



## Nature and Factors Influencing Tourist Harassment at Coastal Beach of Mombasa, Kenya

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### Abstract

*Nature of tourists' harassment and factors leading to this menace are some of the issues with not only negative but also significant effect on the growth of tourism. This study was therefore set to assess the nature/types of tourists' harassment and determine the factors leading to this problem along the coastal beach of Mombasa, Kenya. Systematic random sampling technique was used to sample a total 300 foreign tourists from Nyali, Bamburi and Shanzu beaches of Mombasa, 100 respondents per beach. Structured questionnaire was used to collect data on nature of harassment: forms of harassment, most problematic harassers, hot-spots for harassment; and factors leading to harassment: marital status, gender age, and travel experience of tourists. Data collected was subjected to descriptive and inferential tests. The most prevalent type of tourist harassment was pestering to buy goods and services followed by begging and sexual harassment respectively. Curio sellers were identified as the most problematic tourist harassers. Beaches were identified as the frequent hotspot of harassment in Mombasa. Demographic factors of marital status, age, gender and travel experience significantly influenced harassment but they did not vary much in terms of percentages.*

**Keywords:** Tourists; harassment; nature, factors, beach.

### Introduction

**Background information:** Beach tourism is a very popular form of tourism. Attractions of the beach mainly revolve around recreational activities such as swimming, sun bathing, goggling and various water sports activities. Beach is also a convergent place where tourists and the locals meet and in the process make friendships and or buy goods and services from beach vendors commonly known in Kenya as beach boys. Items usually sold by beach boys to tourists include curio/souvenirs and services such as safaris, guiding services among other things.

One of the negative consequences arising from tourist-host interactions is the conflict of tourist harassment. Harassment negates the very tenet of tourism whose cornerstone is hospitality. Tourism is generally considered as a hospitality industry<sup>1</sup>. Thus tourists expect to be accorded with warm welcome any time they interact with the host community in the course of their holiday. The need to be appreciated is an innate trait of human nature<sup>2</sup>. Many reported cases of unpleasant holiday experience resulting from harassment by local vendors are a thorny issue in the tourism and travel industry especially among the top tourist destinations in developing world. Tourism harassment has been shown to discourage tourists from visiting certain destinations<sup>3</sup>. Studies have shown for instance that tourist harassment arising from beach vendors, beggars, drug peddlers has been a serious problem facing Caribbean countries<sup>4</sup>. The consequence of harassment is also likely to

cause mental or psycho-traumatic difficulties among the tourists<sup>5</sup>.

Most host-guest interactions scholars believe that due to brief nature of interactions between tourist and the locals, both tourists and locals tend to ignore about what their present actions will have on the relationship in future<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, such "relationships are particularly open to deceit, exploitation and mistrusts, since both tourists and locals can easily escape the consequences of hostility and dishonesty"<sup>6, 7</sup>. Various scholars have advanced various reasons to explain why conflicts occur as a result of encounters between tourists and local vendors<sup>8</sup>.

A cultural difference has been a major factor influencing host – guest interactions. Some researchers argue that tourism promotes inequalities between the rich and the poor by showing that globally most tourists come from western countries whose customs, beliefs, behaviours are at variance with that of the host community they are visiting. Such beliefs are more pronounced in respect of the destination in the developing world<sup>9</sup>. However, others view it as displaying a cultural colonialism where tourist's culture becomes dominant over the host. This can lead to irritations and a sense of social marginalization by the locals<sup>10</sup>. Cultural differences exist in the way guests and locals communicate, exchange greetings and establish relationships<sup>11, 12</sup>. The dilemma in services delivery may be of concern to tourists. In addition some tourists seek to be served exactly in their own cultural settings while others seek new experiences<sup>13</sup>.

Thus, it may be argued that tourist personality may have a lot of influence in the way they interact with the locals.

