Research Article

Second-Order Sexual Harassment: Violence Against the Silence Breakers Who Support the Victims

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Abstract

Second-order sexual harassment (SOSH) is the harassment suffered by those who stand with and support victims of violence against women (VAW)[1]. Because the vast majority of programs currently focus on promoting *bystander intervention*, for such programs to be successful, knowledge about and actions against SOSH are necessary. Through narratives, this article provides unprecedented clues about SOSH. Working on safety strategies for individuals who support victims, promoting solidarity networks that also address SOSH, and ensuring that institutional policies are enforced are found to be central factors that can help prevent and/or transcend SOSH.

Keywords

second order of sexual harassment, bystander intervention, support

Recent advances in gender violence prevention have given rise to a need to develop programs that encourage the community to take an active role in preventing this type of violence or in mitigating the impact of gender violence that does occur (Banyard et al., 2004; Cook-Craig et al., 2014). In other words, those individuals who know of the violence should offer help and support to victims. Greater support for victims will not only help ensure that victims no longer feel alone but also help break the silence surrounding cases of gender violence that have been covered up.

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In 2017, we witnessed the expansion of an international movement to support victims of sexual harassment, commonly known as the "Me Too" movement (Pengelly, 2017). The "Me Too" movement has exposed cases of gender violence that have been silenced for years and has prompted millions of individuals to publicly demonstrate their support for victims. In the United States, the uncovering of cases of gender violence in Hollywood led many to show their support for victims on social networks or in public statements. In Spain, thousands took to the streets to reject rape culture, express their support for victims, and demand legislative change because of the case of a young woman who was gang-raped during the popular San Fermin festival in 2016, in which the court later ruled, in June 2018, that the incident was sexual abuse but not rape (Ceberio, 2018; Diario Feminista, 2018).

An analysis of support for victims of gender violence draws attention to another type of harassment that has yet to obtain widespread recognition: second-order harassment (SOSH)[1]; in other words, this is the harassment experienced by individuals who support victims and is the direct result of such support. To date, studies have analyzed the risks faced by victims; however, the research into the consequences for individuals who support victims is scant (Liebst et al., 2018; McMahon & Banyard, 2012; Moschella et al., 2016). The vast majority of research focuses on bullying in schools (Berkowitz, 2014; Pronk et al., 2016; Unnevern & Cornell, 2004).

We must have a thorough understanding of second-order harassment and strategies for combatting it if we are to make progress in overcoming gender violence. If not, an essential component of the struggle to overcome gender violence will be severely limited: the community's commitment to supporting victims. This article presents six life stories from individuals who have suffered from second-order sexual harassment in different settings in Spain. Their stories provide us with the means to define the characteristics of SOSH and contribute key elements to learning how to combat this type of violence.

Including SOSH in the Conceptualization of Gender Violence

In early studies on the topic from the 1970s and 1980s, violence against women was identified as a physical or sexual attack (DeKeseredy, 2000; Gelles & Cornell, 1985), despite some debate about whether other types of attacks, such as verbal or economic attacks, should be included in that definition. In present-day Europe, the latest framework document relating to the fight against gender violence is the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which went into effect in Europe in August 2014 (Council of Europe, 2011). This convention is considered the most important international instrument for fighting violence against women, and its definition of violence against women includes physical, psychological, and sexual violence; female genital mutilation; forced marriage; sexual harassment; and forced abortion and forced sterilization. In Spain, a similar definition is established in Constitutional Act 1/2004 of December 28 on the Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence, the first few lines of which stress that

"[i]t is violence directed against women for the mere fact of being women; considered, by their aggressors, as lacking the most basic rights of freedom, respect and power of decision" (Spanish Government, 2004).

In all these cases, we encounter definitions that refer to violence aimed directly at women; however, not one of them includes SOSH. Depending on the circumstances, SOSH victims may be recognized as victims of gender violence insofar as they are the victims of harassment or physical assault. However, the fact that the violence against them was motivated by their support for a victim of gender violence is not in any way reflected.

In particular, we have only seen the scientific literature make reference to the concept of SOSH on two occasions. In the first, Dziech and Weiner (1990, p. xxviii) discuss SOSH in the following way:

> Sexism on campus creates a second order of sexual harassment victims, those who advise, support, and rule in favor of the primary victims. These are the affirmative action officers, ombudspersons, counselors, assistant deans—the people assigned, and usually committed, to helping sexual harassment victims.

