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Knowledge of adolescent girls about laws related to rape and police

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Abstract

The present study focuses on knowledge of adolescent girls regarding laws related to rape and police in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. A sample of 112 school going girls of age 14 to 18 years was identified from five villages from two blocks of Kangra district. A questionnaire consisting of aspects of laws relating to rape and police was developed and administered. All adolescents were given questionnaire to fill regarding their knowledge on rape, precautionary measures and police laws. It was observed that majority of adolescents were not aware of the rape laws or what can be done in case of rape. Small percentages of adolescent girls were aware of the precautionary measures to avoid rape. Whereas half of the respondents did not possess any knowledge about FIR and what other steps can be taken if police refuses to file FIR against rape case.

Key words: Rape, police, adolescents, laws.

Introduction

Violence against women is a matter of grave concern. Rape, particularly is one of the most brutal form of aggression against women which shatters the life of the victim. It is not merely a physical assault but is destructive to the whole personality of the victim. The law commission of India recommended incorporation of new provisions in the criminal laws to provide for stringent punishment for rape and sexual abuse of children. In the 172nd report submitted to the government the commission suggested sweeping changes for widening the scope of definition of offences in sections 375, 376, 376A and 376D in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) to include any form of sexual contact to make it gender neutral. The punishment recommended varies from a minimum sentence of five years to life imprisonment. However, despite such observations and reports about one rape is committed every hour in the country and an average of two child rapes are reported everyday. But numerous others go unreported largely because of the stigma associated with the crime and also because the final justice takes long in coming. Acquaintance rape and date rape are now widespread problems among adolescents and youngsters all over the world. Studies have reported that women ages 16 to 24 experiences rape at rates four times higher than the assault rate of all women, making the college or high school years the most vulnerable for women (Rickert and Wiemann, 1998).

The fear of rape is widespread among adolescents. Although they fear stranger rape more than acquaintance rape, even though the latter is much more common (Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1997). As regards the psychological trauma the acquaintance rape victims suffer same psychological harm as stranger rape victims, which include shock, humiliation, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, loss of self-esteem, social isolation, anger, distrust of others, fear of AIDS, guilt and sexual dysfunction. It has been documented that a women's condition or behavior does not cause rape, but certain factors appear to increase women's vulnerability to it. These include drinking to the point of being unable to resist forceful sexual assault, being single, using drugs, having previously been the victim of sexual assault, being at an isolated site and holding less conservative attitude about sexual behaviour (Himelein, 1995).

Rape is certainly the most heinous crime against women. It is an experience which shakes the foundation of the lives of the victim. Its societal implications are also important. In India, the rape victim suffers on to fronts. First the trauma experienced by rape and second the humiliation experienced by the victim because of inadequate laws, the policemen and insensitive doctors.

Rape is not just a crime against women, but it is a crime against humanity. It is a crime against basic human rights and is violative of the rights to life contained in Article 21 of the constitution. The lives of young innocent victims are defiled, traumatized, ruined and their families stigmatized. Rape sometimes carries the seeds of unwanted pregnancy and the trauma of abortion. Yet our policy makers and law enforcers appear to be non-chalant to this menace. Rape often leads to an

external crisis in the life of the victim. This results in the immediate disruption and disorganization in the life style of the victim. However the awareness of preventive measures and proper laws against rape among girls will be helpful to remove this atrocite. Therefore this study is planned with the objective to assess the knowledge level of adolescent girls regarding rape and its preventive measures and laws relating to it.

