Street harassment and its negative psychological outcomes in an Italian university population

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1 BACKGROUND

The phenomenon:
Street harassment (SH), which is the experience of unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public settings, is a **global**, **widespread**, and **frequent** phenomenon most affecting women (see Bennett & Johnson, 2015; Fairchild & Rudman's, 2008).

The theories:
SH as a form of **male domination** through which the public sphere is remarked as male space where women are not welcome (DelGreco & Christensen, 2020).
SH as a tool for **masculine bonding** since gives a «feeling of youthful camaraderie» (Quinn, 2002).
SH as **denial of humanity** which results in perpetrators believing that women's bodies are objects for others (Davidson et al., 2016).

The psychological consequences:
Lower self-esteem and higher levels of **anxiety**, **insecurity**, **depression**, and **self-objectification** (Davidson et al., 2016; DelGreco & Christensen, 2020).
Decrease in security perceptions in crowded and isolated public spaces and rise in general anxiety levels (Davidson et al., 2016).
Changes in behavioural habits (i.e., more restrictions on freedom of movement) (Fairchild & Rudman, 2008).
The negative psychological outcomes occur whether the victim labels their experiences as harassment or not (Magley et al., 1999).

2 HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1a: Women experience more SH than men.

Hypothesis 1b: SH perpetrators are mainly men.

Hypothesis 2: Exposure to SH have negative psychological effects regardless of whether people label their experiences as harassment or not.

Hypothesis 3: Negative outcomes deriving from SH explain the relationship between SH experienced by respondents and the probability that they change their daily routine.

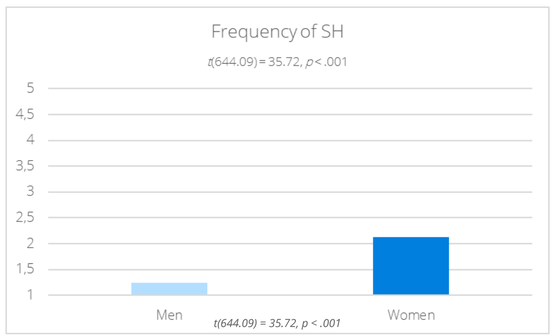
3 METHOD

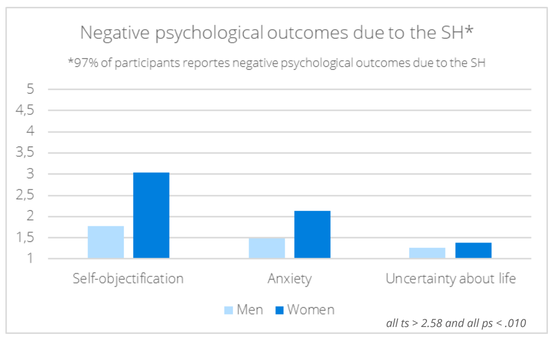
Participants and Procedure
Anonymous online questionnaire on Qualtrics between May-June 2021.
Final sample: 2,764 students and personnel of the University of Milano-Bicocca (2,400 females, 338 males, 12 non-binaries, 14 prefer not to answer), 18-51 years old.

Measures

- *Exposure to street harassment* (see Campos et al., 2017; Sullivan, 2011): type and frequency (13 items, e.g., "Someone made you feel uncomfortable with a whistling sound")
- *Street harassment features*: time (i.e., day, evening, night), place (e.g., park, public transportation), and features of the perpetrators (i.e., sex, age, number of perpetrators, familiarity)
- *Negative psychological outcomes* (e.g., Bottesi et al., 2015; Kyriazos et al., 2018): anxiety (4 items, e.g., "I felt I was close to panic"), uncertainty about life (4 items, e.g., "I could not see anything good in my future"), and self-objectification (3 items, e.g., "I thought obsessively about my appearance")
- *Changes in behavioural habits* (e.g., Stop Street Harassment, 2014): yes/no followed by 22 items (e.g., "Avoiding public transportation at night")
- *Street harassment labelling* (the same 13 items of the *Exposure to street harassment* scale)