The second is an article published by Vidu et al. (2017), who are colleagues of mine and with whom I have researched SOSH for many years. Vidu et al. (2017, p. 3) define SOSH as

> physical and/or psychological violence against persons who support victims of sexual harassment. Some people, groups and institutions that support survivors become subject to violence when they accompany them in the process of reporting or when they defend them from re-victimization as a form of coercion against such support.

In addition, the Community of Research on Excellence for All (CREA) research center in Spain organized the first conference on SOSH, which occurred in Barcelona in 2016. One of the conference's prominent participants was Ruth Milkman, a professor at the University of California who was the victim of one of the first public cases of SOSH at a university in the 1970s, although at that time, the incident was not classified as SOSH.

Although Dziech and Weiner (1990) provide only a brief conceptualization of SOSH, the work of Vidu et al. (2017) stands out because of the definition cited above and because of their identification of the desire to avoid taking focus away from first-order victims as a possible reason why SOSH has not been studied further. In that regard, Vidu et al. (2017) argue that if we want to empower victims to report their cases, protect them, and help them to not feel so alone, we also must ensure that the individuals who defend victims are protected as well. In fact, our review of the existing scientific literature has allowed us to identify a gap in the research that revolves precisely around that idea: protecting those who advocate for victims. Few scholars have reflected on how individuals who intervene can keep themselves safe (McMahon & Banyard, 2012). The studies we reviewed have contributed to a

preliminary definition of SOSH; however, the characteristics of this phenomenon and the factors that hinder or facilitate overcoming this type of violence have yet to be analyzed.

Witness Reactions to Violent Situations

Gender violence usually does not occur "behind closed doors" (Taylor et al., 2016). Generally, witnesses are present, or people later learn of the violent incident. In a study conducted by Fanslow and Robinson (2010), more than 75% of the respondents reported that they told someone about the violence they had experienced. Most victims of gender violence turn to people around them instead of seeking out formal support services (Goodman et al., 2005; Rose et al., 2000). Informal networks also tend to provide the most useful and lasting support (Goodman et al., 2016). The benefits of informal support for victims include fewer signs of depression and anxiety and higher self-esteem (Sainio et al., 2011) and an increased sense of safety and well being (Goodman & Smyth, 2011), and we have even found studies that associate social support with lower rates of suicide, mental health issues, and stress in general (Adkins & Kamp Dush, 2010; Bybee & Sullivan, 2005; Coker et al., 2003). Despite these benefits, the research has also shown that both informal support and institutional responses are often ineffective or inadequate (Fanslow and Robinson, 2010). Given all this information, it is important to study the support for victims provided by informal networks, bystanders, and witnesses so that these groups can offer appropriate support.

We are faced with the following question: How do individuals who witness or have knowledge of an incident involving gender violence react? We have found several studies (Burn, 2009; Kania & Cale, 2021; Katz et al., 2015) grounded in the research conducted by Latane and Darley (1970) that describe possible witness reactions and the barriers that determine whether a bystander will intervene. These studies analyze bystander reactions to dangerous situations in general. Individuals who witness or have knowledge of a violent act may react in one of four ways: actively participate (when the bystander directly or indirectly participates in the violence in support of the main attacker); passively watch (when the bystander does not participate in the violence but also does not do anything to stop it); intervene on the victim's behalf (taking an action that directly opposes the attacks targeting the victim); or notify others so that they can intervene on the victim's behalf. This classification of bystander reactions illustrates possible interventions not only in cases of violence in general, but also in cases of gender violence in particular. That being said, our goal is an in-depth analysis of the factors that determine how witnesses will act—in other words, what encourages witnesses to intervene or discourages them from doing so. Therefore, the specific features of gender violence and the circumstances in which it occurs have led us to identify a series of elements that are unique to cases of gender violence in particular. Based on our literature review, we have grouped the factors that determine how spectators act into three categories:

Knowledge of the Issue

An individual's knowledge of gender violence determines what he or she identifies as gender violence. Because of this, both the inability to recognize the potential risks for sexual violence and the acceptance of myths about rape are associated with reduced odds of intervention (Banyard & Moynihan, 2011; McMahon et al., 2017; Peña et al., 2017; Puigvert et al., 2019).

