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# **Discursive Strategies in Egyptian Women's Stories on Sexual Assaults: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach<sup>(\*)</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

In their quest to combat sexual violence, women have utilized digital platforms to create safe spaces, challenge the ‘unspeakability’ of their experiences and call for justice in ways previously unavailable to them. Online stories on sexual violence posted by Egyptian female survivors emerge as a more visible and impactful form of discourse in post-revolutionary Egypt, catalyzing potential social change and leading to significant legal amendments in the country’s Penal Code regarding sexual crimes. In view of this, the present paper examines the linguistic construction of the ‘survivor’ identity in 75 online stories posted by women between 2020 and 2024. Using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study investigates the linguistic choices employed by the female survivors in their self-presentation and in the portrayal of their perpetrators. The analysis reveals a sharp contrast in the representation of the survivors vs. their aggressors, with the male abuser as the active agent, mostly represented in terms of his manipulateness and ‘animalistic’ behavior. In contrast, the female survivor is portrayed as the weaker and more vulnerable participant, often pressured by the abuser, feelings of shame, self-blame, and entrenched

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socio-cultural norms. Yet, some narratives portray women as challenging, determined and sometimes aggressive, in response to their assault, echoing a shift in women's understanding of gender roles and behaviors. The work contributes to the evolving field of digital feminism research and adds to the limited scholarship exploring sexual violence discourse in contemporary Egypt.

**Keywords:** sexual violence, social media, Egyptian female survivors, women's narratives, critical discourse analysis

### الملخص

في سعيهن لمكافحة العنف الجنسي، استغلت النساء المنصات الرقمية لإنشاء مساحات آمنة، وتحدي 'المسكوت عنه' بتجاربهن، والمطالبة بالعدالة بطرق لم تكن متاحة لهن من قبل. تظهر سرديات الناجيات المصريات عن العنف الجنسي عبر مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي كنوع جديد من الخطاب في مصر ما بعد الثورة وحافزاً للتغيير الاجتماعي، حيث أدت هذه السرديات إلى تعديلات قانونية كبيرة في قانون العقوبات المصري فيما يتعلق بالجرائم الجنسية. بناءً على ذلك، يتناول هذا البحث البناء اللغوي لهوية 'الناجية' في ١٥ قصة عن العنف الجنسي نشرتها نساء مصريات عبر مواقع التواصل الاجتماعي بين عامي ٢٠٢٠-٢٠٢٤. باستخدام تحليل الخطاب النقدي، تقوم الدراسة بتحليل الخيارات اللغوية التي تستخدمها الناجيات في تصوير أنفسهن وكذلك المعتدي الجنسي. يكشف التحليل عن تباين حاد في تمثيل الناجيات مقابل المعتدين، حيث يظهر المعتدي ممثلاً بصفات تلاعبية وسلوك 'حيواني'، بينما تظهر الناجية كطرف ضعيف وهش بشكل عام بسبب ضغط المعتدي وإحساس العار، بالإضافة إلى تأثير الأعراف الاجتماعية والثقافية المتجذرة، إلا أن بعض القصص تظهر نساءً أكثر صموداً وأحياناً عدائيات في رد فعلهن على الاعتداء، مما يعكس تحولاً في فهم النساء للأدوار والسلوكيات المرتبطة بالنوع الاجتماعي. تساهم هذه الدراسة في تطوير مجال البحث في النسوية الرقمية كما أنها تضيف إلى الدراسات اللغوية المحدودة التي تتناول خطاب العنف الجنسي في مصر المعاصرة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** العنف الجنسي، وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، الناجيات المصريات، روايات النساء، تحليل الخطاب النقدي

Sexual violence is a major public threat that every culture can relate to. It is often used as an umbrella term to cover all types of sexual victimization, including rape, attempted rape, and unwanted sexual touching. Frequently considered a form of gender-based violence, violence against women (VAW) has been reported as a global concern and a violation of women's human rights. The United Nations defines VAW as

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (*Frequently Asked Questions: Types*, n.d.).

According to estimates published by the WHO, approximately 1 in 3 women globally (30%) have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner, or sexual violence from a non-partner, at some point in their lives (WHO, 2021). Additionally, the WHO reports that sexual violence is mostly perpetrated by men against women.

In the African region, sexual violence against women (SVAW) has been a disturbingly prevalent issue in Egypt. In 2013 a study by UN Women suggested that 99.3% of Egyptian women had been sexually harassed, either verbally or physically (*Egypt Serial Sex Attacks*, 2020). Incidents of sexual assault have soared in Egypt in the three years since the 2011 overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, which has led many analysts to tie the phenomenon to the wider political turmoil in the country (El-Rifae, 2014; Kingsley, 2013). Others have attributed the increase in sexual harassment against women to a number of socio-economic factors, including poverty, unemployment, delayed marriage, and a culture of impunity, all of which exacerbate the challenges facing the Egyptian society (Kassab & Mamdouh, 2012).

Despite the legal reforms and stricter punishments introduced by the state since 2014 (*President Mansour leaves office*, 2014), the struggle of women in reporting sexual assault remains a problem, either due to feelings of embarrassment, humiliation, or fear of social stigma. In the meantime, however, women's efforts to use online technology as a medium for 'counter-publics', as described by Fraser (1990, p.61), have allowed them to develop alternative frameworks for representation and participation in the public sphere, thereby spreading counter-hegemonic discourses. Not only have these online spaces enabled women and girls to raise awareness about SV and rape culture, but they have also provided female survivors with alternative modes of justice beyond the realm of the law (Loney-Howes, 2018).

The present study captures one side of the struggle between women's online resistance and patriarchal society. It aims to investigate how Egyptian women use social media to construct their 'survivor' identities in their narratives. Building on prior scholarly

work that examines how social media serves as an alternative platform for female survivors to share their experiences and influence public opinion, this study specifically explores the discursive strategies women employ to counter the pervasive victim-blaming culture in the Egyptian society. This is done by examining the linguistic choices women use in their self-presentation and in the depiction of their perpetrators within their personal accounts of SV. Accordingly, the present paper addresses the following main research question and two related sub-questions:

1. How is the 'survivor' identity linguistically constructed in the narratives of sexual assaults by Egyptian women?
  - a) *How are the social actors (i.e., the male assaulters and the female survivors) presented linguistically in the narratives?*
  - b) *What qualities are attributed to the social actors?*

To address the posed research questions, I conduct a qualitative analysis of the women's narratives using the discourse-historical approach (DHA), a strand of critical discourse analysis (CDA), that seeks to explore the relations between the Self and Other with respect to power dynamics, social inequalities and identity construction (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 1986, 2015). In this study, the survivors' online personal accounts are primarily analyzed in terms of two discursive strategies used in the constructions of identities, namely, nomination and predication.

