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The world of sports sexual harassment

Arsalan Sadiq Sheikh

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THE WORLD OF SPORTS SEXUAL HARASSMENT

This Capstone Project is submitted to the Faculty of Business Administration as partial fulfillment of Master of Science in Journalism (MSJ) degree

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Fall 2019

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Abstract

Sexual harassment has been a major issue in all fields of life, similarly, the national and international level athletes also faced it on their way to the glory. The capstone project focused on exploring the state of sexual harassment in the field of sports in Pakistan, at the school, university, national and international level. During the investigative report, it was revealed that sexual harassment was much more common in sports than anyone had imagined. Moreover, the harassment was not always by male coaches or counterparts against female athletes. Instead, the females were being harassed by the same gender, while men were also exploiting their subordinates and even under-aged children. Further, the legal aspect of sexual harassment has also been explored in the report, the sections applied on it, the punishment for the offenders and everything around.

1. A fine evening

It was the year 1998. B*, a young, enthusiastic girl with dreams in her eyes of representing Pakistan at the international level in cricket, left her home after bidding goodbye to her father and family.

She had been selected in the two trials conducted by the newly-established women's wing of the Pakistan Cricket Boards (PCB) as a bowler and was asked to pack her bags as she had to report to the regional academy in Karachi first, from where the team would head to Lahore. The girls had to prepare for the upcoming series with the touring Sri Lankan women's team.

It seemed like the perfect script for a teenager but the end was too soon. She reached the academy in Lahore only to find out that she has been replaced by the daughter of an influential police officer from Hyderabad. She walked up to the manager and inquired about her room, at which the manager told her to check her name in the list posted on the wall.

Her name was not in the list.

She showed them the letter issued by the board regarding her selection for the camp at the regional academy, but it turned out to be a useless piece of paper as only the names mentioned in the list posted on the wall mattered. As her dream of becoming Pakistan's pride began to shatter, the tale took an uglier twist. Her manager, with whom she had played for Dr Asghar Ali Shah's team a little while back, asked her to stay with her in her room until things were sorted out. "My manager said 'I know you have been wronged'," she recalled (B, personal interview, 2019). "I can put you back in', she showed empathy and I was happy to stay with her and thought she was so nice."

2. Some things never change

Fast forward 20 years, it was the year 2017, when a budding mixed martial artist from Quetta applied for a Bachelors program in the Punjab University on sports quota following a friend's advice. T* wanted to pursue her career in Mass Communication, however, she got admission in sports sciences. The martial arts trainer at the university, Mohammad Imran, assured her that he will get her the desired transfer of department.

T believed him and appreciated the gesture. She shifted to the university hostel a little before the commencement of classes. She was living in Lahore, away from her home and a friend of hers was yet to join the university. The coach messaged her one day, "You must be missing your home, let me take you out and show you the city," the message read. "I found it odd and I made some excuse to avoid him," she recalled (T, telephone interview, 2019).

Despite a difference of around 20 years, the vulnerability of both B and T were similar. The psyche behind harassment has always remained the same. They were seeking the help of someone they believed to be in a position of power who could resolve their issues. They both saw their respective manager and coach as their guardian angels, who were sent to help them out.

Unfortunately, it turned out to be the opposite. The people in power had other plans and now the young athletes would need angels to protect them from those two.

3. The myth

Anything offensive, unwanted or unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature falls under the category of harassment. There is a misconception that sexual harassment is triggered by the desire of intercourse -there are more layers to it. Moreover, it is not always committed against the opposite sex, harassment from the same sex is also quite common (Ghazi. E, email interview, 2019). “Sexual harassment is seldom about sex and more about power, where the perpetrator may be committing the act to intimidate or disempower the victim,” says Erum Ghazi, a psychologist, who has been practicing for eight years at different mental health facilities.

4. Silent struggles

B did not want to return home empty handed as she had left her home with big dreams and hope. She simply did not want to admit she had lost.

As the sun set later that day, things started to get awkward. When she lay down on her bed, she found her manager, whom she refused to name, lying beside her. "I asked her, 'Are you fine?' She replied I am scared. I said 'Fine, you sleep, I sleep, we both sleep,' I did not find anything fishy."