Knowledge about gender violence is also associated with whether the individual has a friend who has been a victim of this type of violence and whether the individual in question has received gender violence training (Banyard, 2008; Kania & Cale, 2021; Katz et al., 2015; Powers & Leili, 2017). In recent years, the spread of programs that promote bystander intervention (such as Green Dot, TakeCARE, or BarTAB) has often been accompanied by an evaluation of such programs. Ample evidence shows that bystander intervention training is effective, especially at colleges, but also in other settings such as bars. These programs have made progress in changing attitudes and beliefs, increasing the willingness to intervene, promoting a sense of collective responsibility, and teaching specific intervention strategies (Banyard, 2008; Jouriles et al., 2017; Kania & Cale, 2021; Langhinrichsen-Rohling et al., 2011; Peterson et al., 2016; Powers & Leili, 2017; Yule & Grych, 2017). Nevertheless, although scholars such as Yule and Grych (2017) acknowledge that bystander intervention programs are effective in changing beliefs and making bystanders more willing to intervene, they also question whether such programs have any real impact on behavior. In other words, they question whether such programs truly stir people to action.

Relationship With the Victim or Attacker

Most studies agree that intervention is more likely when the bystander knows the victim, especially when the victim is a friend. However, intervention is less likely when the bystander is friends with the person who is committing the violent act. In such cases, the bystander is both less likely to intervene on the victim's behalf and less likely to tell the attacker to stop (Kania & Cale, 2021; Liebst et al., 2018).

Perception of What Might Happen After Helping: Risk and Safety

As studies of cognitive and behavioral processes from the 1970s have shown, a cost–benefit analysis occurs during emergency situations (Latane & Darley, 1970). In the specific case of gender violence, the fear of negative repercussions or retaliation stands out (Jouriles et al., 2017; Logan & Walker, 2017; Moschella et al., 2016). Typically, a bystander will weigh the possible reactions of the person who commits the violent act and individuals who are close to the attacker. In addition, when a violent incident occurs in an institutional setting, the possible reaction of the authorities concerned will also be weighed.

With regard to this last point, the studies we found focused primarily on university settings. Studies such as Jouriles et al. (2017) and Valls et al. (2016), both of which

refer to gender violence at universities, stress the importance of the role played by the institution itself. Both studies stress that individuals evaluate how the university and individuals in leadership positions react, both to incidents of gender violence and, more specifically, to individuals who have taken a stand to support the victim or who have reported incidents of which they are aware. In their evaluation of the effectiveness of the TakeCARE program, Jouriles et al. (2017) found that the program had no impact on students who believed that their school would have a poor response to reports of sexual violence. However, when students felt that their institution took the matter seriously and would respond appropriately to incidents, they were more willing to intervene in risky situations. Both studies stressed that university programs or policies had to be backed up with a real commitment to implementing those programs and policies. Bystander intervention is encouraged in settings where institutions take clear action when faced with violent incidents. However, witness involvement may be undermined at institutions that do not act in support of victims. For example, a campus that is perceived as being less receptive to complaints of sexual violence may also be perceived as being threatening for students who are willing to report or intervene when confronted with sexual violence (Jouriles et al., 2017).

Victimization of People Who Support Victims

The last obstacle mentioned in the section above is particularly important when analyzing SOSH because existing studies of SOSH (Dziech & Weiner, 1990; Vidu et al., 2017) have identified retaliation against people who defend victims as a main characteristic of SOSH.

Very little research has focused on the repercussions faced by people who intervene in incidents of gender violence. The consensus is that bystanders who intervene are exposing themselves to real danger (Hamby et al., 2016; Liebst et al., 2018; van Reemst et al., 2015). However, there is no consensus as to the level of that risk or the repercussions. The research that we did find stresses that the type of intervention and the setting where the conflict occurs are the main factors that influence risk levels and outcomes. In terms of the type of intervention, aggressive interventions tend to lead to conflict escalation (Levine et al., 2012; van Reemst et al., 2015). As for the setting, Levine et al. (2012) indicate that interventions in settings associated with nightlife entail an increased risk of victimization, especially due to the presence of alcohol (Bierie, 2017). Scholars have also evaluated whether the presence of other bystanders has any impact on the victimization of people who intervene. According to Liebst et al. (2018), the presence of other witnesses does not necessarily reduce the risk of victimization of people who intervene in dangerous situations. Whether the presence of other witnesses could be a constraining factor in situations that are not perceived as dangerous emergencies would be a question worth asking.

Method

In conducting this study, we have taken a communicative approach, eliciting six communicative life stories from the participants. As indicated in the introduction, the

purpose of this article is to raise awareness of an existing type of violence that has yet to be described in detail, SOSH.