In the first section of the paper, I briefly outline the social and legal context with respect to VAW in Egypt. In the second section, I present a review of the literature that has explored the means through which female survivors have utilized digital spaces to disclose experiences of SV and their underlying motives for sharing these experiences online. In the third section, I describe the data and methodology used in my research. Finally, I introduce the results and discussion.

### **Societal Norms and Women's Positionality in Public Life**

From a sociological and cultural perspective, Skalli (2014, p.

247) explains that sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence against women identify "broader patriarchal structures that normalize 'power over' women, in the sense of control and domination." Furthermore, the entrenched norms of shame and honor surrounding Egyptian girls and women align with the idea that "violation of women's body is taken as a dishonor of the entire family or community for which women, and not their aggressor(s), are held responsible" (ibid, p. 246). Thus, this issue not only leaves women burdened with the responsibility for their own safety from sexual violence, as well as ensuring they do not 'tempt' men, but also links a woman's behavior to the way she is raised. This is why the family is conventionally brought into discussion in women-related cases.

One notable example is the "TikTok girls" case in 2020, as referred to by the Egyptian media, which ironically became a "matter of public concern." Two women were convicted and sentenced to prison for allegedly violating "family principles and values upheld by Egyptian society" by posting "indecent" videos and images (Columbia Global Freedom of Expression, 2021). Authorities stated that the arrests were primarily due to the women's appearance, choice of attire, and dance moves. Their conviction closely mirrors the handling of Menna Abdel Aziz case, a 17-year-old TikToker who publicly accused a man of raping her, only to find herself detained for "violating Egyptian family values" (*Digital Campaign Supports TikTok*, 2020). The perceived violations of social norms were questioned by feminist supporters on the grounds that the Public Prosecution had criminalized individuals based solely on their appearance (ibid), overlooking the context of women's victimization, as in Abdel Aziz's case. Accordingly, the societal expectations put forth for women dictate that they dress, live, and behave in ways that align with 'normative' social traditions. Consequently, women who deviate from these 'appropriate' standards in public spaces are often subjected to policing, disciplining, or reprimanding by strangers and onlookers, predominantly men (Elmeligy, 2021).

The regulation of women's behavior in public spaces has been directly linked to a broader pattern of exclusion from public life.

Salter (2013) notes that women's concerns were often regarded as 'trivial', leading to their marginalization. It follows that any allegations of SV have either been questioned or overlooked. Such experiences were dismissed as a 'private' matter without public or political significance (Pateman, 1988), or treated with a high degree of suspicion (Benedict, 1992). As a result, women's voices, and by extension, SV survivors', remained unheard for years.

### **The Evolution of Social and Legal Responses to Sexual Violence in Egypt**

An increased focus on the issue of SV in Egypt by the international and local media since the beginning of the Revolution, and even years before it, has raised awareness of the problem. The first widely reported mass sexual assault against women in public occurred in 2005, when four female protesters calling for a boycott of a referendum organised by Hosni Mubarak were sexually assaulted during a demonstration in front of the Press Syndicate in Cairo (Slackman, 2005).

Subsequently, the results of the ECWR survey, which began in 2008, influenced the drafting of a law against sexual harassment, defining the legal parameters of the term and criminalizing the act. In 2008, Noha Rushdy, a 27-year-old filmmaker at the time, became the first woman to invoke this law and initiate a legal process demanding police intervention following her assault. Her individual case led to the first criminal prosecution for sexual harassment in Egypt (Sinay, 2012). It has paved the way for the criminalization of sexual assault in the country and a gradual shift in social perceptions regarding such behaviors toward women in public spaces, catalyzed by women's political participation during the Revolution.

Following a series of proposed amendments by women's and human rights groups, a new law was finally passed in 2014, criminalizing sexual harassment for the first time in the country (*President Mansour leaves office*, 2014). The new law[5] amends article 306A in the Egyptian Penal Code to criminalize harassment in the form of words, gestures, and actions expressed in person or

through other means of communication (*Egypt Brings in New*, 2014). Later, in August 2021, the Egyptian Penal Code was amended to turn sexual harassment from a misdemeanour into a felony and increase penalties for it, including ‘sexploitation’—using a position of power to require a sexual benefit from a victim (Oak, 2021). Additionally, in its latest form the legal code covers both offline and online verbal sexual harassment, and thus taking into account the modern means of communication (i.e. internet, mobile, and more).

### **Literature Review**

Numerous studies have investigated the role of social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, in amplifying women’s voices. Arguably, the most important movement online to expose SVAW was *#MeToo*, which has been considered the largest on social media since 2017 and has inspired other international responses, such as *QuellaVoltaChe* in Italy, and *Ana Kaman* in the Arab world (Fahmy & Ibrahim, 2021). This section reviews previous studies that have explored how these emerging online responses to SV have enabled survivors not only to collect and publish evidence against abusers, but also to challenge traditional media narrative, influence public opinion, and shape legal frameworks.

#### ***The Role of Online Platforms in Challenging SVAW***

Salter (2013) examines three case studies of women using various online platforms to make extrajudicial allegations of SV. He observes that although these online counter-publics influence traditional media coverage as well as legal outcomes, they can still reproduce cultural biases. This is because not all women receive equal support by activists and online networks, and consequently, they receive different legal outcomes. His results show that some cases need to meet certain criteria of ‘newsworthiness’ based on age and appearance of the victim. Similarly, Keller *et al.* (2018) have examined the ways in which survivors use platforms like *Hollaback!* and hashtags, such as *#BeenRapedNeverReported*, to challenge rape culture. They argue that this digital mediation creates new connections previously unavailable to girls and women and provides for them a

wider feminist community in online spaces.

Others have focused on solidarity-building practices in digital feminist activism, yet with a particular emphasis on how emotion and affect are expressed online. Mendes *et al.* (2019) investigate how language in ‘pain memes’ operates on multiple levels to convey trauma, foster solidarity, and subvert traditional rape myths. By examining hundreds of ‘pain memes’ across Tumblr and YouTube, they observe that survivors utilize some linguistic strategies that intensify the emotional impact of the memes, such as hyperbole, repetition and the use of exclamation marks. On the other hand, Nau *et al.* (2023) study the interplay between affect and emotion in the more concise Twitter posts during the #MeToo movement. By analyzing a sample of 570 tweets, the researchers identify recurring emotions, such as sadness, anger, fear and disgust. They observe that even in the absence of explicit emotional expressions, participants employ specific “vernacular practices” to generate affect, such as euphemisms, non-verbal cues like emojis, tone, and other rhetorical devices. While all these practices convey emotions and affect, they simultaneously mobilize support and challenge societal norms around SV.

