

JORDAN

Sexual Harassment Among Jordanian College Students: Pilot Testing a Promising Primary Prevention Intervention

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BACKGROUND

Sexual harassment (SH), which includes verbal, physical, relational, and cyber forms of aggression that target the victims' sexual orientation, gender, or sexuality[26], is associated with physical[1] and mental[1-4] health sequelae, and is a significant problem in schools across the globe.[5 6 27] The issue of SH is increasingly being reported by students in the Middle East,[7] including Jordan,[10] and is salient for Jordanian women who are attending universities in record numbers.[11] In the university context, SH has been associated with lower academic satisfaction and poor school performance.[4] Preventing SH in universities in Jordan is essential to empowering women, because education is associated with a number of factors that reduce violence victimization and improve health throughout the life course.[28] SH interventions in universities have been primarily developed in the U.S.[12]. To the best of our knowledge, no SH intervention has been designed for universities in Jordan.

Women and girl's experiences of physical and sexual domestic violence has been well documented in Jordan[28-31] and in other Middle Eastern countries[32-34] and, while knowledge of SH in Jordan[8-10] and neighboring countries[7 35] has similarly increased, it is much more limited. In Egypt, one study found that almost half of the sampled women were sexually harassed on a daily basis.[7] The online popular site "Uprising," which was created in 2012, received more than 70 stories from women all over the Arab world, including Jordan, who had experienced sexual violence.[36] In Jordan, a study of 180 Syrian refugees living in North Jordan, indicated that 11% had experienced some form of sexual violence most of which was SH.[9] An informal survey of 200 women from 6 universities in Jordan found that 60% of women had been subject to physical or verbal SH.[37]

Significant cultural shifts in Jordan over the past 20 years make the current research timely and important. While there are still significant social norms around a woman's sexual behavior,[28 38 39] attitudes toward women appear to be shifting. In 2016, a ministerial committee voted to repeal Jordanian Penal Code Article 308, which exempts from prosecution persons accused of sexual assault who agree to marry their victims for at least five years.[40] In Jordan, in 2007, 90% of women in a nationally representative survey agreed that beating a wife was justified under at least one circumstance[41] compared to 70% of women who agreed in 2012.[28] More Jordanian women are involved in education. Compared to 2002, when only 43% of women achieved a secondary education or higher, in 2012, 52% of women had done so.[11] There have also been an increasing number of organized awareness raising activities regarding SH[8] and governmental and non-governmental resources for women and girls who are subjected to gender-based violence (GBV).[42] This study contributes to the long-term goal of understanding the SH in the Middle East and scaling up effective interventions in university settings in Jordan and the Middle East.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES, AND METHODS

Aim 1

Conduct a baseline assessment to understand the prevalence, correlates, and perceptions of SH among students and staff at the University of Jordan (UJ).

Objective 1.1: We will describe the prevalence, correlates, and perceptions of SH among students at UJ. To achieve this objective, we will use sex-separate focus group discussions (FGDs) with students (n=4), interviews with UJ staff (n=3), Fadfed polling tool in public space on campus (n=1) (it should be noted that one Fadfed is estimated to collect data from at least 100 people on campus), as well as surveys with students (n=300) using translated and modified versions of validated scales such as the Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory,[23] Sexual Experiences Questionnaire,[24] and Organizational Tolerance for SH Inventory. [25]

Outcome: Prevalence of SH perpetration and victimization in the last 6 months is documented.

Aim 2

Adapt a promising Jordan-based intervention to the university context and enhance it with an environmental component.

Objective 2.1: To adapt and enhance a promising intervention created by Leaders of Tomorrow to the university context using the framework of Intervention Mapping.[15] Intervention Mapping involves the creation of an advisory board consisting of research staff and community members to adapt the intervention based on best practices, formative research, and the scientific literature.

There are three elements of the intervention: the first is Mo7aka which consists of a short retreat to provide an intensive training experience to key student opinion leaders in the University. Drawing from the Theory of Planned Behavior,[49] we use this element to support 30 participants (15 male and 15 female) to build awareness/knowledge of and plan responses to SH. The second element is Diwanieh, an open, free and critical platform for discussion involving as many as 200 individuals. Underlying this element is the theory of diffusion of innovation,[50] whereby professionals, with the involvement of student opinion leaders, will use this format and discussions to share information about SH and encourage others to similarly make plans and build skills to prevent SH. Based on the same theory, we will use social marketing in the form of an online campaign to reinforce shifts in social norms that SH is not permissible or acceptable. Using Shifting Boundaries[48] as a model and drawing from Systems Theory,[51] a third element will be added to support the university staff to address SH "hotspots" by raising awareness and knowledge of SH through the formative research, planning ways to address SH, and making changes to the physical environment (e.g., more lighting, placing security guards in areas where SH occurs, stronger policy framework to prevent and respond to SH).