After repeated attempts of advancements from her manager, B figured out where it was all heading. It had become a routine for the manager, who was around 35 years old at the time, married with two kids, to try to get closer to B and expect 'favours' from her. "I used to avoid her by saying I am too tired, I need to get up early for practice and similar excuses," she said.

All this while, a battle of wills raged inside B's mind. On one hand, she was trying to cling onto her dream of representing Pakistan, while on the other, there was this guilt about what it can cost her. "I was thinking, I will be able to wear the star on my chest, Karlete hain thora larki he to hai [let's do it a bit, she is just a girl], then I was thinking why I have worked so hard if I have to do this," she reminisced. She felt lonely as she could not even talk to her father, whom she calls her friend, to discuss about it.

Meanwhile, a couple of days later, T again received a message from her coach to go for an outing with him. "Let my friend join the university then we all three will go out together," I replied to him. On which he said 'why will we take him with us'," she recalled.

This was the first instance where she sensed something was not right. He started texting her more frequently, even though classes had not yet commenced. A few days later, he asked her to send her a dance video. She had an impression that only he can help her with the transfer of department, so she decided to tolerate it for a bit. "I told him that when you get married, we will all dance together, then you will see me dancing," shared T. He replied, "You are cute".

As her university started, so did her training. She had deleted all the messages received from her coach as she was afraid about anyone else reading them in her phone. Imran's behaviour was quite dubious towards her. He used to praise her in front of all the other athletes and tell them to learn from her. "All he used to do during the training session was praise me; he even said that I have a nice body," she added. These kinds of statements made her feel uncomfortable.

T was getting impatient; she wanted to play the sport and progress in it. Instead, all she was getting was unwanted attention for all the wrong reasons. During one of the training sessions, she decided to confront the coach and told him, "If you do not want to train us, why do you call us all here and waste our time? Our studies also suffer due to these useless sessions." Imran did not like her tone and the piling up of his frustration of T not giving him enough importance turned into rage.

5. ‘Stand up, speak out’

The prolific Pakistani swimmer and an Olympian, Kiran Khan believes that no coach or any other figure can harass anyone if they are ready to stand for themselves (Khan. K, telephone interview, 2019). Khan has been representing Pakistan for the last 19 years and claimed that she did not come across a single case of sexual harassment till 2015. “How can anyone dare to harass you? When you allow someone to harass you, only then they will,” she said. “I want the girls to speak up then and there, I have seen them staying quiet and being tortured because they are afraid of being dropped from the team or not being selected. They should not worry about their career, if you will not speak, you will lose your name, dignity and identity.”

On the other hand, Ghazi says that the stigma attached to sexual abuse or harassment is so haunting that the victims are afraid to speak about it. “Society is still not very survivor friendly, and tends to start victim blaming and shaming,” she said. “It is usually the survivor who bears the brunt by not only having their personal space violated and disrespected, but also being stigmatized by the social circles the survivor belongs to,” she added.

It has never been easy for victims to speak out against the sexual exploitation, be it the era of the 90s or the modern age of 2000s. Both B and T were keeping their respective suffering inside them. Despite suffering round the clock, they were afraid to talk to their family or friends.

6. From bad to worse

The young cricketer was having the time of her life, playing the game she was passionate about as she puts it, "I was the happiest person on this planet during the day." Training hard, enjoying her time with the team and romanticizing with the thought of rocking the international stage wearing the "Green" colour. But her excitement used to fade as night approached. Her happiness would turn into horror as she had to face her manager again and had to avoid her sexual advances without offending her. Meanwhile, T had to deal with her coach every day during training sessions. Her studies were suffering and her sports career was not going anywhere.

B was getting the limelight, meeting big names of Pakistan cricket, it was somehow satisfying her desires as a young sportsperson. "She had promised me selection for the Pakistan team and to be honest, I was enjoying the attention I was getting because of her. She was getting me noticed everywhere, I was feeling important, she was boosting my confidence as a player and as a person. I met [Shahid] Afridi and other players, which was amazing."