### ***Digital Activism Against SV in the Egyptian Context***

In the local Egyptian context, numerous works have also explored how online spaces provide survivors with alternative forms of agency and recognition, allowing them to reshape public discourse on SV as well as legal outcomes. Marzouk and Vanderveen (2021) have studied the online anti-sexual violence campaign on ‘Assault Police’, an Instagram-based account created by feminist activists and gained significant attention during the ABZ case<sup>(1)</sup> in 2020. Using the concept of ‘framing’, the researchers have conducted a content analysis of the online strategies employed by the account, from July 2020 till January 2021, to give testimonies on SV experiences and expose (alleged) perpetrators. Their analysis highlights the range of technology-mediated tools, especially the visual ones, used by the account to build and develop their claims regarding SVAW, such as



memes, screenshots and artworks, demonstrating the role played by technology in shaping the form and function of digital activism. It also highlights the evolving role of the account as one example of female publics that have contributed to social and legal change, both locally and internationally.

Ibrahim (2022) further explores the cyberactivism led by ‘Assault Police’, focusing specifically on the collected evidence against ABZ as one case study at the time of the allegations. Through a corpus-assisted CDA, Ibrahim has analyzed 100 narratives posted by ABZ’s victims in June 2020. Although her findings reveal that female survivors are predominantly constructed as weaker social actors, acted upon by their male aggressor, Ibrahim argues that the spread of their stories on social media is a major reason behind changing legislations in Egypt, a point that aligns with the view of Marzouk and Vanderveen (2021). This is evidenced by the fact that, thanks to the victims’ digitized narratives, more amendments were introduced to Egyptian law in 2021, including harsher penalties for sexual harassment crimes and measures to conceal the identity of victims (Oak, 2021).

Building on these findings, Eltantawy (2023) examines the broader impact and effectiveness of ‘Assault Police’ cyberactivism, focusing on its expanded scope to cover two major rape cases: the ABZ case and the ‘Fairmont case’<sup>(2)</sup>, a violent gang rape that took place in 2014. While she acknowledges that online platforms have enabled marginalized groups of women and SV survivors in Egypt to challenge societal taboos and traditional media scripts, she also identifies significant challenges that could hinder social and legal reforms in the country. These include trolling on social media and backlash from conservative segments in society.

Despite the growing attention to SV, there remains limited linguistic research on how survivors in Egypt are creating online strategies to assess and respond to allegations of sexual assault. Most studies addressing this topic in the Egyptian context have primarily employed ethnographic methods, including interviews and

observation of victims' lived experiences in natural settings, while drawing on content analysis and retrospective descriptive analysis (e.g. El-Elemi *et al.*, 2011). While some studies examine the stereotypical representation of Egyptian women on social media (e.g. Abdelhafiz, 2019), this research shifts the focus to the language used by women themselves in their narratives, exploring how their collective resistance against SV operates in discourse. Accordingly, this study sets out to explore how social media can offer Egyptian survivors alternative forms of justice, as well as to understand the discursive strategies they employ to counter the 'blame-the-victim' mentality. In a society where gender hierarchies are deeply entrenched, these issues are likely to be framed differently compared to other previously studied international contexts. Therefore, by analyzing the 'collective' conceptualizations of other Egyptian women vs. their perpetrators, through the lens of CDA, different results might be obtained with respect to gender roles and power relations in society, especially when incorporating more diverse accounts over a broader and a more recent time span, which is the aim of the present study.

## **Methodology**

### ***The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)***

The discourse-historical approach (DHA) is a branch of CDA that was proposed by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues to explore the relationship between discourse and power. Characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, the DHA combines linguistic analysis with historical and sociopolitical context to study how discourses are produced, reproduced, and transformed over time by integrating knowledge and methods from various disciplines (e.g., linguistics, sociology, history, political science). This is particularly relevant to investigating power dynamics, ideologies, social inequalities and identity construction. For instance, the DHA can investigate how certain marginalized or systemically excluded groups are represented in public discourse, such as immigrants, refugees, ethnic minorities, and women. It critically analyzes how certain discourses legitimize or

perpetuate inequalities, and thus, taking into account multiple dimensions of a discourse, including social, political, historical and cultural factors.

In order to reveal how power and ideologies are embedded in discourse, the DHA has identified five key strategies involved in the discursive construction and representation of identities, namely nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and mitigation or intensification (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009; Wodak, 2015). A ‘strategy’ is defined as “a more or less intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices), adopted in order to achieve a particular social, political, psychological, or linguistic goal” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 94). These discursive strategies are centered around five main questions:

1. How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes, and actions named and referred to linguistically?
2. What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events, and processes?
3. What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?
4. From what perspective are these nominations, attributions, and arguments expressed?
5. Are the respective utterances articulated overtly? Are they intensified or mitigated?

The present paper uses a selection of these strategies, as shown in Table 1 below. For the sake of space, I have chosen two main strategies to be in line with my research questions, with a particular focus on those corresponding to questions 1 and 2 above. Since the first research sub-question addresses how the social actors, the incident of sexual assault, and the processes involved in describing the survivor vs. the perpetrator are named and referred to linguistically, I have selected the discursive strategy of nomination. For the second sub-question, which focuses on examining the attributes or qualities assigned to the social actors, I have used the strategy of predication.

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Thus, the construction of the survivors' identities is explored through these two strategies: nomination and predication.

**Table 1**

*Discursive strategies selected for analysis\**

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Devices</i>
Referential/nomination	Discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/ events, and processes/actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc.</li> <li>• tropes such as metaphors, metonymies</li> <li>• verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions</li> </ul>
Predication	Discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena/ events/processes, and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits (e.g., in the form of adjectives, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, etc.)</li> <li>• explicit predicates or predicative nouns/ adjectives/pronouns</li> <li>• collocations</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
*Adapted from Reisigl and Wodak (2009, p. 95)		

### *Halliday's Transitivity Model*

In order to investigate how the events in the narratives are constructed, the processes are analysed and classified using Halliday's (1994) transitivity model, which is at the heart of CDA. According to Halliday (1994), language serves three metafunctions: experiential, interpersonal and textual. The experiential metafunction is concerned with how reality is represented, the interpersonal with the relationship between the producer of the text and those who receive it, and the textual with how a text is created. Transitivity is a system that relates

to the ideational/experiential metafunction. It construes experiences in terms of a set of process types, linking them to participants and circumstances within the clause. The processes expressed by the verbal element of the clause have three potential components: the process itself (expressed by a verb phrase), participants involved in the process (realized by noun phrases), and any circumstances involved in the process (which usually contain adverbial and prepositional phrases). As Jeffries (2010, p. 40) explains, the transitivity model classifies lexical verbs into six categories: material, mental, verbal, behavioral, relational, and existential processes

The idea behind analysing transitivity is to explore what social, cultural, ideological and political factors determine what process type (verb) is chosen in a particular type of discourse. It ‘shows how speakers encode in language their mental picture of reality and how they account for their experience of the world around them’ (Simpson, 1993, p. 88). In view of this, the transitivity model is integrated in the critical analysis of the data under investigation, offering insight into how events in the narratives are constructed and how they convey the lived experiences of victims of sexual abuse.

