us to identify the gender and the age of the perpetrator, as well as the type of relationship. In general, we observed that in all cases the aggressor was a boy. Most of them were of a similar age to the victim; only in four cases was the aggressor an older boy, and were people known to them.

A middle school boy (W, 1:470).

A boy in my class (W, 1:549).

My classmates (W, 1:868).

Multiple violence suffered against adult women

This second main category represents 24% of the complaint tweets (n= 161); thus three types of violence were identified: 1) *sexual harassment*, 2) *harassment based on sex*, and 3) *sexual assault*.

1. Sexual harassment

A total of 143 tweets (21.3%) posted in #FirstSexualHarassment Campaign were situations of sexual harassment experienced by women. Our analysis identified the type of abuse, the characteristics of the victim, the place and the characteristics of the harasser.

a) Type of sexual harassment

The behaviors were classified into those with no physical contact and those with physical contact. Despite the first ones are the least reported, we found that they were mainly *verbal behaviors* such as catcalls.

He cursed at me on the street (W, 1:774).

He asked me for the time and then asked for a kiss (W, 1:141).

Regarding situations with physical contact, it was found that they are the most frequent type of sexual harassment, which victims mostly suffer through touching without their consent.

He grabbed my ass (W, 1:505).

He started to touch my breasts (W, 1:276).

He came from behind and touched me between my legs (W, 1:881).

He took the opportunity to lunge at me and give me a hug (W, 1:371).

Several victims indicated that these behaviors are such a common part of their daily lives that they are even socially normalized and considered “games” or “jokes”.

You couldn’t go to the dance floor upstairs because they would touch you everything, and there it was “the normal thing” (W, 1:524).

b) Characteristics of the victim

All the cases reported of this type of harassment were of women, mainly between the ages of 18 and 20.

When I was 18/19 (W, 1:535).

My first #FirstSexualHarassment was at the age of 20 (W, 1:878).

c) Place where sexual harassment occurred

Three quarters of the participants reported having suffered sexual harassment mostly in public places, but also in private ones.

Of the first times I went to the movies alone (W, 1:80).

On the street (W, 1:407).

In my first job interview (W, 1:349).

At home (W, 1:1020).

d) Characteristics of the harasser

This analysis showed that there is no defined profile of the harasser, since the participants were victims of known and unknown persons. More than half of the sexual harassment situations in the complaint tweets were perpetrated by people “unknown” to the victim. In some cases, women reported that they were sexually harassed by several men at the same time.

A worker (W, 1:307).

A guy in his 30s (W, 1:686).

The gas technician (W, 1:5).

By seven men (W, 1:773, 775).

As for harassment situations by people known to the victims, they pointed to family members, friends, neighbors, supervisors and even teachers.

My long-time “friend” (W, 1:314).

Driving instructor (W, 1:552).

Uncles, friends, cousins, neighbors, teachers, priests (W, 1:688-689).

Harassment based on sex

Of the total tweets, 11 of them (1.6%) allowed us to establish the typology of the harassment, the characteristics of the victim, the place and the characteristics of the harasser.

a) Type of harassment

In all cases, the victim’s accounts show that the situations involved both *verbal* and *non-verbal harassment*. Most of the victims refer to verbal harassment that includes *offensive and vexatious comments* such as catcalls, followed by *sexist remarks*.

All kind of horns, savagery and expletives coming from cars or even trucks (W, 1:615).

When they yell at you on the street (W, 1:581).

There was always teasing about physique (W, 1:844).

He told my father that giving his daughter education was a waste of money, because my future was to get married and give birth (W, 1:76).

Regarding harassment through *non-verbal* behaviors, the victims reported *discriminatory behavior* suffered throughout their lives by the simple fact of being women.

Testimonies about how a person was rejected to teach because she was a woman (W, 1:227).

It is harassment to get paid less than a man for the same job (W, 1:1018).

b) Characteristics of the victim

All the examined tweets were from women recounting situations of sexual harassment they had experienced.

Workers don't like it when a woman is the boss (W, 1:486).

c) Place where sexual harassment occurred

Most of the victims indicated that it was in the *public space*, both in the workplace and in academia, as well as on public roads.

When starting college (W, 1:74).

On the street (W, 1:581).

In the bagpipe band from my town (W, 1:139).

d) Characteristics of the harasser

The victims did not provide much information as to the sex of the harassers. However, we note that they may be men known to them, but not close persons.

A dude (W, 1:104).

A co-worker (W, 1:90).

Sexual assault

In the complaint tweets, 1.1% of women reported having been victims of a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault in their lifetime. In all cases, the victims were young women at the time of the assault, the aggressor was unknown to them, and in some situations her friend.

It was in a festival when I was 18, I didn't know him. He took me unawares and didn't let me move. He hurt me (W, 1:803-806).

When I was 23, an attempted rape by a friend who was walking me home (W, 1:225).

Discussion

On the basis of the objective of this study, it was found how women decided to raise awareness and report sexual violence that they have suffered since their childhood through new technologies such as Twitter, the social media in this case. Of these tweets, 76% were situations experienced as children; and of this percentage, 65% were from cases of abuse of minors and 11% of peer sexual harassment.

As for the type of sexual abuse, it was identified both with physical and with no physical contact. The victims mostly related unwanted touching and rub, even being forced, in some sexed part of their bodies. These results are in line with the study of Chandraratne *et al.* (2018). Likewise, more than a quarter of the tweets were of verbal abuse with sexual connotations, as in the study by Witt *et al.* (2018), in which high prevalence of sexual abuse with no physical contact is shown.