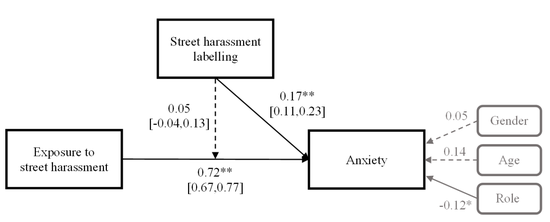
4 RESULTS

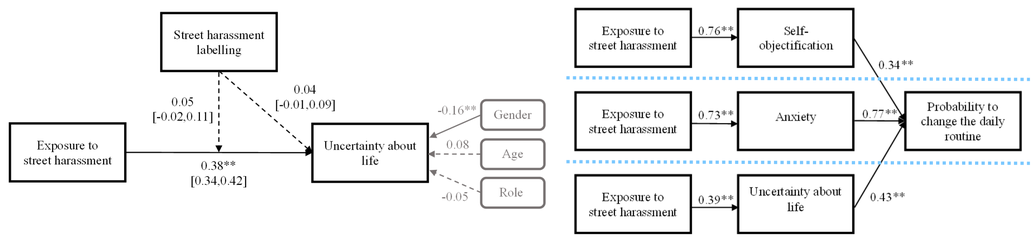


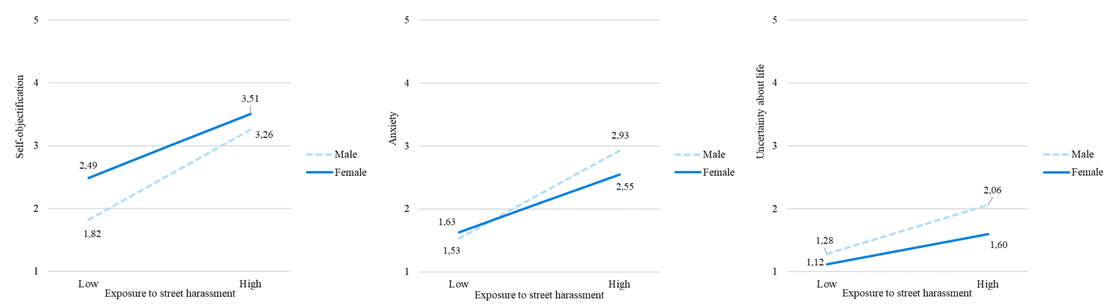


Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Exposure to street harassment	-							
2. Self-objectification	0.52**	-						
3. Anxiety	0.56**	0.50**	-					
4. Uncertainty about life	0.38**	0.38**	0.44**	-				
5. Changes in habits (a)	0.41**	0.40**	0.44**	0.27**	-			
6. Street harassment labelling	0.22**	0.24**	0.19**	0.08**	0.14**	-		
7. Gender (b)	0.43**	0.30**	0.20**	0.05**	0.21**	0.26**	-	
8. Age (c)	-0.27**	-0.20**	-0.11**	-0.08**	-0.12**	-0.09**	-0.15**	-
9. Role (d)	-0.29**	-0.25**	-0.15**	-0.09**	-0.15**	-0.11**	-0.19**	0.59**









5 DISCUSSION

SH is associated with **negative psychological outcomes regardless labelling or not** the experiences as SH.

Negative outcomes mediate the relationship **between SH episodes and the probability to change the daily routine**, affecting the relationship with urban spaces.

Women experience more SH than men and perpetrators are mainly stranger males between 31 and 60 years old.

The **association** between **SH and negative psychological outcomes** are **stronger for males** than females:

- females' self-objectification scores are consistently higher than males, confirming the pervasiveness of self-objectification among women;
- women tend to perceive SH as routine behaviour while men find SH unexpected;
- experiencing SH usually directed at women might raise doubts about one's masculinity.

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