### ***Data Description and Collection***

My research investigates social media narratives posted by victims of various forms of SV, including rape, physical and online harassment, and blackmail. I have manually collected my data from Facebook and Instagram, two of the most commonly used platforms by social media users in Egypt (based on a survey conducted by *Statista*<sup>(3)</sup> in May, 2022). Both platforms also provide a rich collection of personal accounts on SV that surfaced after the *#MeToo* movement. Particularly, following the well-known ABZ case that unfolded in 2020, Egyptian social media campaigns against SV have grown significantly. The data comprises 75 stories posted between 2022 and 2024 on three of the most prominent anti-sexual violence pages: 1) *Assault Police*<sup>(4)</sup>, 2) *Speak Up*<sup>(5)</sup> *اتكلم/ى*, and 3) *daftar hekayat*<sup>(6)</sup> *دفتر حكايات*. On these pages, hundreds of Egyptian women have shared their

experiences of SV, either anonymously or with their identities disclosed. The narratives were selected based on their content and length, with each narrative ranging from as few as 15 words up to a maximum of 1000 words.

I have also included 'public' posts in my corpus, shared directly through personal accounts. These are posts from users who intentionally enabled the 'public sharing' option by adjusting their privacy settings from 'Friends Only' to 'Everyone'. D'Arcy and Young (2012, p. 541) explain that this step involves "making personal content – otherwise protected within the confines of the site – 'public'", and thus, anyone on or off the platform can view their posts. However, in my data examination, I have anonymized these public narratives to protect the privacy of the survivors, though in some instances I may mention that certain narratives were linked to 'named' users. I have collected these posts by following hashtags related to sexual assault and harassment, similar to #MeToo, such as ماتسكتيش# ('speak up') and التحرش\_جريمة# ('sexual harassment is a crime').

### ***Procedures of Analysis***

The analysis of the corpus was conducted in three main steps. In the first step, I categorized the narratives thematically based on the recurring topics found in the stories (See Tables 2-3 below). In the second step, I carried out an in-depth analysis by selecting excerpts from the narratives that demonstrate the thematic categorization identified in the previous step, focusing on the depiction of the 'self' and the perpetrator. This involved identifying the discursive strategies and examining the lexical and grammatical choices related to social actors, events, and processes, in the light of the two strategies of nomination and predication (grouped together). In the third step, the discursive strategies were discussed and explained in relation to the context of the narratives.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Preliminary Results***

A preliminary analysis of the data indicates that there are topics that are commonly raised in the 75 narratives under

investigation; some examples include verbal and online harassment, blackmail and threat, as well as shame and honor. Tables 2-3 below describe the key notions involved in the construction of the male assaulter (Table 2) and of the female survivor (Table 3).

<b>Table 2</b> <i>Thematic division of narratives on Facebook &amp; Instagram accounts (male assaulter)</i>	
Category	No. of occurrences in narratives
<i>Physical assault</i>	59
<i>Verbal harassment</i>	16
<i>Online harassment</i>	9
<i>Odd behavior</i>	4
<i>Power abuse</i>	16
<i>Religious hypocrisy</i>	14
<i>Blackmail &amp; threat</i>	11
<i>Animalistic behavior</i>	6

<b>Table 3</b> <i>Thematic division of narratives on Facebook &amp; Instagram accounts (female survivor)</i>	
Category	No. of occurrences in narratives
<i>Life before vs. after assault</i>	30
<i>'Post sharing' as a means of empowerment</i>	27
<i>V's Naivety vs A's immorality</i>	18
<i>Shame, honor &amp; virginity</i>	15
<i>Clothing</i>	10

As expected in stories on sexual violence, Table 2 introduces various forms of negative actions by the abuser, based on the

survivors' descriptions. Some of these actions fall under sexual assault as a 'crime', while others show more complex notions. The assaulter's actions range from 'actual physical assault', which has the highest number of occurrences (in 59 out of 75 narratives), to 'verbal harassment' (16), 'blackmail and threat' (11), and 'online harassment' (9), whereas 'odd behavior' only recurs four times. The male assaulter is also described by the survivors in terms of his abuse of power and social status in professional or institutional settings (in 16 narratives), as well as his hypocrisy, especially in religious settings (e.g., in churches or mosques) (in 14 narratives). These two frequently occurring notions ('power abuse' and 'religious hypocrisy') go beyond the physical actions of the abuser and are interpreted in a social context where religiosity and power relations are important, as explained in more details in the next section. Additionally, the assaulter's lustful behavior and his sexualization of the female body was found to be significant, an idea that is conveyed through the portrayal of the perpetrator as an 'animal', driven by his sexual urges.

Table 3 shows five key notions related to the construction of the female survivor. 'Life before vs. after assault' occurs most frequently (in 30 stories). This idea pertains to the psychological transformation of the survivors following their assaults; more particularly, the positive or negative impact of their experiences on their mental and emotional states. Ranked second, 'post sharing' (in 27 stories) is seen by the survivors as their main source of empowerment on social media through which they can open up, expose their harassers, raise awareness, seek advice from their peers, and more. Another recurring notion is 'victim's naivety vs. assaulter's immorality' (in 18 stories), an idea that partly enables the narrators to generate sympathy amongst their audiences. That is, they tend to emphasize their vulnerability by describing their old gullible self that might have enabled their assaulters to exploit them. In that sense, the victim's naivety can be contrasted with the exploitative image of the assaulter, and hence, his immorality.

Though the concept of 'shame, honor and virginity' still exists



among sexual assault survivors, as Table 3 shows, it is only brought up in 15 narratives out of the 75 under investigation. The fact that this notion is contested in several narratives can suggest the growing awareness among women of their status as ‘victims’ rather than ‘partners in crime’. Yet, it can also indicate that the idea of bestowing ‘family honor’ to female bodies continues to exist in the Egyptian culture and that ‘female virginity’ remains a matter of concern. Likewise, the idea of ‘clothing’ (mentioned in 10 stories) points to the conservative socio-cultural view that links women’s ‘provocative’ clothes to the behavior of the assaulter, considering the way they dress as a reason for being harassed. However, in many cases, the survivors use this as a starting point to protest against the society’s claim, and hence challenge their victim-blaming culture.

It is also worth mentioning that other key participants were depicted in the narratives, including the narrator’s family members, the (mostly passive) bystanders witnessing the event, and figures of authority, such as police officers, lawmakers and the judiciary. However, due to space constraints, I have addressed only six of the above-mentioned notions in the more detailed analysis below, with respect to the representation of the survivors vs. their assaulters. The depiction of the male assaulter is discussed in the light of three main aspects: 1) his abuse of power and/or social status, 2) his religious hypocrisy, and 3) his ‘animalistic’ or lustful behavior. On the other hand, the portrayal of the female survivor is analyzed in terms of three other central themes: 1) the survivor’s naivety vs. the assaulter’s immorality, 2) ‘women’s clothing’ as a contested notion, and 3) the impact of sexual abuse on the survivor’s life.