By conducting narrative interviews, we were able to create a detailed reconstruction of specific experiences within a relational context and organize those experiences (Ben-Ari & Dayan, 2008; Riessman, 1993). This approach also allowed us to capture the contextual characteristics of the SOSH experience considered important by the victims themselves. As Testa and Livingston (1999) and Rinehart and Yeater (2011) have noted, the use of qualitative methodologies as opposed to quantitative research, and the collection of life narratives, in particular, make it possible to define new topics and compile their characteristics, identify the unique aspects of specific life experiences, and present the complexities of the social interactions that lead to sexual victimization.

We have also chosen a communicative model (Gómez et al., 2011) because such an approach entails the creation of knowledge through intersubjectivity and reflection, placing particular emphasis on the interactions and social dimensions that provoke, in this case, a certain type of violence or enable that violence to be overcome. Unlike other models, this model not only proposes a descriptive understanding of social reality but also seeks to transform that reality. The communicative model sets out to overcome the methodological imbalance between researchers and research subjects by creating knowledge through an intersubjective dialogue. This approach suggests that any interpretation of reality must be analyzed as a function of the validity of the arguments (made by the researcher and the research subject) and not as a function of their positions of power and/or status. These principles have been emphasized by the European Commission with regard to the research on vulnerable groups such as victims of violence and social inequalities (Aiello et al., 2018; Rios et al., 2018).

Following this methodology, the participants contextualized their experiences and justified both their actions and the actions taken by people around them in light of the issue.

Participants

There were six participants in this study: four women and two men. We explicitly sought out and chose participants who could be key informants and who had different profiles and backgrounds. In the end, the six individuals who were chosen were as follows: a male high school teacher, a female elementary school teacher, a female researcher, a man whose sister was abused by a close family friend, a woman who is an active member of a political party, and a female employee of a nonprofit organization. Hence, the settings analyzed in this study included schools, universities, nonprofit organizations, and family environments. We also sought diversity in terms of the relationships between the victim and the offender and their relative positions of power within different social structures. The victims were in a position of equality in the structure where the violence occurred in two of the six cases (the family setting and the political organization). In three cases, the victims were in a position of relative

inferiority (the non profit organization, the university, and the elementary school), whereas in the remaining case (the high school teacher), the victim was in a position of relative power.

These variations in participant background were intentional for the purposes of broadening the perspective of this study. All participants self-identify as direct victims of SOSH. In all cases, their experience with SOSH lasted at least 1 year.

Data Collection

The researcher had a script that was developed using a theoretical framework formulated based on the existing scientific literature. The main topics included in the script were: the incident of gender violence that led the participants to take a stand and later resulted in the SOSH that they experienced; a description of the SOSH experienced by the participant including characteristics, methods of harassment, and purpose; the role of individuals who were close to the participants; the ramifications of the SOSH; and the factors that hinder or facilitate the process of overcoming SOSH.

In accordance with the communicative life narrative technique, efforts were made to ensure that the researcher's communication and relationship with the participants offered them the freedom to express the unique aspects of their experiences and their interpretations of their own actions.

Furthermore, in accordance with the principles of communicative methodology, while conversing with the participants, the researcher not only gathered the information they provided but also intervened in their narratives to provide input from scientific evidence about the subject, thereby creating a reflexive process in which knowledge was built in a collaborative manner.

The researcher ensured that ethical standards were strictly followed during the entire research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, they were informed of how the information would be used, and their anonymity was ensured. Therefore, any information that might help identify the participants has been redacted from this article. Some of the participants who have shared their stories for this study are still victims of SOSH and still live in fear of retaliation from their harassers.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of our fieldwork, we focused on the two dimensions proposed by communicative methodology: the exclusionary dimension and the transformative dimension (Gómez et al., 2011; Puigvert et al., 2012). Broadly speaking, this approach allowed us to obtain a description of not only the characteristics of SOSH but also the factors that make it possible for SOSH to continue to occur or that can bring an end to the harassment. This understanding also facilitated a reflection on how SOSH could be prevented.

The exclusionary dimension of our analysis focused on harassment experiences that were the result of the participant having taken a stance in support of a victim of

gender violence and on all the reactions of individuals who were close to the participant that were either not helpful or supportive. However, the transformative dimension of the study involved the gathering of perceptions and judgments associated with the participants' experiences with SOSH that they viewed as positive experiences because they felt supported, because others mitigated the suffering that the participants had experienced due to SOSH, or even because the experience helped put an end to the SOSH, to name a few examples. This transformative dimension also covers actions that did not occur in the participants' cases but that they believe would have improved the support they received or would have helped prevent SOSH.

