Topic: "Breaking the Silence: Confronting the Surge in Everyday Harassment of Females, From Inappropriate Comments to Physical Violations"

Imagine walking down a public street, only to be met with a barrage of unsolicited comments, whistles, and even physical advances. This is the reality faced by countless women every day, a constant undercurrent of harassment that can erode self-esteem, limit personal freedoms, and create a climate of fear. The prevalence of such behavior highlights a deep-rooted cultural problem that must be addressed.

In recent years, there has been increased visibility and discussion surrounding the harassment of women. However, many aspects of this issue remain deeply rooted in societal norms. From inappropriate comments and catcalls to physical violations, everyday harassment of females is a pervasive issue that affects individuals across diverse backgrounds, including our mothers, sisters, partners, and even strangers. Addressing this problem requires awareness and actionable strategies to bring about meaningful change.

Everyday harassment manifests in various forms, including catcalling, unsolicited comments, and unwanted physical contact. These incidents often occur in public spaces, workplaces, and online environments, creating a hostile atmosphere for women and marginalized groups. The normalization of such behavior contributes to a culture of silence, where victims may feel reluctant to speak out due to fear of disbelief or retaliation.

*One often witnesses deliberate physical contact with women on public transport like buses and trains. There are also instances of inappropriate staring and making nasty remarks in public without any fear of consequences. Additionally, there is constant victim blaming, not just from the general public, but also from law enforcement and even the victims' own families. In India, where we are raised in a patriarchal society, we are conditioned to believe that the fault always lies with the women. This warped mentality justifies cruel and senseless acts like honour killings. For centuries, daughters have been considered a burden in most Indian cultures, leading to inhumane practices such as sati, female infanticide, child marriage, and dowry.*

The repercussions of everyday harassment extend beyond immediate discomfort. Victims experience anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. Situations like this make the victims question their authenticity. Moreover, the prevalence of such behavior perpetuates systemic inequalities, reinforcing power dynamics that disadvantage women. As a society, failing to address these issues can lead to broader implications for mental health, workplace productivity, and social cohesion.

Education is crucial in reshaping perceptions around harassment. Workshops and community discussions should be organised for everyone including children, which can help demystify the issue and encourage individuals to recognize and understand the impact of their words and actions.

Institutions, whether schools or workplaces, should establish clear policies against harassment. Cultivating an environment at institutions where there is mutual respect is taught and held up to the highest standards would Strategies like implementing anonymous reporting systems can empower victims to come forward without fear, fostering a culture of accountability.

**Promoting Bystander Intervention:** Encouraging bystanders to intervene in harassment situations can significantly deter inappropriate behavior. Training programs that equip individuals with the skills to safely address harassment can create a more supportive environment.

**A system of s**upport networks, including counselling services and advocacy groups, can provide vital resources for victims. If this starts as early as in school, the Empowering individuals to share their experiences helps to break the stigma and promotes collective action.

**Legislative Action:** Advocating for stronger laws against harassment can bring about systemic change. But just stronger laws won’t be enough. Studies have shown that the tendency to commit crimes depends on two factors namely severity of punishment as well as the chance of getting caught. In India, the laws are already strict against sexual violence offenders but oftentimes the victims don’t register a FIR against the abuser. Many reasons can be attributed to this which all point to the deep-rooted societal problem. In about 97% of cases of rape, the perpetrator is related to the victim or is an acquaintance of the victim. In such a case, the victim is threatened and shamed by the family members because of this reporting such a crime becomes impossible for the victim. Rapes are not just about sex but about power. It satisfies the ego of the offenders when they think that they can make a female submit to them. Policymakers must prioritize initiatives that protect individuals and penalize perpetrators, creating a safer environment for all.