



SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS AN EMERGING PROBLEM IN PERUVIAN UNIVERSITY CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

Considering the prevalence of sexual harassment, especially in university contexts, it is essential to have a validated instrument to identify these characteristics in the educational community. For this reason, this study aimed to analyze the psychometric processes of the sexual harassment scale on university campuses. Using an instrumental design and a sample of 927 students, it was found that the values of the evidence of construct validity and reliability are acceptable. The practical implications of validating the instrument that will allow the identification of sexual harassment problems to promote symmetrical coexistence between men and women are highlighted.

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1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is a type of violence that violates the rights of integrity and freedom of people in the educational environment, especially in women (Phillips et al., 2019; Pololi et al., 2020). It encompasses aggressive behavior on the part of the harasser (Thurston et al., 2019), behaviors related to gender factors, age and poor practice of social skills (Duncan et al., 2019; Reed et al., 2019). Currently, the problem of sexual harassment has a notable prevalence in various settings, being frequently visualized in the streets, urban transport (Bharucha & Khatri, 2018; Hoor-Ul-Ain, 2020; Quinones, 2020) and with greater notoriety on university campuses, where it is invisible because it is considered a normal issue in interactions between teachers and students (Klein & Martin, 2021; Spencer et al., 2022). In these spaces, it is considered as a widespread problem (Wood et al., 2021) that affects women more than men and whose practice is not only in person, but also through virtual media where teachers or peers give free rein to attitudes with sexual connotations (Copp et al., 2021; Pendergrast et al., 2021). An analysis of the course of this problem will give a broad configuration to understand the consequences of being tolerant and consenting to the presence of these behaviors in interpersonal relationships.

Internationally, sexual harassment has had a dizzying growth, especially in educational institutions (Ranganathan et al., 2021). In nursing students, a prevalence of 12.6% and 53.4% was found (Lu et al., 2020). 64.7% "visual/verbal" including sexual teasing and 34.3% "invasive touching/personal" behaviors encompassing sexual contact (Sweeting et al., 2022). Of these, it is women who experience the different forms of sexual harassment (Gianakos et al., 2022).

Regarding the people who commit this type of violence, it is usually teachers, who, taking advantage of their hierarchy in an educational context, generate this type of actions. Studies reflect that 19% of students reported having experienced sexual harassment perpetrated by faculty or staff and 30% by classmates (Wood et al., 2021). Currently, in universities, it has been found that 36.6% of students reported experiencing sexual harassment by a faculty or staff member and 38.5% harassment by a fellow student (McClain et al., 2021). Other studies report the prevalence of sexual harassment of 69.6% in males and 68.7% in females, finding differences in variables such as location and ethnicity (Menhaji et al., 2022).

At the national level, this problem is not new. In Peruvian universities, sexual harassment shows a prevalence of 63.6% and 77.5%, it is expressed through comments, conversations or talks that are off-color, questions about personal sexual life and exclamations or whistles with sexual content (Gutiérrez et al., 2022), 76% of cases are given more by classmates than by teachers, and in the same way it is expressed physically and verbally (Cuadra-Moreno et al., 2021). It is clear then that the problem substantially affects women and mostly occurs through physical contact or touching, comments about some part of their body, sexist language and through harassing e-mails or messages (Goyzueta & Cervantes-Alvino, 2022).

Several research studies have been conducted to understand this problem. Most of them were conducted with students from professional schools of health sciences such as nursing, human medicine, gynecology (Gianakos et al., 2022; Menhaji et al., 2022). The instruments used for the study of the topic include perception of sexual abuse and nightlife (Recalde-Esnoz et al., 2021). Scales to measure sexual attitudes were also validated (Cesario et al., 2018). Therefore, taking into account the high prevalence of cases of sexual harassment and sexual harassment, it is necessary to have valid and reliable instruments to measure such behavior that violates human rights (Sánchez et al., 2021).