Whereas, there was nothing to cherish for T. She was suffering mentally, physically and emotionally at the hands of her coach. The girl whom he used to praise unconditionally, was now being humiliated. "If I was five minutes late for training, he would call me a dozen times and then scold me in front of everyone, calling me useless and what not," she recalled.

Moreover, during the training sessions, the coach and the athletes act to hit each other, making sure that no one hurts each other. But T was facing the wrath of her coach "for not satisfying his lust". Her coach started to beat her intentionally and then to make things worse, he called her brave and strong to take his blows. "I had marks all over my body, there were bruises and I could not cry in front of him, I did not want to sound weak or show him that he is affecting me," she said. T was in a fix, she was in an alien city, she could not share this with her family, otherwise they would ask her to quit studies.

7. The final straw

T remembers one specific day, when they were all training in the university premises and her coach challenged her to remove her tracksuit and then fight him. T refused straightaway. A couple of days later, during another training session, Imran kicked her so hard that she fell a couple of yards away. "It was a terrible blow and I had to struggle to hold my tears back. I just stood up and ran to the restroom. I cried my heart out there. There was a big bruise on my body."

B and T had enough of suffering by the hands of their manager and coach, respectively. They both decided to end this mental, physical and emotional suffering once and for all. Just a couple of days before the announcement of the national squad for the Sri Lanka series, B decided to call it quits. T, on the other hand, opened up to her friends, who advised her to register an FIR against him.

"I was feeling disgusted with myself, if I were to be selected by serving such demands, I did not want Pakistan's colours," B recalled. She suffered the misery for good 30 days. She avoided sexual intercourse, but at the same time served her lust. She sacrificed her dream of playing for Pakistan and to be one of the few women in the country who had the honour to represent her country at the international level back in the day.

She called her father and asked him to book an air ticket for her as she wanted to return and lied that she was not feeling well. "I was suffering from depression, but I was consoling myself that I am happy, I am going to live my dream, but it was never the case," she added. She gave up on her dream, she told the management the reason why she was leaving but did not take her manager's name, but everyone knew who the predator was. "I told them I was not feeling comfortable and I cannot fulfill the demands some people were making and then I left for home. Despite telling so much to the board, the PCB never contacted me again." After the incident, she quit cricket.

T, however, before filing a case against her coach, decided to resolve the matter within university. She wrote a letter to the university management and explained how she has been manhandled by Imran through the days. The varsity formed a committee and called T to present her case before them, but to no avail. "I asked them to see the marks on my body, there are bruises everywhere," she said, but they just insisted her to continue play as she was their hope to win inter-university competition. "I put it straight to them that they have to remove the coach if they want me to continue the sport," she recalled. Imran, however, was not removed and T eventually had to

bid farewell from the sport she played for the last ten years. T changed her phone number, her department got changed through official channel and she cut all ties with the coach and the athletes she used to train with. She is in her final year of the degree and at peace after getting out of the traumatizing period.

8. Dooming stars

These two incidents deprived the sports fraternity of two possible stars. Sexual harassment in the world of sports is much more common than people can think. The curse is not only at the national or university level, but the abuse starts at the grass root level. Under aged boys and girls become prey to these vultures on a daily basis all around the world and dozens of probable future sports stars are doomed even before they shine. According to a study conducted by Institute for Sociology and Gender Research at the German Sports University in Cologne, out of 1,800 athletes they interviewed; 600 were a subject of some sort of sexual violence, a majority of them being exploited even before they turned 18 (Sten-Ziemons, 2017).

9. 'Nothing new'

Saleem Akhtar, who now teaches at government schools and give private tuitions to students without any cost in a small town named Dera Allah Yar near Jacobabad, commonly known as Jhat Pat, was once an emerging footballer. He has spent years at academies and had advanced to the national camp, but could not make it to the national team. "The phenomenon of sexual harassment is nothing new," said Akhtar while sipping from a cup of tea (Akhtar. S, personal interview, 2019). "When I used to play at the academy level in the era of the 70s, it was common even then."

