SEXUAL HARASSMENT: A PILOT STUDY ON ATTITUDES AMONG COLLEGE-LEVEL STUDENTS IN JAPAN.

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Abstract -This paper responds to this need by reporting on a pilot study survey of over 300 university students to ascertain the degree to which their attitudes and perceptions were accurate, helpful, and positive. Twelve questionnaire items assess respondents' attitudes towards the people involved in sexual harassment cases and eight items assess respondents' perceptions of the extent of the problem, and the circumstances surrounding such cases. This distinction highlights the interlocking of both issues: transforming perceptions can change attitudes, transforming attitudes can change perceptions.

Keywords – Attitudes College students, Japan, Sexual Harassment

I. SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

In its 2002 World Report on Violence and Health, the World Health Organization defined 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…" Even if physical force is not involved, it involves sexual touching without a person's consent, which constitutes sexual assault. This definition underlines the serious nature of sexual harassment as a form of sexual violence.In spite of the grave nature of the offence, sexual harassment has only recently received the attention it merits. The global reach of the #MeToo movement has placed sexual harassment in the public consciousness to an unprecedented extent, and this is also the case in the Japan with the "WeToo" movement. Many university and college-level educators have been stimulated to undertake educational initiatives within their classrooms to promote understanding of the nature and extent of sexual harassment as a serious issue for global society. A few studies in east Asia have focused on college students' understandings of sexual harassment issues. Up to now, however, few similar research studies have been carried out in Japanese tertiary-level educational institutions. Many educators may feel that it is too difficult to know what current levels of bias may be and how difficult a task it may be to sustain student motivation for meaningful engagement with sexual harassment issues.

In Japan, every year, approximately ten-thousand individuals file cases of harassment with the Ministry of Labor (Huen, 2007). In a recent government survey, 30% of employees in Japan reported being sexually harassed at work ("A turning point,"2017). Data for educational institutions are also a cause for concern. A survey for FY 2016 by Japan's Education Ministry reported that 129 teachers had to be dismissed from public schools due to sexual assault).In total, 226 school staff members were found culpable of offences including secret filming or peeping, touching of a victim's body, and sexual intercourse ("Record 226 staffers," 2017).

A General Union (2014) survey found that 57% of female instructors in Japan, as well as 48% of men had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Accounts from instructors point to contrasting patterns along gendered lines. Typically, the offending male students seemed to be seeking sexual gratification from their inappropriate behaviors; most offending female students made sexual advances with the objective of enticing the male instructor into marriage or a long-term relationship. Other findings from the survey were equally worrying. Appropriate action was taken against culprits in only 15% of cases and many respondents did not feel confident enough in the institutional system to report the incidents. Many who did report sexual misconduct found that there were no procedures in place for them to pursue justice and to prevent perpetrators from re-offending. In fact, representatives at lower-management level usually discouraged victims from taking any further steps to deal with the situation. The survey also indicated that sexual harassment occurs in a wide range of educational institutions, from the largest to the smallest, and that many instructors feel unsafe in their work environment. Accounts of the language conversation school GABA (General Union, 2017) also indicate that language instructors in the eikaiwa(English language conversation school) sector may be vulnerable to lack of protection from sexual harassment. The principal causal factors may include short-term contracts, immigration status, language ability issues, cross-cultural miscommunication, and a lack of managerial support (cf. Currie-Robson, 2014).

II. RATIONALE FOR SURVEY QUESTIONS

A review of issues surrounding sexual harassment in educational contexts in Japan reveals the need for

initiatives for transformation. One stating place is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of university students. This present study can aid policy-makers and educators who must decide which initiatives are most pressing when considering possible interventions.

The survey consisted of twelve attitudinal questions (see Appendix) which assessed respondents' attitudes towards sexual harassment issues, especially with regard to perpetrators and recipients. There were eight perceptual questions which evaluated respondents' perceptions regarding sexual harassment (who they see as likely victims and perpetrators, which motivations they attribute to people involved in sexual harassment cases, what perceptions they have of the extent of the problem). Items were also offered to avoid an obvious pattern, with a switch of expectations regarding "Agree/Disagree" for items 1-3, 4-7, 8-12, 13-18, and item 19. There was no expectation for item number twenty as this referred to each respondent's particular high school background and experience.

III. ATTITUDINAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Item no. eight asserted that sexual harassment is not a good topic for variety show humor. Surprisingly, 24% disagreed, suggesting that they have a positive attitude towards the jokes and cracks about sexual harassment on variety shows. One respondent pointed out that these jokes are often at the expense of female comedians, but "they should remember that they have human rights too." The high percentage in favor of SH humor is indicative of a cultural difference with most Western cultures where such jokes can provoke a massive social media backlash and precipitate the end of a comedian's career. It is possible that these jokes might be heard on late-night television shows that specialize in "cutting-edge" comedy. However, this is markedly different from expressions of humor during day-time television on programs for general audiences. Such cultural products send out the message that what is being expressed is generally acceptable in that particular society. If a toxic culture of masculinity exists in certain social locales where the pain of female victims from sexual assault is treated as a joke, then even mild forms of similar humor on national television shows reinforce and perpetuate such cultures, making them more entrenched and more likely to continue providing the atmosphere of approbation that promotes toxic behaviors.