### ***Construction of the Sexual Assaulter through Nomination and Predication***

The image that the survivors construct for their abusers can be conveyed through the naming choices and modifiers with which the assaulters are labelled. Narrators employ many lexical choices that carry negative connotations, reflecting the various kinds of misconduct they have suffered by their predators. Labelling the

assaulter(s) as ‘psychopath’, ‘abuser’, ‘criminal’, ‘jerk’, ‘motherfucker’, ‘bastard’, ‘coward’, ‘rat’, ‘dirty male creature’, ‘aggressor’, ‘harasser’, among others, and their behavior as ‘disgusting’, ‘weird’, ‘abusive’, ‘disrespectful’ can be ideological, since all these modifiers are value-loaded. The following are examples from different narratives [modifiers are italicized]:

(١) أقذر و أوسخ احساس فى الكون إنى حد يلمسك غصب عنك

[The *most disgusting* and *filthiest* feeling in the world is someone *touching you against your will*.]

(2) It’s [the abuser’s behavior] so *annoying* and it *makes me feel* really *anxious*

(3) He would touch me *in ways I didn’t feel comfortable with*.

Generally, all these negative attributes describing the abuser’s actions (e.g., ‘most disgusting and filthiest’, ‘annoying’, ‘touching against [her] will’) and their impact on the narrator (e.g., ‘makes me feel anxious’, ‘ways I didn’t feel comfortable with’) contribute to constructing an image of an immoral, abnormal person or an outlaw who deserves to be punished. As a result, these descriptions are likely to prompt readers to form judgments and ultimately align themselves with the victims. Yet, there are some common aspects that are highly emphasized throughout the narratives under investigation when it comes to the image of the male assaulter, three of which are exemplified below.

**The Male Assaulter as a Power Abuser.** One frequently occurring theme observed in the narratives is the abuse of power and status by the male assaulters. Particularly, they exploit their authoritative position and reputation in social and/or professional settings (such as the workplace or institutional environments) to harass the victim. They might also extort sexual favors in exchange for something that the victim needs or wants. These needs can include a job, a grade or an increased salary. Thus, the abuse of power described in the narratives usually involves a hierarchical relationship between the male assaulter and the female victim, as in the case of a teacher-student, a trainer-trainee, an employer-employee or a doctor-

patient relationship.

The following extracts come from two different testimonies on the same abuser, a public figure and a distinguished journalist who was accused of sexually harassing and raping several women:

(٤) حابه احكي عن شئ تعرضتله من كام سنة من حد مشهور عالمييس

في الاوساط العلمية وتبسيط العلوم. الشخص ده اسمه [Name Initials]. كان عندي بحكم انه بتجمعنا حاجات بنعملها، ومكنش ليا اي كلام معاه، بعثلي قالي انا عاجباني اوي افكارك واللي بتكتبته قولتله متشكره جدا، قالي انت متحررة ف افكارك؟ قولتله متحررة بمعنى ايه، قالي هبعثلك صوري نود (عريان) وبعث صورة بس كان عريان من فوق بس، عملتله بلوك بس حسيت بعدم امان او اطمئنان وبقيت بتجنب اي شغل معاه. وبعدين لما حكيت لصديقة كانت في نفس الوسط قالتلي انه عمل معاها نفس الشئ.

[I want to open up about an experience I went through a few years ago with a famous person on Facebook who is well-known in scientific communities and for his simplification of science (i.e., making scientific knowledge understandable for the lay public). This person is called [Name Initials]. He was on my Friend List since we had shared work interests, but we never had any conversations. He texted me saying, I like your topics and posts very much. I told him thank you so much. He said are you open-minded? I asked what that meant, he said I'll send you nude pictures of myself, and he sent one, but it was only showing his upper body. I blocked him but I felt insecure and uncomfortable, and I started avoiding any kind of work with him. Later, when I told a friend in the same circle, she said he did the same thing with her.]

(٥) من ٩ سنين، في السنة الأخيرة من الجامعة، اتعرفت على بنت في

ورشة للصحافة... قالتلي ان فيه شخص بتتدرب معاه في (مؤسسة صحفية مصرية مستقلة شهيره) دماغه متفتحة وبيساعدنا في مشاكلها. كانت كل مشاكلي وقتها بتتمثل في خضة بنت من أسرة منغلقة تماما على نفسها ولازم تتعلم ازاي تواجهه عشان بدرس صحافة، وده كان حلمي. صحفي استقصائي معروف ... ادعى -مش متأكدة من صدق الادعاء- انه دارس علم نفس، وفاهم هو بيعمل ايه

ولو ناقشت بيرد بصرامة انه عارف هو بيعمل ايه

[Nine years ago, when I was in my last year of university, I met a girl in a workshop on Journalism... She told me that there was someone she was training with at '*a reputable independent Egyptian press institution*'. He was open-minded and he helped her deal with her problems. At the time, my problem was simply that I was a timid girl coming from a completely closed-off family, needing to learn how to face the world because I was studying journalism, and that was my dream. *A well-known investigative journalist*... He claimed – though I'm not sure how far this is true – that he had studied psychology and that he knew what he was doing, and if I questioned him, he would reply sternly that he knew what he was doing.]

Both examples show how the man misuses his high social status to abuse his victims. By identifying him by his profession as a 'well-known investigative journalist' who is attributed to science circles and 'reputable' institutions, the narrators implicitly introduce a justification for the cause of their manipulation. Whereas the first narrator starts by describing the superficial relationship she had with him ('He was on my Friend List as we had shared... conversations'), the second narrator starts by bringing in her older 'naïve' self that could have enabled the man to manipulate her. Through their further description, the assaulter is seen to have used his credentials as an established journalist to select vulnerable younger colleagues and trainees. He also claims to be a therapist to justify his criminal conducts with his victims. In example (5), the mental processes involved in his description as an actor, such as '*studied* psychology' and '*knew* what he was doing' (repeated twice), along with the behavioral process 'replied sternly', serve to establish the positive and sophisticated social image he assumes for himself. Other material processes, such as 'helping her deal with her problems' and 'training her' (example 4), position the girl as the object, thereby placing him in a more powerful and controlling role over his victims. Thus, through

the narrators' description, it can be seen that the image that the abuser draws for himself to manipulate his victims contrasts sharply with his later acts of harassment and violence against them (as stated later in both stories).

**The Male Assaulter as a Religious Hypocrite.** The Egyptian society is often stereotyped as being 'religious by nature' (Ziada, 2022). This is because religion tends to be given much weight and is central to the logic Egyptians apply when making decisions, whether for major life-changing choices or everyday activities (ibid). With this in mind, it is likely for people to take the words of an apparently 'religious' man for granted and to view their proximity as 'safe'.