Coaches and managers were involved in luring innocent children to these filthy activities. He has been an eyewitness to many such incidents, "We used to have training sessions till the dusk. One day, A few other boys and I stayed a bit late at the academy. As it got dark, we heard screams of a boy from the ground. We rushed to see what was happening, we saw one of our coaches forcing himself on the 14 or 15-year-old boy, as he saw us, he let him go," he shared. According to Akhtar, that boy was a good football player and he never returned to the academy after that incident.

Moreover, he shared another incident, where his club team had traveled to Mirpurkhas to play a tournament. After having training all day, a coach took a kid to show him the city. "He took the boy to the red light area of the city, he wanted to lure him to fulfill his hunger," he said. "It is not always that a perpetrator wants to play an active part, sometimes they want to fulfill their desires passively."

Akhtar claimed that he has seen coaches and senior players discussing how many kids they have molested, as if it was some kind of a pride. The one with the most number of victims considered himself an "achiever." The top management of the clubs and academies did not use to take any actions against these monsters, in fact, they were also the beneficiaries. "The top management do not take any action against them, they expect these perpetrators to give them their share," he revealed. "The top management do not play an active role; they want the lower staff to send them their share of meat."

10. Bone chilling incident

Pakistan's law is not victim friendly, the powerful rules here and if there is an attempt to challenge the elite, they themselves are punished. In 2013, five girls, Seema Javed, KiranIrshad, Hina Ghafoor, Saba Ghafoor and Halima Rafiq, came up to speak against the chairman of Multan Cricket Club, Moulvi Sultan Alam and the team selector Mohammad Javed. According to the girls, they were asking for sexual favours from them for their selection in the team. "Moulvi Sultan was a powerful figure at that time," said Malik Shaadat, the journalist, who uncovered the story and was associated with Express News at the time. Few other girls from the club accused Sultan for the same offense, but they were not willing to come forward due to the stigma attached to it and expected consequences of their act. PCB formed a committee to investigate the matter, as expected, they did not find any conclusive evidence of sexual harassment. The authorities slapped the girls with a fine and a ban of nine months each (2014).

If the punishment for challenging the system was not enough for them, Sultan, who was a former judge of an anti-terrorism court and member of Punjab's provisional assembly, filed a defamation case of Rs 2 million on each of the five girls after their suspension expired. 17-year-old Halima got panicked by the court notice, despite her lawyer telling her not to worry, she drank a full bottle of acid to take her own life (Khan, 2014). All the other girls who had gathered courage to voice against the giant of the system quit playing cricket and disappeared from the scene. Halima's family looked to proceed with the case, but Moulvi was able to 'settle' the matter outside the court, claimed Shaadat. The family of Halima relocated themselves and went into complete anonymity, their extended family cut all ties with the deceased girl's family and there was no one to speak for the poor departed soul (Shaadat. M, telephone interview, 2019)

We managed to find Hina Ghafoor and tried to talk to her on the incident, but despite several attempts, she refused to talk. She made different excuses each time and eventually stopped attending our calls.

There was a case in Pakistan hockey in 2017, where a girl, Sadia, decided to release a video on social media, accusing her coach for entering in her room at night and holding her hand. Her roommate, Iqra supported her allegation and the duo was suspended by the Pakistan Hockey Federation (Tahir, 2017). They formed a committee and gave the verdict, holding the girls guilty for falsely accusing their coach, without even listening to their side of the story (Bilal, 2017). We contacted Iqra to talk about the matter and she said "we have suffered a lot already, we do not want

to relive that trauma again, we have fought hard to come out of it.” She further told that they both returned to hockey after some time and also travelled abroad with the team as well, but she refused to give more details (Sadia. S, telephone interview, 2019).

11. The flawed law

Khan, who is also known as the Golden Girl and has won dozens of medals for the country, stated that the problem in Pakistan is that poor cannot afford sports, if they somehow manage to progress in the field, they face exploitation by the hands of influential people, “If a son or a daughter of poor parents face such a hurdle, they cannot proceed it legally,” she said. “If such an athlete is being sued for defamation, who will fight his or her case? Who will pay for it? They cannot afford it.