Outcome: Intervention protocol and manual of operations documented.

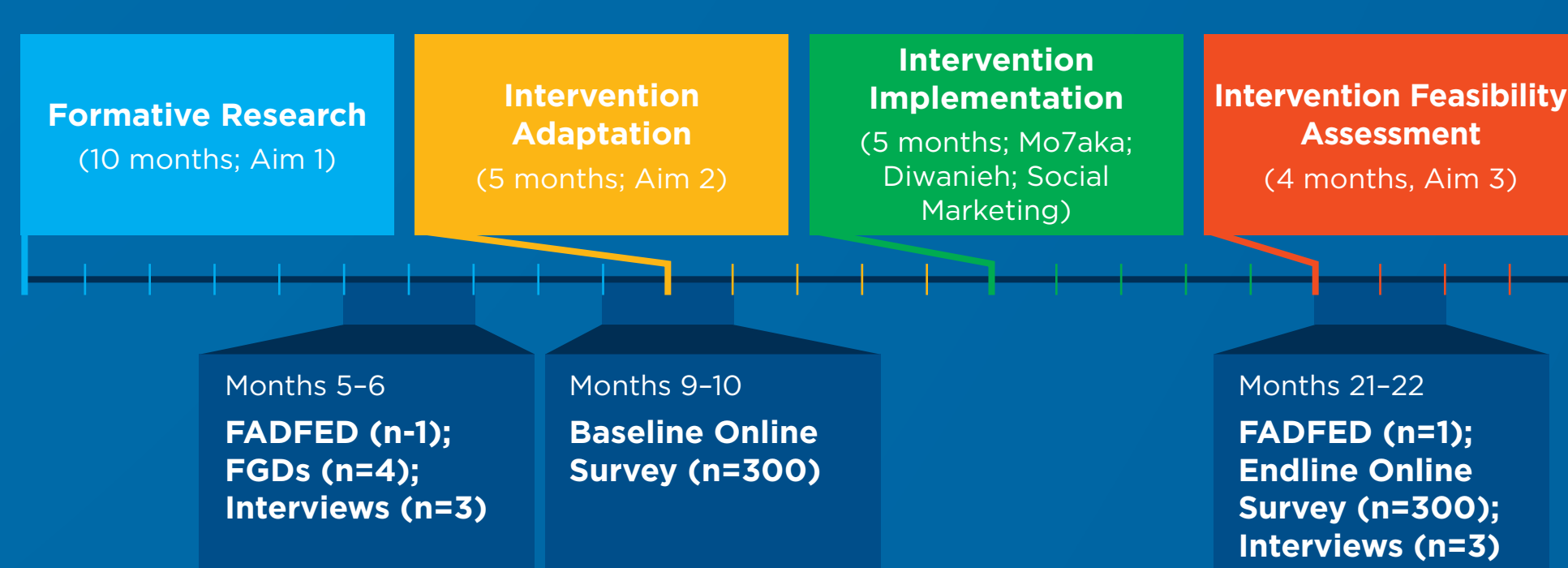
Aim 3

Conduct a pilot study to test feasibility of the intervention.

Objective 3.1: Determine the feasibility of the intervention (safety, acceptability, recruitment and retention) by measuring the perceptions and safety of the intervention among students and staff using surveys (n=300), key stakeholder interviews (n=3), and a Fadfed polling in a public space on campus (n=1).

Outcomes: Feasibility of the intervention in the UJ context measured by examining safety, acceptability, and recruitment and retention of students and staff.

TIMELINE



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The current study will make a significant contribution to our understanding of SH in Jordan, adapt and enhance a promising intervention to the university context, and test the first multi-level intervention to prevent SH on a Jordanian campus. In doing so, we support SVRI and the World Bank's mission of decreasing violence against women and girls through effective interventions in low and middle income countries. Funding this study is an essential step toward developing intervention components that are scalable to campus settings in other low and middle income countries, including those in the Middle East.

References available on request.