Results and Discussion

See Appendix A for summaries of each of the narratives obtained during the interviews.

Characteristics of SOSH

As we noted in our literature review, in most cases where a woman is a victim of constant abuse, other people know about the abuse. Some react by taking the attacker's side, others do nothing and "look the other way," and still others react by showing their support for the victim. All the participants in our study became victims of SOSH because they showed their support for the victim. What all the individuals who offered to share their stories for this article have in common is that they took a clear stand to support a victim of gender violence. That support manifested in different ways: attempting to stop violent episodes by intervening in an incident of physical assault or harassment, offering to help the victim file a report about the situation, or supporting the victim during the complaint process to keep the victim from feeling alone.

In five of the six cases, *the main perpetrator of the SOSH* was the same individual who victimized the person the participants were defending. In the remaining case, in which Marina reported the sexual abuse of two children on two separate occasions, the individuals who committed the initial abuse at first reacted against Marina; however, Marina considers their reactions isolated incidents. When asked to identify the perpetrator of her SOSH, Marina identifies her boss, the woman she contacted regarding cases of child abuse. Sara also notes that later, she and the individuals who worked with her were subjected to intense harassment from individuals in leadership positions who were not the perpetrators of the initial act of gender violence.

The cases studied here demonstrate that SOSH can occur in a variety of *relationships, settings, and contexts*. We have one case in which a teacher became the victim of SOSH by one of her coworkers in a school setting; another in which a high school teacher was a victim of SOSH by one of his students; a case of a young man who was the victim of SOSH by an older man who sexually abused his sister within a family setting; a case of a nonprofit employee who was the victim of SOSH by the woman who was her superior; a case where an active member of a political party was the

victim of SOSH by one of her colleagues; and, finally, a case of a female researcher who was the victim of SOSH by another member of the university community.

SOSH mainly manifests as several different *forms* of psychological violence. The only case in which we found SOSH manifested as physical violence was Marina's case, in which the individual who was sexually abusing the girl tried to physically attack Marina after one of the cases of sexual abuse that Marina reported. Our research has indicated that harassers mainly commit SOSH through humiliation, threats, and lies intended to smear the personal and professional reputations of the victims and undermine their credibility.

As with first-order sexual assault, SOSH usually occurs in *spaces* where harassment is witnessed by other individuals. Therefore, SOSH, like other types of gender violence, does not occur "behind closed doors." The participants indicated that some individuals who witnessed or had knowledge of the harassment joined in the attacks. Therefore, those additional individuals are also considered perpetrators of SOSH. The actions taken by these secondary perpetrators included supporting the main attacker, providing the attacker with a network of people who would come to his or her defense, and reproducing or spreading their attacks. Another reaction identified as being particularly hurtful by all participants except Javier, who did not experience it, was when their acquaintances distanced themselves and avoided any type of contact with the participants as a means of alienating them.

SOSH Triggers and Harasser Motives

When asked what triggered SOSH, all participants, without hesitation, identified their support for a victim of gender violence. More specifically, when analyzing what the perpetrators wanted to achieve with SOSH, the participants' narratives distinguish between the goals of the individual they consider the main perpetrator and those of the other individuals who supported the main perpetrator and who also later harassed the participants. All participants agreed that the main perpetrator's motive was to get them to stop supporting the victim. By the participants' accounts, although they were not the attacker's initial focus, they became a problem when their intervention made it difficult for the attacker to continue his or her abuse. Therefore, the harasser intended to eliminate that support with his or her actions. The cases of Sara and Marina are unique because people who were not the perpetrators of the first-order sexual harassment played a very active role in the attacks against them; more specifically, the individuals who took a very active role in the SOSH in those cases were representatives of the institutions where the initial incident of gender violence occurred: a university and a nonprofit organization, respectively. Both Sara and Marina believe that their institution perceived them as the problem because both women drew attention to a situation that the institution wanted to hide.

Furthermore, with the exception of Javier, all participants felt that their experience was an attempt to "make an example of them," to discourage them from continuing to support the victim and to send the message that getting involved on a victim's behalf brings negative consequences.