Research has been found such as those of (Page et al., 2016) who adapted a scale that assesses moral disengagement on sexual harassment issues, data analysis evidenced positive correlations with sexual harassment myth acceptance, male gender identification and hostile sexism. On the other hand, Spencer et al. (2022) validated the Sexual Experiences questionnaire to measure sexual harassment victimization among university-going women in Jordan; the model fit for the four factors measured by the instrument is adequate, reflecting scores between 0.013, 0.996, 0.994; 0.020, 0.988, 0.986.

Murdoch et al. (2022) developed a scale to evaluate the perceived tolerance of sexual harassment in the armed forces, a six-item version, finding as results an internal consistency of 0.88, through factor analysis where it was observed that the factors explained 55% of the variance in the responses of the participants. Along the same lines, Lobos-Rivera et al. (2022) adapted the sexual harassment perception scale in a sample of 215 Salvadoran women, finding as a result in the confirmatory factor analysis the existence of a three-dimensional model with adequate adjustment indexes. The KMO was 0.88, the three

factors explained 63.19% of the total variance and the factor loadings were equal to or greater than 0.40; the reliability was 0.72 and 0.84. Also, Gonzalez et al. (2019) designed a scale to evaluate experiences of sexual harassment in public streets in a sample of 498 women in the city of Asunción; their results indicated that its structure was in three factors: Verbal/Gestual Harassment; Indirect Harassment; and Physical/Invasive Harassment; the reliability presented values higher than 0.80.

The high presence of sexual harassment makes it a public health problem that can lead to student dropout and negatively affect their physical and mental health and subjective well-being (McClain et al., 2021; Oriol et al., 2021), especially the female sex, who are the ones affected (Verge, 2022). These studies demonstrate the high prevalence of sexual harassment and bullying, causing a need for valid and reliable instruments to assess the characteristics of students in the face of this reality that has been of concern to academic authorities. Also, based on this, to develop intervention strategies that promote a culture of respect and equal rights between men and women.

Knowing the limitations at the national level with respect to adapted instruments, the general objective of this research is to analyze the psychometric processes of the sexual harassment perception scale in a public university in the Piura region.

2. Methodology

The research had a quantitative approach, of a non-experimental type of transectional cut since the information was taken as is and the variables were not manipulated, in addition, the data are collected at a single moment (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). It was of instrumental design, oriented to analyze the psychometric properties of the instrument and the study of its reliability and validity (Montero & León, 2007).

The population was considered to be the students of a public university in the Piura region, a non-probabilistic sampling by convenience was used, because the specific characteristics that favored the objective of the research were taken into account (Montesinos et al., 2016), and 927 students were finally selected. The sociodemographic characteristics considered were that they were enrolled in the 2019 - I semester, whose ages ranged between 15 and 60 years old, including males and females, studying in one of the following faculties: Economic Engineering (IE), Food Industry Engineering (IIA) and Administration and Hospitality and Tourism (AHT).

Table 1. Description of the sample

Faculty	Total	%
AHT	345	37.22 %
IE	307	33.11 %
IIA	275	29.67 %
Total	927	100 %

Source: Own elaboration

In order to identify the perception of sexual harassment among university students in the Piura region, a scale of Perception of Sexual Harassment developed by the Student Support Center of Harvard University was used to identify the type of beliefs presented by students and to provide attention to university students who manifest sexual harassment. It was translated into Spanish and adapted to the Peruvian context by Olga Bardales Mendoza and Zoila Ortiz Miguel in 2012; said scale contains 9 items with ordinal response scale with 4 response alternatives, hierarchized by the Likert scale (Strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). It can be administered individually or collectively and has a duration of five minutes, and its application range is from 16 years of age.

In compliance with the requirements of research ethics, permission was previously requested from the university authorities to contact the students of the faculties, who, after explaining the objective of the research, were consulted about their desire to participate and this was formalized by means of a written document called informed consent. In this way, the group of participants to whom the sexual harassment scale was applied was established in order to collect the data, which were ordered and tabulated for later analysis and interpretation.