Accordingly, just as some male assaulters exploit their prestigious positions in social and professional settings to attract their victims, others take advantage of the 'virtuous' reputation associated with their religious posts. For example, according to the narrators, an assaulter could be a 'Sheikh', a 'church custodian', or a religion teacher. Others misuse 'sacred' spaces, such as a mosque or a church, and thus, a harasser could also be categorized as a 'worshipper' at ceremonies or prayers. In that sense, the male assaulter is perceived by the female survivors as a religious hypocrite.

The following examples demonstrate how hypocrisy is particularly evoked in religious settings, where the assaulter not only exploits his public image of 'piety' but also the place and time of the event. These short extracts come in response to a topic initiated on 'Speak Up' in relation to sexual harassment in religious settings.

(٦) و أنا فى الحرم المكى وقت الطواف اتحرش بيا معتمر لابس لبس الاحرام

[While I was in the *haram*, during *Tawaf*, a 'mu'tamir' ('worshipper') in the *Ihrām* clothing harassed me]

(7) It was in the church (safe place it should be) I was crying to someone because of sth happened. This person tried like hug me under the name of "tabtaba" ['consoling someone by patting them on the shoulder']

(8) اتعرضت لاعتداء جنسى (اغتصاب) من شيخ فى المسجد فى العشرة الاواخر من رمضان فى طفولتى فى قرية من قرى مصر

[I was sexually assaulted (raped) by a Sheikh *in a mosque during the last ten days of Ramadan*, in my childhood, in one of the villages in Egypt.]

(9) مش فى مكان عبادة بس من محفظ القرآن و اكثر شخص متدين فى عيالتى

[Not in a place of worship but on the hands of a ‘*muḥafiz*’ (Quran teacher) and the most religious person in my family]

(10) مش فى مكان عبادة بس كان امام مسجد.. و كان جدى بالمناسبة

[Not in a place of worship but it was an *Imam*.. and he was my grandfather by the way]

In examples (6-8), the focus is mainly on the setting in which the assault takes place, encompassing both the location and timing of the event. In other words, identifying the place (‘I was in the ḥaram’ i.e., the ‘Sacred Mosque’<sup>(7)</sup>, ‘it was in the church’) and the time of the event (‘during Tawaf’<sup>(8)</sup>, ‘during the last 10 days of Ramadan’), rather than the sole mention of the assaulter’s actions, reveals significant context. These spatial and temporal settings are generally associated with self-discipline, feelings of spirituality, and reverence towards the sacred place, and are therefore conventionally labelled as ‘safe’. Thus, by showing how some people take advantage of these ‘holy’ spaces and times of worship to carry out their deeds, the narrators implicitly construct a hateful image for the so-called ‘worshippers’. Their acts of ‘harassing’ (6), ‘hugging under the name of ‘tabtaba’<sup>(7)</sup>, in addition to the extreme act of ‘raping in a mosque’, foregrounded in example (8), heightens the assaulters’ sinful behavior.

On the other hand, in examples (9-10), the emphasis is on the religious role of the male assaulter rather than the setting. By foregrounding the assaulter identity as an ‘Imam’<sup>(9)</sup> and ‘*muḥafiz*’ (Quran teacher<sup>(10)</sup>) (also ‘*mu’tamer*’<sup>(11)</sup>, earlier in example 6), the narrators mainly rely on the irony of the situation. These semantically related terms instantly bring to mind an image of piety that ‘naturally’ goes against all forms of immorality. Further, the description of these assaulter as ‘the most religious’ (example 9) heightens his hypocritical image, and invokes feelings of shock in the narrator, especially when the familial ties are revealed in both examples, (9) and (10): ‘the most

religious... in *my family*' and 'he was *my grandfather* by the way'. Therefore, whether the focus is on the given religious titles or the sacredness of the place, the assaulter's negative image as a religious hypocrite is established through his unexpected misconduct that contradicts the religiosity of 'men of God'.

**The Male Assaulter as an 'Animal'.** Another important aspect stressed in several narratives is the intense and overt sexual desire of the male perpetrator conveyed through his negative portrayal as an 'animal'. More specifically, his uncontrollable lust and lasciviousness is frequently described in many instances, as in the following examples by different narrators [relevant modifiers are italicized]:

(١١) جوز عمتي الحيوان... كل ما يشوفنى يتحرش بيا

[My uncle the *animal*... every time he sees me, he harasses me.]

(١٢) شايقة الراجل كأنه خرة، ما بيحسش ولا بي فهم غير بشهوته

[I see the man as a *piece of shit* who *doesn't feel or understand anything except through his sexual desire/senses*. (i.e. he cares about nothing but his sexual lust)]

(١٣) لقيت شاب فى العشرينات بيبصلى بأكثر نظرة شهوانية شفتها فى حياتى

[I found a guy in his 20s *staring* at me with *the most leering look* I have ever seen in my life.]

(14) when I got closer... he was *masturbating* and I could hear him saying stuff like "you *turned him on*... he *got up the moment he saw you*"

Though the expressions 'animal' (example 11) and 'a piece of shit' (example 12) are explicit derogatory terms, the mental process 'doesn't feel or understand... except through his sexual desire' (12), as well as the behavioral process 'staring at me... leering look.' (13), with the 'man' in the agent position and the narrator as an object, implicitly add to the figurative image of the 'harasser as an animal'. Given that unregulated sexual desire is an animal attribute, an assaulter's lustful behavior could be conceived in the same way – he is

incapable of holding his sexual needs, and therefore, he is rather 'spurred' by these desires. This idea is also conveyed through the material and mental processes 'masturbating', 'turned him on', 'got up the moment he saw you' (14). These processes denote sensual reactions that reflect a state of sexual arousal in the harasser, and thus emphasize the perpetrator's sexual objectification of his victim. In that sense, the narrator's linguistic choices construct a negative image of the harasser, one who is driven by animalistic impulses, reinforcing his portrayal as a predator.

### ***Constructing the 'Self' through Nomination and Predication***

**Naivety vs. Immorality.** The negative portrayal of the sexual abusers contributes indirectly to the construction of the survivors. As Jancarikova (2013) and Tabbert (2012) argue, offenders and victims are canonically perceived as binary opposites. In many of the recounted stories under investigation, the depiction of the female survivors vs. their male perpetrators seems to fall broadly under the notion of naivety vs. immorality in the sense that the lack of experience of the survivor is frequently emphasized and commonly perceived as a reason for her exploitation by the male assaulter. To put it differently, in many cases, the skilfulness of the male assaulters to abuse their victims contrasts the victims' abilities to protect themselves. In that sense, the portrayal of both social actors greatly relies on the interplay between these two traits: the victim's naivety and the assaulter's immorality.

Referring to the young age of the survivors when recounting their past experiences, compared to the older age of their abusers, is a recurring strategy that can reflect the above-mentioned notion. This is usually done in the openings of the stories, before mentioning the details of the incident, as in the following examples [italicized for reference]:

(15) وأنا مرافقة ومتعاش ال ١٥ سنة... الاقى واحدة صاحبتى من  
سنى جاية بتقولى ان عمو الدليفرى اللى هناك ده بيقولك انه علوز  
ينام معاكى و ببص عليه لقيته شاب فى العشرينات بيصلى بأكثر  
نظرة شهوانية شفتها فى حياتى...