“Even when a girl committed suicide, what did anyone do? There is no law in this country, the influential people have made a joke out of this law. One call from a top government official and the case is closed. This is how law operates in Pakistan,” she added.

Despite that tragic incident, PCB has not made any amendment in the constitution regarding harassment. “We don’t talk about such matters,” replied a PCB representative on being asked about the board’s policy about sexual harassment. “Our HR (Human Resource department) has a sexual harassment policy and we have committees to investigate if an incident happens.”

Lawyers encourage the victims to come out and take the legal route against the perpetrators, despite the haunting precedent. “The law on sexual harassment in Pakistan is nascent, particularly due to the patriarchal dominance in our society which has only discouraged women facing harassment from filing a complaint, or taking a stand,” said Mohammad Sheikh, a civil lawyer (Mohammad. S, email interview, 2019). According to Sheikh, defamation is difficult to prove in the court and an unrealistic demand for damages, such as Rs 2 million, cannot be awarded anyway. Sexual harassment, however, is also as difficult to prove in the court of law. “Victims should ensure that they have records or evidence of harassment in the form of text messages voice recordings or even video recordings,” he said. “They should remain connected with the witnesses of such harassment incidents to ensure that they are not pressured to withdraw or alter their statement against the accused.” It means the victims like B, the five cricketers and the hockey players who were physically harassed by the harassers cannot be proven unless there are eyewitnesses, who are willing to record their statement before the court.

Interestingly, there is no provision for same-sex harassment or harassment against the male gender in the Pakistan Penal Code or in the constitution. “Constitution under Article 25 ensures that all citizens are equal under the law and that there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex,” mentioned Sheikh. “Article 34 ensures full participation of women in all spheres of life.”

As far as Pakistan Penal Code is concern, the following sections deal with sexual harassment:

Under Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), if a person insults a woman regarding her modesty, whether through gestures or words, the perpetrator can be charged with three years of imprisonment, or with a fine, or both.

Under section 496C of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), anyone making false accusations against another female are to be punished with five years in prison and a fine.

A person who assaults a woman, uses physical force against her, or strips her of her clothes for the public to see, shall be liable under Section 354A of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860). The accused may be given a death sentence or imprisoned for life.

A person who forces a young girl under the age of eighteen to have sexual intercourse with another person, shall be liable under Section 366A of the Pakistan Penal Code (1860) and charged with ten years of imprisonment or a fine.

Moreover, the complaint against this kind of harassment can be filed under The Protection against Harassment of women at the workplace Act, 2012 with the provincial ombudsman who has the powers to investigate under section 8 of the 2012 Act.

These sections mean men, who have faced harassment, have few legal options to follow. If a man wants to legally pursue a case for harassment, he will have to lodge an FIR under Section 349 to 370 and will have to fight it as a criminal case, while women harassed by the same gender will have to follow the same protocol.

12. Harassment - a weapon

Sexual harassment is not only used in power dynamics, where powerful post holders exploit the needy, vulnerable ones. Harassment is also used as a tool in this patriarchal society to stop girls from chasing their dreams. Jaffa Football Club is the only club that allows girls to play football in Lyari. Despite a rich sporting history of the locality, there are few elements, who do not want women to play football. “There are female boxers, karatekas and martial artists in the area, but they do not want girls to play football,” said Hani Baloch, a Lyari native, who actively works for women's rights (Baloch. H, personal interview, 2019).

The academy used to have a boys’ team, but they decided to introduce their girls’ team, challenging the norms of the society. They wanted a separate space for girls to train, so they picked a portion of the ground, where they train from 5pm to 8pm from Wednesday to Saturday. The District Football Association did not like the idea and they started opposing it. “They do not want us to train in the ground,” said one of the players. “Marriage ceremonies can take place in the ground, but we cannot practice there.” District Municipal Corporation had allowed them to install a net to separate the area of the ground, but the local political forces are not allowing them to complete the work. The former councilor of the area, who himself is a former footballer, Iqbal Lamba, stopped the installation of the net and said “what is this vulgarity where the girls are playing in shorts.” The whole fiasco started from there. To keep girls away from the sport, the local political powers started to sexually harass them.