Hotspot theory seeks to explain why certain geographical locations tend to be high crime areas. This theory postulate that crime prone areas are usually places with numerous opportunities<sup>14</sup>. Normally high crime places may include areas frequented by tourists such as restaurants, night clubs, tourist class hotels, strip joints among others<sup>15</sup>. Due to high crime rates in these locations, many crime prevention and management are directed at these hot spots. Beaches clearly fit description of crime hotspot areas<sup>16</sup>. Hotspot theory is an important tool for determining locations of high incidences of harassment with a view to developing situational crime prevention mechanisms. Hot spots of harassment are places providing convergent areas in which crime can occur given the prevailing circumstances. It is a meeting place for both tourists and local vendors with varying needs.

**Justification for the study:** Despite the fact that Kenya is a leading tourist destination in Eastern Africa, no effort has been made to address the problem of tourist harassment by systematically carrying out a study on the nature and factors that tend to increase the possibility of tourists becoming victims of harassment. This issue needs an urgent attention as this could be useful to the relevant authorities in mitigating the problem especially at the coastal city of Mombasa where several cases of harassment has been reported.

**Study objective:** In view of the foregoing, this study was designed to establish the nature of tourist harassment and factors influencing its occurrence in Mombasa, Kenya.

## Research Methodology

**Study area and Sample size:** The study was conducted in November 2011 and March 2012 using a survey research design. Three beaches (Nyali, Bamburi and Shanzu) were selected for the study and in every beach, only foreign tourists were targeted in the study. A total of 300 respondents were sampled from the three beaches and as a result, 100 respondents drawn from each beach.

**Sampling technique and Data collection:** Systematic random sampling technique was used to sample 100 tourists per beach thus 300 respondents for the whole study. The first tourist was considered as the random start followed by every fifth tourist approached as the random interval. To prevent biased responses by the tourists in every beach, the distance from one respondent to the other was separated by at least one hundred meters (100 m) away per beach.

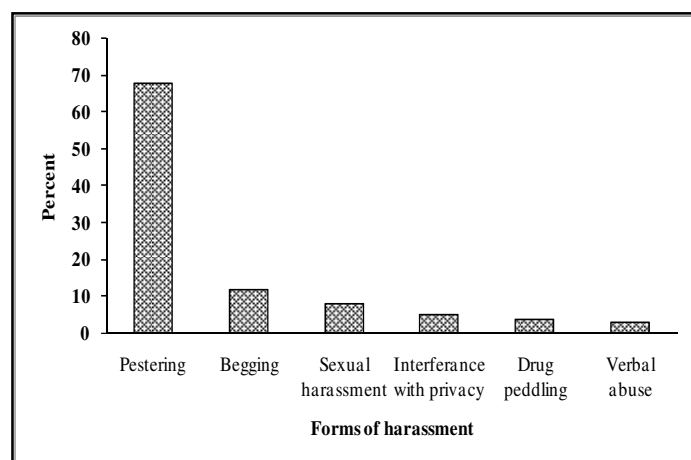
Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. In assessing the nature of harassment, the data collected focused on form or types of harassment; most problematic culprits; and major hotspots for harassments. Determination of factors determining

tourist harassment focused on the marital status; gender; travel experience; and age of the tourists.

**Data analysis:** Data was subjected to analysis using *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)* Version 17. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross tabulations were calculated and presented using tables and graphs. Inferential statistics using Chi-square test was done at 5 % level of significance to assess the significant differences.