[I was a teenager who was only 15 years old...then a friend of mine, who was the same age as me, came to tell me that *uncle deliveryman* over there wants to tell you that he wants to sleep with you. I looked over there and found a guy in his 20s staring at me with the most leering look I have ever seen in my life...]

(16) ...أول تحرش كان عندي ٦ سنين من جوز عمتي الحيوان .

[The first time I was exposed to sexual harassment I was six years old by my uncle the beast...]

- (17) I'm one of the girls whose private pics were shared on the [Name] camp group. They were pictures of me when I was 14. I was young, naïve and it ruined my life. I was in grade 9 and I had a huge crush on a guy who was one year older than me.

In example (15), the voice of the narrator as a 'child' is reflected in the honorific term *عمو الدليفري* (roughly: 'uncle deliveryman'), a polite form of address that is typically used by younger people in Arabic when addressing an older person. This goes in line with her young age at the time of her encounter with her harasser. It establishes an image of innocence and naivety for both the narrator and her friend, compared to the immorality of the '20-year-old guy' that is revealed through his disturbing behavior of asking to 'sleep with her'. The same image applies to the other two narrators in examples (16-17): one is confronted with her 'uncle', and the other with 'a guy one year older'. Thus, drawing attention to the abuser's age serves as evidence that supports the narrator, as it indirectly conveys the idea that it was not the narrator's fault. Instead, it is her 'older' predator that is to be held accountable for his actions. Additionally, in example (17), the narrator opens her story by describing herself as 'one of the girls whose private pics... group', which allows her to foreground the assaulter's act of sharing her pictures as something beyond her control. This, consequently, magnifies her problem and adds to her vulnerability as a victim.

The two previously mentioned extracts (4-5) about the 'investigative journalist' can also be viewed as examples illustrating

this point, in the sense that the aggressor's image contrasts with the 'flawed' or less confident image of the narrators. This is reflected in the lexical choices modifying the survivor and her background in example (5), such as 'timid', 'coming from a completely closed-off family', 'needing to know how to face the world'. These choices point to an inexperienced character that can be easily deceived or victimized. Even the material processes involving the narrator in the agent position represent minor defensive (re)actions, such as 'block' and 'avoid' (4). Additionally, the mental processes describing the narrator, such as 'felt insecure/uncomfortable', add to the weaker position of the narrator. This highlights the stark difference between the survivor's guilelessness and the assaulter's more dominant and manipulative character, which gradually convinces the reader to support the survivor and condemn the perpetrator.

**'Look at What You're Wearing, Whore!': A Challenged Justification.** A central cultural notion relevant to the issue of sexual harassment in the Egyptian society is that the physical appearance, and particularly women's clothing, is claimed to be the main reason behind such crime. This perspective suggests that women 'tempt' men with their attractive looks, and therefore, it is the women who should be blamed for 'initiating' the incident (Evans, 2020). Accordingly, many of the narrators resist this notion, as reflected in the following extracts:

(18) I looked at myself in the mirror, I was trying to find *one thing in what I was wearing or the way I looked* that would make him say something like that.

(19) I literally *wear a hoodie or a tshirt* that is *not really tight* to *not show my figure* that much

(٢٠) أقدر و اوسخ احساس فى الكون إن حد يلمسك... تحت مسمى بصوا  
لابسة ايه

[The most disgusting and filthiest feeling in the world is someone touching you... with the claim 'Look at *how she's dressed!*']

(21) My case is really proof it's not about what you wear... Kona

bne3mel 3omra [*we were at the 'Umrah'*].. nine years old,  
3abaya w 7egab [*'Abaya' and a hijab/headscarf*].. Educate  
men. Stop blaming girls and women.

The fact that the survivors refer to what they were wearing (e.g. 'a hoodie or a t-shirt', 'Abaya and a headscarf') or the 'way they looked' ('not really tight', 'not show my figure') in all these examples can be interpreted as follows. 'Clothes' is the object that covers or reveals the body. It follows that, if the clothes are tempting, then the 'whole body' is seen as sexually alluring. Thus, a woman's body is viewed as an attracting stimulus that causes performing an act (i.e., sexual behavior). It is worth noting that the term 'Abaya' (example 21) refers to a loose-fitting full length robe traditionally worn by some Muslim women as a symbol of modesty and religious observance. Referring specifically to this type of 'loose' garment or 'the prayer clothes' along with the survivor's young age ('nine years old') is meant to refute this socially propagated claim considering a women's body as an 'attracting stimulus'. Challenging the present notion is also reflected through other discursive means. These include the use of negation in example (21) ('it's *not* about'), negative labelling in example (20) ('the *most disgusting and filthiest*'), and direct imperatives in example (21) ('Educate men. Stop blaming girls and women'), all of which express the narrators' disapproval and heightens their criticism of the circulated societal views.

While some survivors challenge the above-mentioned notion, others are still sceptical about their own looks that 'can be' the cause of harassment (particularly in examples 18-19). This can be reflected in 'I looked at myself... that would make him say that' and 'I literally wear... to not show my figure'. The self-questioning or attempts to make sense of the situation in these statements ironically stress the women's possible accountability, that is, the idea that they do have a role in 'inviting' their harassers even though they are the victims. Therefore, the survivors' conceptualizations of their own bodies and the way they are dressed show how the socially propagated male perspective could be hegemonically reproduced in their descriptions.

**The Impact of Sexual Abuse on the Female Survivors.** Another key notion raised in the narratives with regard to the construction of the 'survivor' identity is the difference between the narrator's life before and after the incident; the past vs. the 'here and now', the 'naïve' old self vs. the 'grown up/mature' self. In other words, the effect of the experience on the narrator's behavior and actions and on her life as a whole is portrayed in many instances whether negatively or positively. On the one hand, there are some instances showing the traumatic effect caused by the assaulter, leaving the survivor weak and devastated:

(٢٠) حياتي كلها تقريبا كنت بحاول اتعالج من التحرش لحد ما الحمد  
الله بقيت معقدة و مش عاوزة اتجوز ... و كبرت و عرفت ان  
الموضوع لا هو شكل ولا هو لبس واني المفروض اتعود اني يتقالى  
كده لما انزل الشارع على الاقل مرتين فى اليوم.

[All my life I have been trying to heal from sexual harassment until (thank God!) I've become mentally ill and I don't want to get married ... I grew up and realized that it has nothing to do with how I look or what I wear, and that I am supposed to get used to hearing this whenever I walk on the streets, at least twice a day.]

(٢١) أنا بقيت حابسة نفسي فى البيت و كبرت و سنى كبير ولا عرفت  
أشتغل ولا اتجوز و بقت كل حياتي جوا أوضتى و الضلمة.