Once the information had been obtained, the following statisticians were used for its analysis and processing. To estimate the normality of the data, skewness and kurtosis were used because they are more accurate tests for this type of analysis; the relationships between items and the total scale were estimated through Spearman's statistic; construct validity was determined through confirmatory factor analysis. Finally, reliability at the item level and in general was determined through the Omega coefficient and Cronbach's Alpha.

3. Results

In accordance with the objectives of this research, the data obtained were processed, and the results are presented in the following order. First, the statistics such as mean, skewness and kurtosis are analyzed, then the relationships between items and the total scale are estimated, followed by the confirmatory factor analysis data, the reliability measures of the instrument and finally a proposal of scales is presented.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the items of the sexual harassment scale.

Items	N	Media	DS	Asymmetry	Kurtosis
	Statistician	Statistician	Statistician	Statistician	Statistician
Item 1	927	2,93	1,114	-,658	-,865
Item 2	927	3,51	,852	-2,127	4,570
Item 3	927	3,43	,839	-1,814	3,518
Item 4	927	3,38	,853	-1,715	3,181
Item 5	927	3,17	,967	-,972	,102
Item 6	927	3,30	,865	-1,292	1,435
Item 7	927	3,25	,814	-1,393	2,805
Item 8	927	3,06	,906	-,935	,638
Item 9	927	3,27	,988	-1,333	,947

Source: Own elaboration

It is evident that the total sample has been 927 students, the mean has been from 2.93 to 3.51, which implies that there is a tendency to be tolerant with sexual harassment since they consider it as a normal behavior in the university campuses; the standard deviation in its majority presents values from 0.81 to 0.98 with the exception of item 1 which has a standard deviation of 1.11. Regarding the distribution of the data, it is observed that they do not follow a normal distribution due to the fact that not all the skewness and kurtosis coefficients are between the ranges of -1.5 and 1.5, therefore, the data analysis will be done using non-parametric tests.

Table 3. Relationship of items to the total sexual harassment scale

Spearman's Rho	Sexual harassment	Correlation coefficient	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Item 9
			Sig. (bilateral)	,625*	,592*	,754*	,760*	,712*	,728*	,553**	,624*
N			,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000

Source: Own elaboration

It is observed that all the items have a directly proportional relationship with the total scale, all the correlations found present values ranging from 0.53 to 0.76 and a significance of 0.000. This indicates that the items evaluate the construct that is actually being measured.

Table 4. Indices reported considering the **original** model

Description of indexes	Value
Chi-square test (49.668/26)	1.91
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.999
Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.998
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.031
RMSEA 90% CI lower bound	0.018
RMSEA 90% CI upper bound	0.044
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	0.030

Source: Own elaboration

It is evident that the chi-square test indicates that the model in its original version is highly significant (1.91), the comparative adjustment indexes have values of 0.99 higher than the values recommended by the literature, likewise, the parsimony indexes are 0.031, which indicates that the model with the data collected fits adequately.

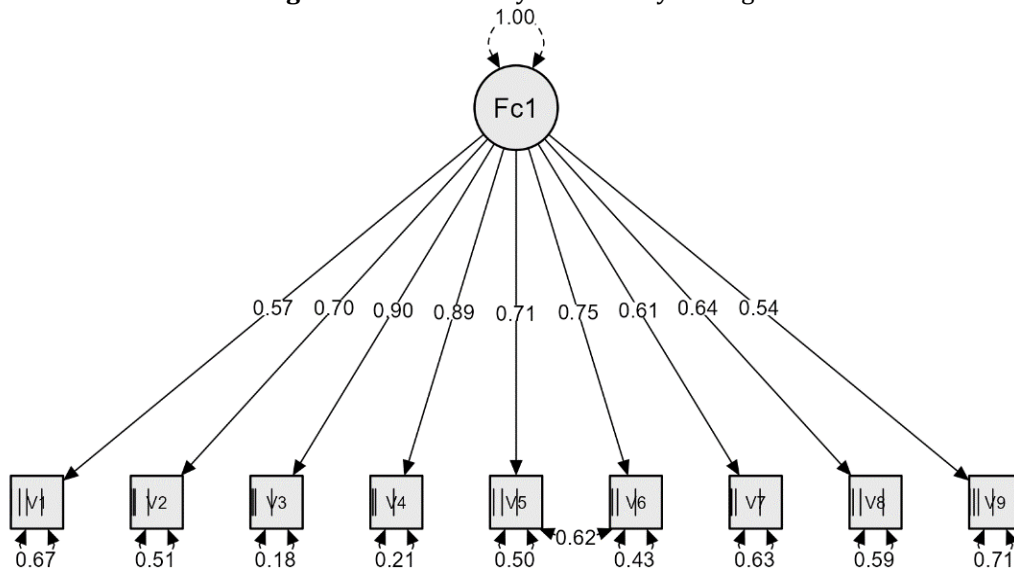
Table 5. Report of the factor loadings of the items.