Nine per-cent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the notion that school authorities have an obligation to educate young people about sexual harassment (Number Ten: "School authorities should provide programs to educate young people about sexual harassment"). It is possible that some respondents were worried that "young people" might mean children or those in their early-teens who have no need of information about sexual harassment or might find it disturbing. However, if this is the case, no-one made such a comment. The bald fact remains that the survey indicated that almost one in ten young people are opposed to educational interventions to tackle the social malaise that is sexual harassment.

Item 12 ("Every report of sexual harassment should be thoroughly investigated") assessed the level of commitment felt to the pursuit of justice for recipients of harassment. An eight-per-cent figure of disagreement is not particularly high, but worth keeping in mind. Pedagogical interventions should thoroughly explain the reasons why all reports should be investigated, especially as it is often extremely difficult for victims to report their cases in the first place. Indeed, the majority of victims of sexual assault and harassment in Japan, continue to live in silence about their ordeals (Yamasaki, 2017). In addition, the likelihood that a claim is bogus is low in a country where financial settlement for sexual harassments are extremely rare and where claimants of sexual harassment and sexual assault run the risk of high levels of social stigmatization (Ito, S. (2017). The value of thorough investigation is that it should bring to light the veracity or lack of it for any particular claim.

IV. PERCEPTUAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

As noted previously, questions six and seven reflected both attitudes and perceptions regarding sexual harassment.

Item no. six ("People who do sexual harassment will probably only do it once or twice, so there is no need to publicize the fact") combines both perceptual and attitudinal elements. This item probed the extent of belief in a mis-perception that perpetrators of sexual harassment tend to do so only a few times and that this would constitute a reason for not reporting offensive behavior. In fact, data regarding a number of professions – sports coaches, church ministers, college professors, and figures in the entertainment industry – suggest that offenders tend to repeat their actions many times (Lamagna, 2017). Only 7% agreed, which shows that a large majority, 93%, understand that much data indicates that perpetrators of sexual harassment are often repeat offenders. They understand, also, that the issue of whether an offender is or is not likely to re-offend does not take away from the fact that they have engaged in unacceptable often criminal behavior. Victims have a legitimate right to speak to authorities in their pursuit of justice and quest for personal safety.

Item no. seven, "Sexual harassment is not a major social problem in Japan" assesses both perceptions of

the actual situation and respondents' attitudes to the issue of sexual harassment itself. It was positive that 92% agreed that it is a major social problem and pedagogical interventions could tease out the ways in which this problem needs to be recognized and challenged.

V. CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment constitutes a major challenge for Japanese society, including its educational institutions. Fortunately, this survey indicates that most young people in Japan have helpful views overall. As a pilot study, it needs to be replicated in other locations and in greater numbers before we can be certain of how accurately this sample represents young people all over Japan. At the least though, the survey indicates that there are a number of areas of concern, which educators should keep in mind when dealing with sexual harassment issues in their classrooms. While university students display sympathy for female and male victims, many believe that attractive looking people have to put up with sexual harassment. A more proactive perspective would eschew a perspective that offers little hope for a certain segment of the population, as though they have less right to avoid harassment. Nearly a quarter of the respondents saw sexual harassment humor on television as acceptable. This might be indicative of a trivializing attitude towards the issue. Also, one in ten believe that sexual harassment is not relevant for two people who have been or are in an intimate relationship. Very clearly, educational input is required here to help prepare students for the realities of relationships which they or their acquaintances will experience during the course of their lives. Finally, it was worrying also that almost one in five have a perception that many women encourage sexual interest from their superiors in the workplace so as to advance their own careers. This perception makes it easier for more powerful employees to be exonerated when they engage in harassment and then claim that the employee or colleague "led them on."

The survey also indicates substantial support for initiatives among policymakers and educators in universities to have a progressive attitude towards sexual harassment issues. 97% believe it is important to prevent harassment happening within educational institutions and 91% want school programs that educate young people about these issues. These results are encouraging for those who believe that educators can play a vital role in social transformation. Those who engage in sexual harassment should not enjoy conditions that guarantee impunity and the initiatives made within educational institutions should help to bring about justice for all victims of harassment so that we can look forward to a future where campaigns like "MeToo" and "WeToo" are no longer necessary.

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[i] Five of the questions (see Appendix) replicate the attitudinal survey of Sakallı-Uğurlu, Salman, and Turgut (2010) which was conducted among Turkish college-level students.