Bearing in mind that all the participants believed that the harassment targeting them would have stopped if they had stopped supporting the victim, we can confirm that SOSH is a type of violence that goes hand-in-hand with first-order sexual harassment.

Witness Responses to SOSH

Prior studies (Liebst et al., 2018) have emphasized that a witness's relationship with the victim may be an important factor when trying to predict whether a bystander will intervene. In our research, the witness's relationship to the victim did not turn out to be particularly relevant. None of the participants indicated that the people who supported them were motivated by a close relationship. In fact, the opposite was true in David's case, in which the vast majority of his family members supported the harasser.

Another factor that has been ruled out as being important in determining how people who are close to the victim will react to SOSH is the knowledge they had developed from prior training in sexual harassment issues (Banyard, 2008; Kania & Cale, 2021; Powers & Leili, 2017). None of the individuals who supported the participants had received any sort of training in these issues. However, our participants did mention that the people who supported them had a certain awareness of gender violence issues. In all cases, the participants received their most significant support from individuals who had worked to overcome gender violence in their social lives or in their workplace. The participants agreed that this background in gender violence is probably why those individuals could identify SOSH as harassment (McMahon et al., 2017). However, none of the participants reflected on this point in detail, and they did not have a clear understanding of whether a failure to identify violence had an impact on the individuals who did not intervene. The only participant to discuss this point in slightly greater detail was Marina when she spoke to us about the role of her family. Marina believes that her family had not realized what she was going through until quite some time had passed after the incident and well after she had been forced into resigning.

In the participants' narratives, two other factors that determined whether individuals who witnessed SOSH intervened took on greater importance: first, the power or status of the harasser and, second, the existence of antiviolence policies and whether those policies were enforced. Both these factors are consistent with findings in the extant literature that discusses the factors that determine whether someone will intervene when faced with first-order violence. Both these factors are taken into account when assessing the possible repercussions of supporting the victim (Jouriles et al., 2017; Logan & Walker, 2017; Moschella et al., 2016). More specifically, both are associated with the fear of potential reprisals.

The position of power held by the individual who committed the violence was an influential factor in the cases of Esperanza, Marina, and Sara, all of whom held lower positions than those of their harassers in the hierarchy of the environment where the harassment had occurred: an elementary school, a nonprofit organization, and a university, respectively. David also pointed out that Raul, the man who abused David's

sister, had a certain status in David's family and was influential in that environment. However, Javier was in a position of relative power in his case as a teacher who was harassed by one of his students. Javier believes that his status may have discouraged the rest of his students from intervening on his behalf because they might have believed that Javier did not need their support. As for his fellow teachers, Javier identifies two other factors as possible reasons for their inaction: the first is the normalization of violence in academic settings and the second is the lack of a clear school policy that specifies when teachers are required to intervene and how they should do so. Javier claims that "the existence of a policy addressing the matter would also help ensure that high schools treat this type of issue with the seriousness that it deserves." Here, Javier's reflection echoes a sentiment also expressed by Sara and Marina as well as the existing scientific literature. Institutions that lack a policy to address issues of violence or where existing policies are not enforced will favor not only gender violence but also SOSH (Valls et al., 2016; Vidu et al., 2017).

In Javier's, Sara's, Marina's, and Esperanza's cases, both the initial violence and the SOSH occurred at institutions that have a responsibility to intervene and/or act in defense of victims. In Spain, Constitutional Act 3/2007 for effective equality between women and men (Spanish Government, 2007) stipulates in Article 48 that all employers are required to institute specific procedures to prevent sexual harassment and harassment on the grounds of sex and for handling all accusations or claims formulated. In all four of these cases, the institution ignored the situation and did not intervene. Furthermore, specific individuals who held leadership positions within those institutions tried to cover-up the incidents and attack anyone who came to the victims' defense.

The institutional reactions in these cases reveal three issues that should be addressed in Spain, which is where our research was conducted. First, an effort should be made to ensure that employers fulfill their obligation to have a procedure for preventing harassment (Spanish Government, 2007). Second, measures should be taken to ensure that these procedures are implemented and that the institutions actually intervene in cases of violence. Third, based on the results of our research, these procedures should also define SOSH as a criminal offense and establish how an institution should intervene in SOSH cases.