Factor	Indicator	Symbol	Estimate	Std. Error	z-value	p	95% Confidence Interval		Std. Std. (lv)
							Lower	Upper	
Factor 1	V1	λ_{11}	0.571	0.025	23.068	< .001	0.522	0.619	0.571
	V2	λ_{12}	0.701	0.023	31.001	< .001	0.657	0.746	0.701
	V3	λ_{13}	0.903	0.012	77.229	< .001	0.88	0.926	0.903
	V4	λ_{14}	0.887	0.011	81.555	< .001	0.866	0.909	0.887
	V5	λ_{15}	0.707	0.019	37.492	< .001	0.67	0.744	0.707
	V6	λ_{16}	0.752	0.017	44.072	< .001	0.719	0.786	0.752
	V7	λ_{17}	0.606	0.024	25.333	< .001	0.559	0.652	0.606
	V8	λ_{18}	0.641	0.022	29.603	< .001	0.599	0.684	0.641
	V9	λ_{19}	0.536	0.027	19.596	< .001	0.483	0.59	0.536

Source: Own elaboration

It is observed that according to the factor analysis with 95% interval, factor loadings ranging from 0.53 to 0.90 have been obtained. The confirmatory factor analysis confirms that the scale has a good fit with the 9 items that make it up. Likewise, when observing the P values of all the items, it is observed that all of them are highly significant.

Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis diagram



After having performed the confirmatory factor analysis, the diagram that graphs the internal structure of the items has been extracted, considering that the scale is unidimensional. The absolute values of each item are also observed.

Table 6. Reliability of the sexual harassment scale

Description	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Item 1	0.851	0.858
Item 2	0.836	0.849
Item 3	0.819	0.830
Item 4	0.818	0.830
Item 5	0.825	0.839
Item 6	0.820	0.833
Item 7	0.838	0.852
Item 8	0.836	0.850
Item 9	0.851	0.861
Overall reliability	0.849	0.860

Source: Own elaboration

In order to establish an adequate reliability, Cronbach's Alpha and Omega coefficient were used, and it is evident that all the items of the sexual harassment scale in both coefficients present values higher than 0.81. The total reliability of the scale according to Cronbach's Alpha is 0.84 and considering the Omega it is 0.86. Both values are in an acceptable category. Therefore, the reproducibility of the results is guaranteed due to the fact that their margin of error is minimal.

Table 7. Percentile norms of the **sexual** harassment scale

Statistics	Category		
Media	29,31		
Deviation Deviation	5,540		
Minimum	0		
Maximum	36		
Percentiles	5	20,00	
	10	23,00	
	15	24,20	Under
	20	26,00	
	25	27,00	
	30	27,00	
	35	28,00	
	40	29,00	
	45	29,00	
	50	30,00	Regular
55	31,00		
60	31,00		
65	32,00		
70	33,00		
75	33,00		
80	34,00		
85	35,00		
90	36,00	High	
95	36,00		
100	36,00		

Source: Own elaboration

With regard to the general percentile norms of the sexual harassment scale, it is observed that scores between 20 and 27 belong to a low category, 28 to 33 to a regular or medium category, and 34 to 36 or more to a high category. This clearly indicates the degree of differentiation that exists in the evaluated population with respect to their assessment of sexual harassment.

