MAPPING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EGYPT

More than 95 per cent of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment at least once, but many citizens there turn a blind eye when it happens. The HarassMap project is aiming to change that attitude at home and abroad, empowering women and changing the attitudes of men in the process.

In Cairo, life happens on the streets. It’s a place where people see and know the parking lot attendant, the building guard, the food seller, the textile shop owner, the jeweller. A woman walking to work might pass them every day. And, in a country where a 2013 UN Women-sponsored study found that 99.3 per cent of women respondents had experienced sexual harassment at least once, there’s a very good chance that she has been subjected to unwanted touching, cat-calling, ogling and even rape. Until recently, the reaction of the familiar faces she sees has been silence.

“Men could harass with impunity because no one talked about it,” says Noora Flinkman, head of marketing and communications at HarassMap, an organization that aims to break that silence by raising awareness and encouraging action from passive bystanders. “We want to create an environment in Egypt where sexual harassment is not tolerated.”

The organization, which was once funded by the International Development Research Centre, launched in December 2010 with two programs. The first was the project for which it is named, the HarassMap. With new technology that combined text messaging with an anonymous online reporting system, the organization was able to create a map of where sexual harassment incidents occurred.

The accumulated data from women’s sexual harassment reports was a well of evidence that could be used to justify and inform other work, says Flinkman. “The data allowed us to challenge many stereotypes. It showed that sexual harassment doesn’t just happen in bad areas or at night. It showed that it isn’t just initiated by poor people. It showed that it happens regardless of what women are wearing.”

The evidence garnered from HarassMap reports informed and strengthened the community outreach program that was launched simultaneously. “Teams of volunteers went into their own neighbourhoods to encourage people to see the problem and then to take action to prevent sexual harassment on the street,” says Flinkman. Volunteers used information from specific reports to encourage people on the streets to feel compassion for the victims of harassment and to be more inclined to take action if something similar happens in their presence.

Volunteer-based programs and their positive outcomes continue to grow. Young women that volunteer for HarassMap become empowered as they work toward a world where they don’t have to be in constant fear of unwanted attention, says Flinkman. Many become strong public speakers and advocates, working on policy and laying the groundwork for real change.

The community outreach program has also been successful in attracting men, who make up about 50 per cent of those enrolled. Flinkman sees an evolution in their involvement as well.

“Some of the men in the program come because they feel like they want to protect women who can’t protect themselves,” she says. “When they go through the program, they see that it’s not about women being weak — it’s a social and behavioural problem that is actually about men. Then their whole perception changes. They stop talking about protecting their sisters and start talking about working together with other human beings on this issue.”

HarassMap has facilitated some landmark changes. It worked with Cairo University, the country’s biggest public university, to implement a sexual harassment policy in 2014 — the first of its kind in Egypt. There is one anti-harassment unit for the entire university that regularly recruits and trains volunteers, and representatives of that unit are available in every faculty. During the recent United Nations-led 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, these volunteers arranged activities against sexual harassment all around campus.

“This was unheard of two years ago,” says Flinkman, adding that the university president, Gaber Nassar, walked in the organized march against sexual harassment.

HarassMap has also worked with the technology company Uber to develop a sexual harassment component for their driver training. It teaches new drivers what sexual harassment is, and the legal consequences.

Having learned of its success, organizations in other countries have asked HarassMap for mentorship in starting their own programs. For example, Women Under Seige has been documenting sexualized violence in Syria, while Akshara/HarassMap India is working against sexual harassment in India.

“We’re trying to support other groups that want to do something similar,” says Flinkman. It appears to be working. While sexual harassment exists across the globe, so do the people determined to stop it.
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READING AS THINKING
Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. Using the mind map below, provide a concise summary of the article. Use your own words and/or pictures. The main idea goes in the centre of your map with supporting details in the outer boxes.
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2. Observe the picture in the article and read its caption.
   a) What kind of information is presented?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

   b) What can we learn from the picture and caption?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

   c) How does this picture help us better understand the topic?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

3. Determine some differences and similarities between your life and the one described in Cairo.

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
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4. Why do you think that sexual harassment has been tolerated in Egypt?

   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
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5. Almost half of the community outreach program volunteers are men. Describe how the program has changed the men’s perception. What might be some reasons for this transformation?

6. Explain how HarassMap is working to address sexual harassment.

7. Predict the outcomes of the project five years from now. Justify your prediction with evidence from the article.

Think-Pair-Share

8. **Think**
   - Watch the clip *Five years with HarassMap* and write a blog post based on what you learn from the video.

9. **Pair**
   - Share your blog post with a partner and decide which ideas are the most essential. Film your own public service announcement to denounce sexual harassment. Include resources in your announcement.

10. **Share**
    - As a class, view the different announcements and discuss their importance.
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ONLINE
1. Using Google Maps, locate Cairo, Egypt, and explore the city by using Street View and the satellite and map modes. Using the quick facts section and other research tools find the following:
   a. The population
   b. The neighbouring cities
   c. The major bodies of water
   d. Places of cultural significance
   e. Describe where Cairo is in relation to Canada

2. Consult the HarassMap map. Locate sexual harassment trends in Cairo.

3. Read this article from Kids Help Phone to learn about how to recognize sexual harassment and things you can do to stop it.

4. Read more about sexual harassment and bullying.

5. Learn about crowdsourcing data and its effectiveness from this report on HarassMap.

6. Read this 2014 article about HarassMap to familiarize yourself with some of the organization’s obstacles.

7. Explore the different initiatives that HarassMap supports around the world. How do they differ from HarassMap?
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CROSSWORD:

Across
4. Onlookers
5. HarassMap has taken on this kind of role for other organizations
6. A technology company that developed training for their drivers to stand up against sexual harassment
8. To chronicle
11. To feel like you have authority
12. Growth, development and change
13. Cairo University implemented a policy in 2014 to address this topic

Down
1. A benchmark
2. Preparation
3. To make the process easier
7. Those who answered an inquiry
9. The capital of Egypt
10. Without consequences or punishment