## Results and Discussion

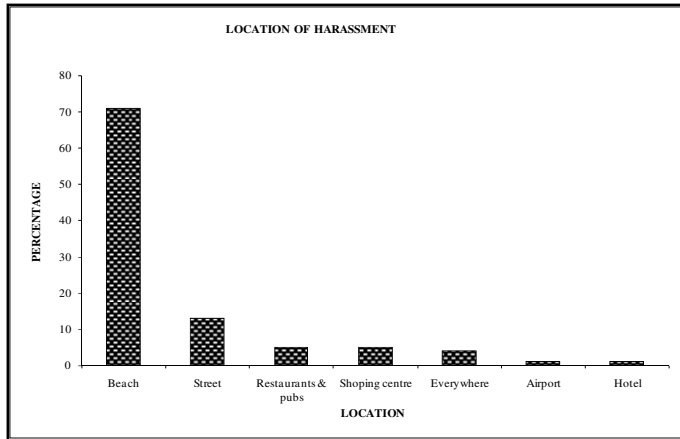
**Nature of tourist harassment at the coastal beaches of Mombasa: Forms of harassment:** Six forms of harassment of tourists were recorded (figure-1). The results suggest that 68% (n=80) of the respondents indicated that pestering to buy goods and services was the most common type of harassment, followed by begging (12%, n=14), sexual harassment (8%, n=9), interference with privacy and freedom of movement (5 %, n=6), drug peddling (4%, n=3) and verbal abuse (3%, n=3), respectively.



**Figure-1**  
**Forms/types of tourist harassment in Mombasa**

**Hotspots of tourist harassment at the coastal beaches of Mombasa:** According to the respondents, 71 % (n= 77) of all harassment cases occur on the beach. The other areas of harassment include the streets of Mombasa (13%, n=14), restaurants and pubs (5%, n=5) and shopping centers (5%, n=5). Insignificant cases of harassment (1%, n=2) occurred within airport and hotels. However a few tourist respondents (4%, n=4) reported that harassment occurred everywhere in Mombasa (figure - 2).

**Most problematic groups of beach boys:** The main group of beach boys identified by tourists were curio sellers (33%, n=62). Other major group of beach boys that harass identified were safari sellers (18%, n=34), boat operators (15%, n=29) and tour guides (11%, n=20), respectively. The other group of beach boys contributed to 23 % (n= 30) harassment to tourists (figure - 3).

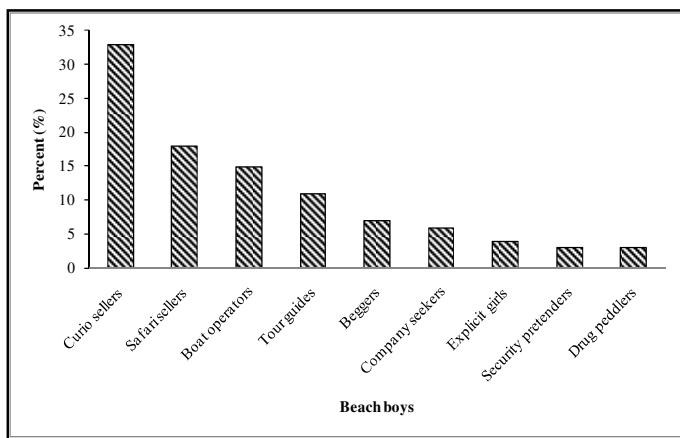


**Figure-2**  
**Hotspots of tourist harassment in Mombasa**



**Figure-4**  
**Tourist harassment by marital status**

**Age:** The interrelationship between encounter with harassment and tourists ages (figure - 5) showed that youthful tourists experienced slightly more harassment (54.5%, n=12) than the other group of tourists. This was followed by elderly tourists who reported 52.3% (n=45) of harassment. Middle aged tourists recorded the least harassment (47.7% n=51).