One third of the tweets indicated that the aggressors were unknown to the victims. However, most of the sexual abuses were perpetrated by people known to them; thus, in one out of eight cases, the abuser was a close relative. Some studies such as that of González-García and Carrasco (2016) or Reed *et al.* (2019) indicate that the main aggressors of minors are immediate family members. Others such as Bogen *et al.* (2019) point to teachers, neighbors or priests as the main perpetrators.

This is related to the fact that two thirds of the cases occurred in the private sphere: in their own house or in family or friends' house. Only one third of the reported situations took place in public spaces, but near their homes such as in the porch, on the staircase or in places related to school or church, or even to leisure and free time such as camps, swimming pools or cinemas.

Another type of sexual violence mentioned in the complaint tweets, occurring when the participants were still minors, was peer sexual harassment (11%). The perpetrators were boys, and most of these situations involved physical contact; for example, lifting their skirts to see their underwear, rubbing against their bodies, touching their sexed parts, etcetera.

In this way, boys tend to objectify girl's bodies through unwanted and non-consensual physical contact. This type of sexual harassment is accepted by the patriarchal society and does not stop the harassers, as they take the opportunity to reinforce the "power" they exert over the sexual dimension of girls/women (Rodríguez *et al.*, 2019). They even consider these behaviors as harmless fun or as the normal thing in interactions characterizing gender

(Quinn, 2002). A third of the tweets about peer sexual harassment mentioned that the aggressors acted in a group, emulating the “herd effect” (Liang and Hu, 2018).

Of the total tweets, 24% were from cases of multiple sexual violence suffered against adult women through sexual harassment, harassment based on sex and sexual assault. The first one is the most reported situation with 21.3% of the tweets, and it is carried out through physical contact, such as touching and groping without consent, mainly in some sexed part of their bodies.

Nevertheless, women are also subjected to sexual comments about their physique, catcalls, leering, and even persecution and insistence for sexual relations. As evidenced in the study by Rodríguez-Martínez and Cuenca-Piqueras (2019), women do not usually identify situations of verbal harassment as sexual harassment despite feeling uncomfortable, since they have normalized it throughout their lives. They identify it only when unwanted touching is involved. Therefore, this fact makes verbal harassment less visible and less reported.

Regarding the victim of sexual harassment, women indicated that they suffered these situations mainly when they were between 18 and 20 years old. Likewise, harassment occurred mostly in public spaces, particularly on streets and places of leisure, as well as in educational centers such as universities. The study of Kearl (2018) has been stressed this, in which it is evident that sexual harassment on the street is a serious social problem, and also in private spaces, although to a lesser extent.

As for the profile of the harasser, most of them are unknown men (Logan *et al.*, 2015), and less frequently men known to the victims: members of their group of friends, workplace or academia. This reality causes women to feel defenseless due to the frequency of such situations (Graham *et al.*, 2014), and due to the social condescension that sexual harassment is treated with in places where it is culturally normalized (Kavanaugh, 2014). It is worth noting that in public spaces, women can often feel uncomfortable, insecure and sexually intimidated, especially at night (Kavanaugh, 2014).

The analyzed tweets revealed that along with sexual harassment women also suffered *harassment based on sex*, which represents 1.6% of the total number of situations of violence that women experienced. This is manifested through various behaviors, mostly including verbal harassment through sexist comments that objectify women and emphasize qualities associated with expressivity-femininity, such as beauty, or that penalize the transgression of female stereotyping with insults or by judging their capacity.

Based on the tweets, these situations occurred in the public space, specifically in the workplace and academia, and also on the street. They were perpetrated by men known to the victim, although not very close. Harassment based on sex has recently been made visible in studies involving university community (Lameiras *et al.*, 2018), in which female students and teachers openly stated that they received some sexist comments from peers and professors.

Finally, our results show that 1.1% of the total number of tweets are from women who reported having been victims of sexual assault in their lifetime. Two of them recounted two attempted rapes from which, fortunately, they were able to escape. They were perpetrated by an unknown man, in one case, and by a friend of the victim who was accompanying her home supposedly to protect her, in the other.

In the same vein, studies such as the one of Kearl (2018) argue that sexual assaults are more frequent by known persons than by unknown ones.

Conclusion

The results of this study show how widespread and normalized sexual violence is in women's lives. Furthermore, it can be affirmed that childhood is the period when most of them remember their first incident of violence, especially through abuse of minors. Sexual harassment and harassment based on sex, both in adolescents and adult women, are other of the various forms of violence reported by the participants. Likewise, this study recognizes the importance of the victim's narrative as central component in women's social movements, as making their voices visible and analyzing their experiences is essential to feminist research that has enabled women to identify and understand the structural and gendered nature of their continued sexual violence experiences throughout their lives (Boyle, 2019).

Nowadays, feminist activism is increasing an egalitarian awareness in society through social media (Mendes *et al.*, 2018). Thus, movements such as #MeToo, #TimeUp, #TalkAboutIt, #IBelieveYou, among others, have brought the spotlight on this reality of violence, which until then were silenced, suffered by many women and girls (Park, 2017). This has been a turning point in helping victims to break the social stigma regarding this type of violence and to bring to public light a reality that has been made invisible.

Therefore, these campaigns have made a "small" social progress in combating sexual violence against girls and women (Patrick, 2018), but there is still a long way to go. We consider it necessary to reinforce these initiatives

with training in sexual education, implementing sexual education and sexual violence prevention programs in the school system, aimed not only at students, but also at the entire educational community, including families, in order to (re)build a more just and egalitarian society, in which women and girls can live free from sexual and gender-based violence.

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