[I've locked myself up at home. I grew old and I couldn't work or marry, and my entire life became confined to my room and the darkness.]

This is evident through the negative modifiers 'mentally ill' and 'grew old,' as well as verbs connoting feelings of despair: 'trying to heal', 'couldn't work or marry' and 'ruined my life'. Additionally, the metaphorical expressions 'locked myself at home' and 'my entire life became confined... darkness' capture a sense of mental or emotional isolation from the outside world.

On the other hand, some narratives show more positivity and

resilience, which can be reflected in the survivors' retaliating actions reported in the narratives. In the following examples, the narrators are depicted as active agents in their responses to street harassment:

(٢٢) النهاردة ٧:٣٠ بليل فى المنصورة ... واحد اتحرش بيا و أنا ماشية مع أخويا الصغير و صاحبتى، طلعت أجرى وراه مسكته من الجاكيت بتاعه و قعدت أصوت و لميت الناس حوالينا ... لما حسيت ان محدش هيساعدنى اطلع بيه على القسم قمت مصوراه. أنا فضلت مكبلشة فيه علشان ميهرش و الناس تيجى تهربوا منى فوق التالت مرات و أنا فى كل مرة جبته من قفاه ... أنا روحت القسم بعدها و ماسبتش حقى..

[Today, at 7:30 in the evening in Mansoura..., a guy harassed me while I was walking with my younger brother and my friend. I *ran* after him and I *grabbed* him from his jacket, and I kept *screaming* till all the crowds came over... When I felt that nobody would help me fetch him to the police, I *took a picture* of him. I *kept holding onto him* so that he won't escape. The people tried to help him escape from my grasp over three times, but every time this happened, I would *grab* him from his neck... I went to the police afterwards and I *didn't give up* my right.]

(٢٣) و مرة كمان كنت راكبة ميكروباص و السواق حاول يتحرش بيا بس ضربته بالشبشب و بقى أى حد يحاول ييجى جنبى ممكن أقتله مش أعوره بس.

[another time when I was on the bus, the driver tried to harass me but I *hit* him with my slippers, and since then, if anybody tries to approach me, I can *kill* them, not just *wound* them]

Unlike the earlier two examples (20-21), the verbs italicized in the current extracts highlight the empowered role of the female survivors. Almost all the material processes used in their descriptions position the abuser as the goal being acted upon, with examples such as 'ran after him,' 'grabbed him by his jacket/neck,' 'kept holding onto him,' 'hit him with my slippers,' and 'I can kill/wound them,' all indicating a physical struggle yet a forceful, assertive response from the women. Additionally, in example (22), the narrator's struggle is further

emphasized through her 'screaming,' a verbal process functioning as a request for help from passersby that is not easily granted. In fact, the narrator's efforts to imprison her harasser are obstructed by the witnesses' repeated attempts to free him, thus actively getting in the way of her achieving justice. Consequently, this intensifies both the physical and mental struggle of the narrator. Despite the described ordeal, the construction of the female survivors in the present examples places them in a more powerful position, compared to the 'shaky' image established earlier in examples (20-21).

### **Conclusion**

The present study set out to explore one type of female counter-publics that has recently emerged in Egypt in response to gender-based violence. It has revealed the way sexual assault survivors, their abusers, and their actions are constructed in first-hand accounts of SV by analyzing 75 online stories. In terms of nomination, the analysis has revealed a wide range of categories through which the narrators construct the negative image of their assaulters, three of which were discussed above. The portrayal of the 'assaulter' mainly reflects his manipulateness, immorality and 'animalistic' behavior. Conversely, the 'survivor' is often depicted as a weaker, naïve and gullible participant, pressured by the abuser and persistent societal norms. Nonetheless, in contrast to earlier studies on Egyptian survivors (e.g., Ibrahim, 2022), some narratives depict women showing greater resilience and a readiness to confront the culture of victim-blaming. Yet, there are some socially propagated patriarchal perspectives that continue to be hegemonically reproduced by the narrators, such as the sexualization of the female body and women's clothing as an attracting stimulus.

As for predication, the material processes identified in the narratives typically construct the male abuser as the active agent and the female survivor as the one acted upon. However, in instances where women retaliate, the role of the narrators shifts to active agents, acting upon their perpetrators. This role reversal is reflected in several material and behavioral processes denoting physical violence and

aggression by the survivors against the assaulters and/or their supporters. This, in turn, suggests a shift in gender roles and power dynamics within the context of SV. It is worth mentioning also that 12 out of the 75 survivors had ‘revealed identities’ on social media. This relatively small number can still be telling. In a culture where sexual violence against women has long been seen as one of the ‘unspeakable things’, dropping the ‘anonymity’ of the social media accounts echoes a change in the behavior of girls and women, and more broadly, the socio-cultural transformation in the Egyptian society.

Since this case study has investigated one side of the public sphere (i.e., social media posts) from the survivors’ perspective, the depiction of the female survivors in the Egyptian news reports, can also be explored. Examining how such experiences, previously viewed as taboo, are placed in the broader institutionalized discourse on gender violence may reveal potential shifts in the representation of women with the change in the surrounding socio-political conditions in the country. The narrators’ choice of language (whether using English or Arabic) and various orthographic techniques could also be examined to understand how they can aid in conveying and amplifying their emotions. Finally, just as Salter (2013) suggested that certain criteria, such as the age and appearance of the victim, influence the ‘newsworthiness’ of a reported case, there could be other factors that privilege some survivors over others based on their social categories. Therefore, examining the audience reactions or ‘comments’ to the survivors’ online posts can offer deeper insight into the potential social and cultural biases that may be (re)produced through mediated technology.

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## Discursive Strategies in Egyptian Women's Stories on Sexual Assaults: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

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### Notes :

- (1) Ahmed Bassam Zaki, a 21-year-old student who was accused of sexual crimes by over 50 women in 2020 and was later sentenced to eight years in prison for sexually assaulting and blackmailing three underage girls. His case sparked rage on Egyptian social media and this resulted in a push for an amendment to Egyptian law in 2021 placing harsher penalties on crimes relating to sexual harassment and concealing the identity of victims.
- (2) <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2021/09/02/feature/politics/witnesses-arrested-and-intimidated-how-the-fairmont-rape-case-fell-apart/>
- (3) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1263755/social-media-users-by-platform-in-egypt/>
- (4) <https://www.instagram.com/assaultpolice/>
- (5) <https://www.facebook.com/search/top?q=speak%20up%20%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%84%D9%85%2F%D9%8A>
- (6) <https://www.facebook.com/daftarhekayat/>
- (7) the world's holiest and biggest mosque for Muslims
- (8) an act of worship and a ritual for pilgrims
- (9) a title given to a person who leads (congregational) prayers in the mosque
- (10) helps a person to read, understand and memorize the Quran
- (11) one who performs 'Umrah'/Islamic pilgrimage



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