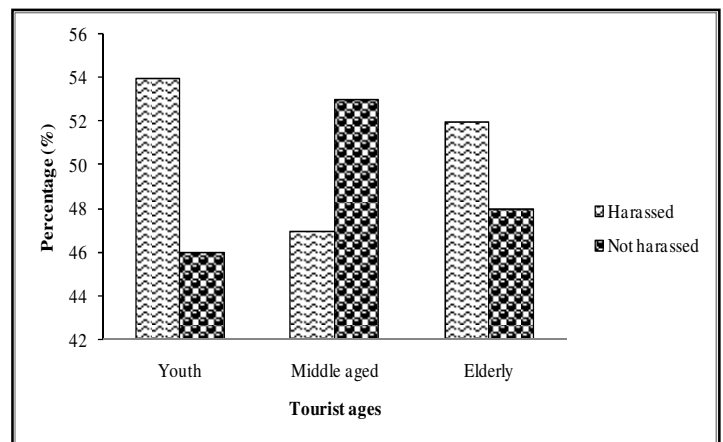


**Figure-3**  
**Most problematic groups of beach boys**

**Factors influencing tourist harassment in Mombasa:** Marital status, age and gender and tourist travel experience were some of the factors considered to influence tourist harassment in Mombasa.

**Marital status:** The results suggest that harassment level among the single tourists was evenly distributed since 51% (n=39) reported experiencing harassment as compared to 49% (n=38) who did not encounter harassment. Among the married tourist respondents, 48% (n=51) got harassed as opposed to 52% (n=56) who were not harassed. The highest (64%, n=14) occurrence of harassment was reported among the group representing the divorced, separated and widowed jointly referred to as the “others” (figure - 4).

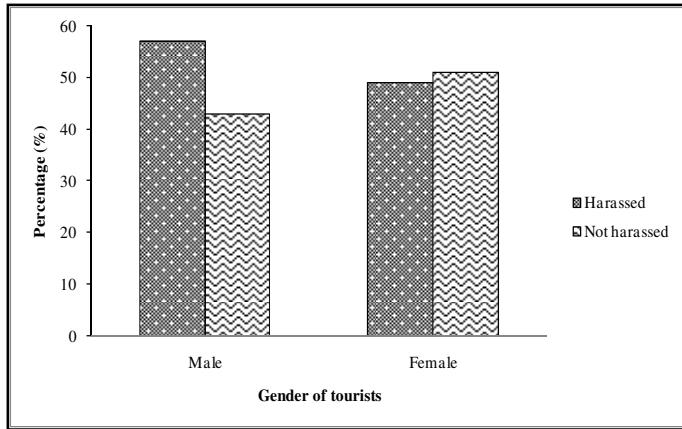
A Chi square test on the marital status of the tourists indicates that there were no significant differences ( $\chi^2=1.883$ , d.f = 2,  $p > 0.05$ ) in encounter with harassment based on the marital status of tourists. There is no relationship between tourist marital status and their encounter with harassment (figure - 4).



**Figure-5**  
**Tourist encounter with harassment by age**

Based on tourist age, there was no significant relationship ( $\chi^2=0.597$ , d.f =2,  $p > 0.05$ ) between tourist encounter with harassment and age. Instead, harassment encounter appeared to be independent of tourist age.

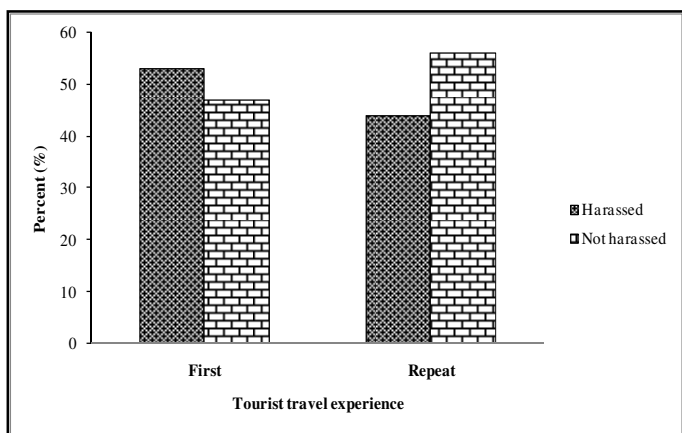
**Gender:** On gender, the results suggests that male tourists were slightly more harassed (57%, n=39) than female tourists (49%, n=68). Distribution of harassment level within each case of gender showed results that contradicts findings. More male tourists (57, n=39) reported that they were harassed as opposed to those who were not harassed (43%, n=30). A number of female tourists (51%, n=72) did not encounter any harassment as opposed to those who encountered harassment 49% (n=68) (figure - 6).