One day, after the training session ended at the academy, few boys on motorcycles chased girls as they were going home. First they passed different derogatory remarks about them and then held the hand of one of them. “She slapped the guy then and there,” shared one of her friends who was an eyewitness of the incident. “The boys started to threaten her with kidnapping and other severe consequences, he called someone and said ‘is larki ko uthana hai aj’ [we have to kidnap this girl today].” She ran back to the academy and started crying. After the incident, she was never seen at the academy and she left football. The management tried to convince her family to send her to the academy again, but she belonged to a conservative Baloch family, who did not allow anyone from the academy to talk to her and bluntly communicated the management that she will not play any sports anymore.

Even during the training sessions, a crowd gathers to see the girls play, they make indecent comments about them. As the girls start training, few men come in their playing area and urinate

in front of them. “These are all tactics used by these people to keep girls away from football,” said Jaffa Football Academy’s spokesperson. These issues have not been faced by the girls’ football academies in Karachi at large, thus the problem is more of a political nature and harassment is just being used as a weapon.

13. In a subtle way

Thousands of boys go to cricket academies to hone their cricketing skills. Even at the lowest level of cricket, boys are harassed in such a way that they do not even realize it. Usama Khalid, who had played at Under 15 for Karachi back in 2012, shared how coaches and senior players intimidate young cricketers. “They spank you for no reason, they call you names like chikna, coaches ask their favorite kids to sit with them, if nothing, then they will just sit holding their hand, which is absurd, it makes them uncomfortable,” he recalled (Khalid. U, personal interview, 2019). He added that boys cannot do anything about it, in fact the majority of them do not even know what is happening with them.

14. What to do?

In this era of technology, physical activities of children are close to none. All they want is to play games and use applications on their smart devices. On the other hand, parents also do not feel comfortable sending their kids in the streets to play due to poor law and order situation. Parents tend to admit their offsprings to some sports academy, be it cricket, football, martial arts or others, to keep them active. Then there is the problem of harassment which awaits them at the professional academies. Adam Jama Waberi, an African coach, who runs Gulshan Soccer Academy in Karachi, advises parents to accompany them to the training. “I know it is tough to manage, but if parents can manage, they should drop their children themselves at the academy, see them play and then take them back,” he said (Waberi. A. J, telephone interview, 2019).

Waberi, who is commonly known as Adam Jee, in the local football circuit, asked parents to listen to what their kids have to say. “If your kids tell you that they have been facing any such issue at the academy, file a complaint to the academy at your earliest, do not take it lightly as it [harassment] is a common phenomenon all around the world,” he said. Adam Jee stated that he gives special importance to these grievances of parents. He shared his academy’s protocol that if they receive a complaint about a coach or a senior player, they keep him under observation and keenly observe how he behaves around kids, if the offence is proven, a strict action is taken against him. “I can only guarantee about myself that I will not do any such act, I cannot make any promise on behalf of the people working under me, this is my principle and which is why I always pay attention to these complaints.”

Ghazi, the psychologist, wants parents to educate children about the rape culture and the factors that encourage violence against opposite or the same gender. “Tell your kids that it is not ok to be a part of such a paradigm and to learn to be respectful towards others,” she said.

15. Gather the courage

The multiple times gold medalist for Pakistan, Khan tells youngsters not to worry about suspensions and bans when it comes to their dignity. She believes reputation and success come when they are honest and stand with the truth. “I have been suspended for three months, six months, even for one year for speaking against the killing of merit in swimming, my federation does not like me,” she said. “But, I have made a name for myself, when I speak, people listen and question the authorities.” She added that girls are afraid to talk about their rights, in fact, they are afraid even if someone else stands for their rights. “There have been many instances where athletes cried in front of me and when I spoke for them, I found myself alone, even the victims turned their back on me. If the situation remains the same, you can never fight against favoritism, harassment and other similar issues.”

*Names have been used to protect the identity of the victims

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