Factors That Can Help Prevent and/or Transcend SOSH

All the narratives compiled for this study coincide in terms of the importance of having a policy that addresses SOSH and ensuring that the policy is enforced. In Wendy's case, her political organization did have an institutional policy, despite the fact that this type of organization is not legally required to have such policies. Both Wendy and her two colleagues, who have also been victims of SOSH, credit that policy as one of the keys to success. Furthermore, Sara claims that the lack of a policy addressing the matter at her institution, a university, had for years led harassers to believe they could act with full impunity, instilled fear in everyone else because of the lack of protective measures, and, as a result, made it so that all cases were swept under the rug. When a

policy was finally implemented, it was inadequate because no one ensured that the policy was enforced.

In all cases, the position taken by those who were close to the participants determined how the SOSH victim proceeded. When the SOSH victim received support from those around them—as they did for Wendy, Sara, Esperanza, Javier, and David—the victim took the step of going public with their experiences. Wendy, Sara, Esperanza, and Javier even filed a complaint with their institutions. However, Sara was the only one who brought her case to court, which can perhaps be explained by the fact that Sara's case has lasted longer than those of the other participants, and Sara received the most support of all participants. However, in Marina's case, no one offered any support, and Marina ended up having to leave her job because of the SOSH she suffered at her workplace.

Being surrounded by individuals who took a clear stand to support SOSH victims was an important factor in reducing and even eliminating the harassment against them, which is what happened in Esperanza's case. Bystander support in that case primarily manifested itself as questioning or discrediting the insults used by the harassers against the victims.

In that regard, the findings of earlier studies (Banyard, 2008; Kania & Cale, 2021; Katz et al., 2015; Powers & Leili, 2017) and the results of our research show the effectiveness of trainings that promote bystander intervention. However, if we want this support to exist, we must address an important gap in the scientific literature: an analysis of the victimization of those individuals who support victims (Burn, 2009; Liebst et al., 2018; McMahon & Banyard, 2012). Based on our research, we can identify three independent yet mutually reinforcing challenges that are important if obstacles to bystander intervention are to be overcome. We discuss each of these in turn.

Working on safety strategies for individuals who support victims. Despite the wealth of research that focuses on empowering witnesses to intervene in violent incidents, there is a dearth of analysis on how bystanders can intervene while still ensuring their own safety (Liebst et al., 2018; McMahon & Banyard, 2012). None of the participants who shared their narratives for this study had received any training in bystander intervention before they intervened in a situation involving gender violence. The participants do not believe that their intervention was impulsive. Each of them put thought into how to intervene; however, they all focused their attention on the victim. Sara was the only participant who thought about the negative repercussions that she and the rest of her colleagues who supported her at her research center might face. In their evaluations of their own experiences, all the participants agreed that they lacked the knowledge or training to intervene safely. After their experience of SOSH, they indicate that they would proceed differently today. In particular, Marina stresses that legal advice on employment issues would have been especially useful in her case.

Trainings designed to promote bystander intervention should provide information on how to avoid danger in a given situation and determine what level of intervention is the safest and most appropriate for everyone involved (Branch et al., 2013; McMahon & Banyard, 2012).

Promoting solidarity networks that also address SOSH. In their study of gender violence at Spanish universities, which was also the first study of its type conducted in Spain, Valls et al. (2016) have already emphasized creating solidarity networks for victims and supporters as one of their recommendations for reducing the alienation and loneliness felt by victims of gender violence. Other studies (Bryant & Spencer, 2003; Choate, 2003) also argue that victims and other individuals who have knowledge of violent incidents are discouraged from filing reports when they perceive that their surroundings are hostile and their institutions blame victims. Generally, this sort of environment fosters passivity among bystanders.

Bearing in mind both the demonstrated effectiveness of bystander intervention trainings, especially in university settings (Banyard, 2008; Kania & Cale, 2021; Powers & Leili, 2017), and the results of our study, we recommend two subjects that should be incorporated into the content of these trainings. First, a definition of SOSH should be included in any description of types of violence so that bystanders can also identify SOSH. Second, trainings should go beyond support for victims of sexual harassment and also promote support for individuals who defend victims within the community. Opposition to gender violence should be shown as a radical position that includes recognizing and taking a stand against both first-order violence and SOSH as well as supporting victims of both types of harassment.

Ensuring that institutional policies are enforced: Institutions that are truly committed to eliminating gender violence. As we have confirmed, SOSH victims, like victims of first-order violence, are skeptical about their institutions' commitment to fighting gender violence. Doubts about an institution's commitment are an obstacle with multiple negative consequences: attackers feel that they can act with greater impunity; victims feel that they are left unprotected; and bystanders have doubts about how they should act and what the consequences of their action will be (Jouriles et al., 2017; Valls et al., 2016).