**Figure-6**  
**Tourist encounter with harassment by gender**

A chi-square test was conducted suggest that there was no significant differences in the tourist encounter with harassment on the basis of gender ( $\chi^2=1.169$ , d.f=1,  $p > 0.05$ ).

**Travel experience:** In terms of the relationship between tourist travel experience and their encounter with harassment, results suggest that tourists on first visit to Mombasa were more harassed (53%, n=80) than those on repeat visit (44%, n=26) (figure - 7).



**Figure-7**  
**Tourist encounter with harassment by travel experience**

On further analysis, results indicated that there were no significant relationship ( $\chi^2=1.348$ , d.f=1,  $p > 0.05$ ) between tourist encounter with harassment based on tourist travel experience. Therefore encounter with harassment was not influenced by tourist travel experience.

**Discussions: Nature of tourist harassment in Mombasa:** The findings of this study compares well with past studies carried out in other countries such as Barbados<sup>4</sup> and Turkey<sup>13</sup> which showed that the most commonly reported type of harassment by tourists was pestering to buy goods and services followed by begging and sexual harassment. The results of this study also

demonstrated that main problematic beach operators causing harassment to tourists in Mombasa were curio sellers, safari sellers and boat operators in that order respectively.

Persistence of beach boys is likely to make tourist avoid making contacts with them. Beach boys are likely to be more aggressive and persistent with the few tourists that come their way. Studies also reveal that if the host population do not obtain direct benefits from tourism, the mere presence of tourists would likely evoke resentment while at the same time increasing harassment possibilities<sup>17</sup>. Persistence as the main type of harassment therefore poses a serious challenge to policy makers if healthy host-guest interactions are to be maintained.

The problem of beggars in Mombasa was also apparent in Mombasa and this perhaps may be explained by high levels of poverty in Mombasa and Kenya in general. Absolute poverty in Mombasa is rated at approximately 44%<sup>18</sup>. The seriousness of the problem of begging in Mombasa can best be captured by a comment attributed to one German female respondent who said thus “it would be very nice if people in Kenya don’t wait for foreign people to naturally give them money always”. A middle aged French tourist also commented “beach girls should be honest as tourists are not cash machines!” This scenario suggests that harassment of tourists could be linked to other social problems in the society. It is the view of this author therefore that high harassment incidence in Mombasa may be linked to high levels of poverty in Kenya. A young female beach operator reported that “lack of employment due to low level of education is what made me to come to the beach and I found myself in the world of finances”. Ryan puts it “it is poverty of people that is driving most of the youths to the beach and in turns causes harassment of tourists”<sup>19</sup>. The high rate of poverty among the locals in Mombasa has led many of them to flock the beach to practice hawking as a means of increasing their family income levels<sup>20</sup>.

The issue of sexual harassment in Mombasa was also recorded by tourists. This type of harassment was particularly common with partnered male tourists who felt harassed by beach girls while taking leisurely walk along the beach. One furious British male tourist said he felt embarrassed when a “scantly dressed local girl strategically walk in front of us with the intention of attracting my attention. My wife felt jealous thinking that I knew the girl in question”. Such incidences are therefore likely to spoil holiday moods of tourists. Most tourists hate prostitutes and are of the opinion that they should be isolated from the society<sup>21</sup>. Some beach girls however accused tourists of sexual exploitation. They accused certain tourists who “fail to remit payments in cash or otherwise even after getting maximum pleasure”. Sexual harassment therefore is an issue that affects both the tourists and the local vendors.