4. Discussion

Almost 20 years have passed since the governments gathered at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, where they committed to combat the limitations and obstacles faced by women around the world (UN Women, 2012); however, the problem of sexual harassment still shows remarkable prevalence and with greater notoriety in university institutions, where it is a daily issue in faculty-student interactions (Klein & Martin, 2021; Spencer et al., 2022). It is here where the predominance of different forms of misogyny and discrimination exercised mainly by men is observed, negatively impacting the professional development of women and the advancement of their university careers, making it a public health problem (McClain et al., 2021; Oriol et al., 2021), especially the female sex, who are the most affected (Verge, 2022). It is therefore of great importance to have a validated and reliable instrument that makes it possible to analyze and identify the characteristics of the problem of sexual harassment in the Piura region, thus favoring the development of intervention programs adapted to our reality.

In the results of the present investigation, considering that the sample was 927 students, and the mean obtained from the analysis of their responses to sexual harassment was 2.93 to 3.51, it can be inferred that there is a tendency to be tolerant of sexual harassment, that is, they consider it as normal behavior within the university environment.

On the other hand, the internal content analysis of the scale shows that it is an appropriate instrument to evaluate harassment as a construct to be measured, given that all the items show a directly proportional relationship with the total scale. Moreover, it can be affirmed that the proposed instrument fits adequately with the data collected, according to the chi-square test, which indicates that the model

in its original version is highly significant (1.91), to the extent that its comparative fit indices are higher than the values recommended by the literature.

Likewise, the confirmatory factor analysis reaffirms that the scale presents a good fit in the 9 items that comprise it, therefore, it is concluded that all of them are highly significant.

Finally, considering that the reliability of an instrument is related to the reproducibility of the data, which means that the results obtained with an instrument should not show significant variability when applied in a different context, but rather always reach a low level of error (Beckman & Cook, 2007) or, in other words, the lower the level of error in an instrument, the higher its reliability (Rodríguez-Vargas et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be affirmed that the instrument guarantees an acceptable level of reliability, since when applying Cronbach's Alpha and the Omega coefficient, it was found that all the items of the sexual harassment scale in both statistics present values higher than 0.81, compared to the margins proposed by various authors who recommend as optimal levels a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84 and an Omega of 0.86 (Ventura-León & Caycho-Rodríguez, 2017), that is, a small margin of error was reached.

A new contribution made by this work in comparison with other scales that evaluate variables related to sexual harassment that have mostly been developed with nursing students (Lobos-Rivera et al., 2022; Murdoch et al., 2022; Page et al., 2016; Spencer et al., 2022) is that a proposal of percentile norms has been developed, this will help to establish categories of this problem, in other words, it will allow to know what level of sexual harassment the students of this university present. In this sense, these characteristics of sexual harassment will be estimated with scales elaborated with the information provided by the university population, therefore, they will be more accurate in all senses.

For the above reasons and considering that all the analyses and validations have been carried out specifically with a sample of Peruvian students, it is a valuable contribution to the study of the problem of sexual harassment that characterizes university students in the region. In addition, having demonstrated the psychometric properties of the instrument, we hope that it will be taken as a precedent that will motivate similar research in other regions at the national level and in other international contexts and will constitute an advance in the confrontation of the problem of university sexual harassment.

5. Conclusions

Since the problem of sexual harassment in universities is a negative situation, especially for women in our country, with an alarming prevalence, it is necessary to have validated instruments that allow its identification and measurement in specific contexts.

In view of this reality, having demonstrated the psychometric properties of validity and reliability of the sexual harassment scale in university students in the Piura region, it is feasible to apply it as an evaluation and diagnostic tool in this context and thus be able to identify the magnitude of these behaviors in students in order to promote coexistence based on equality and respect between men and women. It is also assumed as an important contribution to the development of instruments in the field of psychological work.

One of the limitations of this study is that convergent validity has not been estimated to identify how the results of this instrument are related to other instruments that measure issues related to sexual harassment; therefore, it is necessary that other researchers can determine this type of validity and the instrument can be used as an instrument as an evaluation and diagnostic tool.

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