An improvement in the institutional response to violence will have an unsurprisingly positive impact on bystanders' beliefs and actions, just as it does when addressing first-order violence. In addition, an enhanced institutional response will have positive effects on decreasing the factors that enable SOSH. More often than not, we are not calling for the creation of new laws or policies, merely the enforcement of those that exist. As Jouriles et al. (2017) note in terms of the university context, one way in which a university can improve student perceptions of its commitment to ending sexual violence is by responding more effectively to incidents of violence and publicizing its efforts to do so. To this end, Jouriles et al. (2017) specifically recommend that universities disclose how complaints are processed and their possible outcomes, ensure that this information is accessible to students, and publicize the measures that are taken to combat sexual violence.

An institutional setting with an unambiguous no-tolerance policy will make it more difficult for attackers to commit violent acts and will create an environment that is conducive to supporting victims of violence, including both first- and second-order victims.

Conclusion

With this article, we add a new definition of an offense to the current conceptualization of gender violence: SOSH. Through an analysis of the stories of six SOSH victims, we have determined that SOSH is a reaction triggered by someone coming to the defense of a victim of gender violence, that SOSH can occur in very diverse settings, and that SOSH tends to be motivated by a desire to put an end to support for the victims of the initial abuse and to muzzle any discussion of gender violence that has occurred. Although power relationships can facilitate SOSH, SOSH victims are not always in a position of disadvantage vis-à-vis their attacker. SOSH is similar to first-order gender violence in that a lack of support from individuals who are close to the victim and, especially, a lack of an institutional policy or enforcement of that policy facilitate SOSH. The ways in which individuals who are close to SOSH victims react are also similar to how bystanders react to first-order violence. The fear of retaliation is one element that can help predict whether someone will intervene. The position of power or status held by the perpetrator is especially important in SOSH cases. In cases of SOSH that occur within an institutional setting, the stance that was publicly taken by the institution in prior cases of harassment is also extremely important.

Despite the lack of scientific literature on SOSH, professionals, researchers, and the general public can easily identify situations associated with this type of violence. In cases where the SOSH victim is a woman, it is possible that the incidents are identified as gender violence. However, classifying SOSH as gender violence in such cases loses sight of the fact that SOSH is a type of violence that specifically targets individuals who support victims of gender violence. In other words, this classification does not acknowledge the fact that the victims are attacked precisely because of the stance they have taken against gender violence.

Identifying these cases as a specific type of gender violence will encourage significant legislative advances and improve the implementation of programs designed to prevent and assist victims of gender violence. This improvement will occur if community support remains a key element to overcoming this social problem. Our identification of SOSH allows us to recognize that bystander intervention may be limited by the fear of also becoming a victim. Therefore, expanding informal support networks for victims of gender violence will prove difficult unless we take action to protect the bystanders who support those victims.

Although SOSH is not unique to Spain, very few studies have analyzed the victimization of supporters of victims of gender violence in other countries. In future studies, we hope to expand our analysis to other countries, particularly those where bystander intervention programs have been promoted and implemented for several years. For example, in the United States, universities are encouraged to implement such programs (GovTrack.us., 2018). Specifically, and along the lines of our work in this article, we would be interested in seeing these programs adopt an analysis of SOSH in their efficacy assessments, whether being aware of the existence of SOSH conditions people's intervention, and whether they identify the actions that are helping to eliminate SOSH.

As McMahon and Banyard (2012) and Kania and Cale (2018) indicated, overcoming gender violence requires, among other things, a widespread change in social norms that goes beyond individual change, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and overcoming the tendency to get involved or intervene only in cases where the victim of gender violence is a friend. In other words, overcoming gender violence requires active intervention in all cases of gender violence, and those who defend victims—i.e., SOSH victims—must also be defended. Only then will individuals become brave enough to act upon the urge to help break the silence around gender violence and stand with victims.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Note

1. In 2020 the Catalan Parliament passed the first legislation in the world against this form of violence under the name of Second Order Violence [Llei 17/2020, del 22 de desembre, de modificació de la Llei 5/2008, del dret de les dones a erradicar la violència masclista].

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Author Biography

Ramón Flecha founded the Research Centre that made the first studies about gender violence in the context of Spanish universities and got the approval of the first legislation worldwide against second-order violence.