Much of tourism literature deals with analysis of sex tourism and very little attention has been given to sexual harassment, a common problem that arises when tourists and locals interact.

Sex harassment related studies include those conducted in Jamaica<sup>22</sup>, Barbados<sup>23, 24</sup>, Gambia<sup>25</sup> and Greece<sup>26</sup>. Most sexual harassment incidences are rarely reported by tourists thus making it difficult to control and take action on offenders<sup>4</sup>.

Beach was established as the hot spot of harassment in Mombasa while the least forms of harassment were reported within hotel premises and at the airports. This compares well with survey findings in carried out in Barbados which showed that the tourist harassment occurs mostly on the beach<sup>4</sup>. Studies also done in Turkey indicated that high harassment incidences take place along beach hotels. While many tourists were of the opinion that beaches should be reserved as places of leisure for which they pay a lot of money, beach boys on the other hand considered beaches as places to transact businesses through beach hawking. This situation creates misunderstandings and conflict of interests.

**Factors influencing tourist harassment in Mombasa:** According to the findings of this study, gender and age of tourists were found to have some influence on encounter with harassment. Studies in Barbados concluded that elderly tourists experienced relatively less harassment since they were bound to stay mostly in their hotels<sup>4</sup>. It can be argued that older tourists prefer a quiet environment free from hustling activities of beach boys. The results of this study matches with those done in Barbados<sup>4</sup> in respect to younger tourists which demonstrated that younger tourists tend to experience more harassment because they tend to engage more with the locals and indulge in more tourism activities such as shopping and sightseeing. The findings of this study points out that middle aged tourists are least likely to complaint of harassment. Perhaps the plausible explanation to this scenario could be because they have more travel experience than the other group of tourists.

Although there were comparatively more male tourists who encountered harassment than female tourists, a statistical analysis could not confirm this difference. The high percentage of male tourists encountering harassment can be attributed to the perception held by many beach boys that male tourists are ordinarily household heads and thus have more say on purchases than female tourists. Beach boys are therefore likely to direct their sales efforts more at male tourists than female tourists. Again, many beach girls are more likely to pursue male tourists for sexual favours thus increasing harassment incidences against tourists.

This study demonstrated that divorced, separated and widowed jointly referred to as the “others” recorded the highest percentage of harassment followed by single and married tourists respectively. A chi square statistic yielded an insignificant relationship between marital status and encounter with harassment.

Familiarity with a destination defined by whether one is a first timer or repeat visitor was assumed to have an influence on

tourist encounter with harassment. This study demonstrated that tourist on first visit to Mombasa were more likely to experience harassment than those on repeat visit. This finding matches those carried out in Barbados<sup>4</sup>. In a study of a small number of British tourists visiting Marmaris, Turkey there was no evidence to suggest harassment variation based on familiarity of a destination<sup>13</sup>. Apparently a chi square test done to test whether this was significant in the larger population yielded insignificant results as demonstrated by the findings of this study.

## Conclusion

This study has given an account of tourist harassment in Mombasa and established that the most common type of harassment in Mombasa was pestering to buy goods and services. The study further established that among the group of beach boys the most problematic harassers were curio sellers, safari sellers and boat operators in that order respectively. Young and elderly tourists reported more harassment than middle aged tourists and that that beaches are the hotspots of harassment in Mombasa.

Therefore it can be argued that beach vending bridges the gap existing between the big tourism investors (hoteliers and big tour operators) and local entrepreneurs trading on the beach. What is required is training of beach boys to enable them strong interpersonal relations to enable them get along well with tourist when they meet on the beach<sup>27</sup>. Locals who feel alienated from the main stream tourism are more likely to harass tourists. The Kenya authorities should therefore find ways in which the locals can genuinely benefit from tourism industry without harassing tourists. The Kenyan government should also consider harassment as a crime by enacting laws against it. Harassment law is important since beach boys will be made to account for their criminal activities on the beach<sup>28</sup>.

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