Methodology

A total sample of 112 girls belonging to the age group of 14-18 years was selected from two blocks i.e. Panchrukhi and Bhawarna of district Kangra of Himachal Pradesh. A total of five villages were selected from blocks, two villages i.e. Paruar and Bhawarna from Bhawarna block and three villages i.e. Tatehal, Banuri and Rajpur from Panchrukhi block. Senior secondary schools were contacted to obtain the list of girls belonging to 14-18 years of age. Out of that list girls were randomly selected. Hence from Bhawarna 54 girls were selected and from Panchrukhi 58 girls were selected thus making a total of 112 girls. Survey was done on 112 girls regarding their knowledge on rape, its precautionary measures and police laws related to rape, The tools consisted of a self-structured questionnaire consisting of aspects of Rape and police laws i.e. What has to be done in case of rape, precautions for young girls, what victim should not do, knowledge regarding F.I.R, who can file F.I.R etc.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 indicates the frequency and percentage of adolescent girls regarding their knowledge of rape. It is clear from the data that half (51.7 %) of adolescent girls were aware that in case of rape police report can be filed against the criminal. However very small percentages of adolescents were of the view to tell their parents about rape or remain the things as they are. On the other hand only 19.6 percentage of respondents reported that in case of rape a doctor can be visited or consulted. Regarding the knowledge about precautions that young girls can take 18.7 per cent of adolescent girls did not give any response However, 37.5 per cent of girls reported not going alone at night as an important precautionary measure to prevent rape. Further 22.3 per cent of girls were of the view that not talking to strangers can also prevent the cases of rape to some extent. However almost negligible percentage of adolescent girls reported that complain to school administration can be made if there is any misbehaviour. It can be due to the reason that girls being introvert and shy by nature do not make complain to school administration if they are facing any misbehaviour at school premises or outside. The findings of the study are in line with (Hickman and Muehlenhard, 1997) who reported that adolescent girls had more fear of stranger rape than acquaintance rape, even though the latter is much more common. However, the fear of rape is widespread among adolescent girls.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage distribution of adolescent girls regarding rape

	Total	V_1	V_2	V_3	V_4	V_5
What has to be done in case of rape						
No response	11 (9.8)	6 (33.3)	2 (10)	1 (2.9)	2 (10)	0
Police report	58 (51.7)	8 (44.4)	17 (85)	20 (58.8)	10 (50)	3 (15)
Visit a doctor	22 (19.6)	0	2 (10)	4 (11.7)	4 (20)	12 (60)
Punishment to criminal	16 (14.2)	7 (38.8)	0	4 (11.7)	1 (5)	4 (20)
Tell parents	5 (4.4)	2 (11.1)	0	3 (8.8)	0	0
Remain the things as they are	6 (5.3)	2 (11.1)	2 (10)	0	2 (10)	0
Precautions to young girls						
No response	21 (18.7)	5 (27.7)	5 (25)	6 (17.6)	1 (5)	4 (20)
Not going alone at night	42 (37.5)	7 (38.8)	10 (50)	16 (47)	6 (30)	3 (15)
Not talking to strangers	25 (22.3)	3 (16.7)	3 (15)	6 (17.6)	9 (45)	1 (5)
Being simple	14 (12.5)	1 (5.6)	0	7 (20.3)	1 (5)	5 (25)
Complain to school administration if there is any misbehavior	1 (0.9)	1 (5.6)	0	0	0	0
Reaching home at time	1 (0.9)	1 (5.6)	0	0	0	0
Tell every thing to the family	2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)	0	2 (5.8)	1 (5)	3 (15)
Victim should not do						
No response	89 (79.4)	15 (83.3)	15 (75)	29 (85.2)	15 (75)	15 (75)
Tell parents	4 (3.5)	0	1 (5)	1 (2.9)	0	2 (10)
Not marrying	3 (2.6)	1 (5.6)	1 (5)	0	0	1 (5)
Take bath after rape	1 (0.9)	0	0	1 (2.9)	0	0
Change clothes after rape	3 (2.6)	0	0	0	3 (15)	0

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

In case of, what the rape victim should not do majority i.e. (79.4%) do not possess any knowledge about it. In a study conducted by Micheal (2001) degree of belief in rape myths as determined by participant gender, attitudes about the role of women in contemporary society and factual knowledge of rape was investigated in a sample of 118 male and 126 female college students. It was found that females disagreed with rape myths more than males and the knowledge of rape was negatively related to degree of belief in rape myths.

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of adolescent girls regarding knowledge of police laws against rape. Out of the total respondents half i.e. (51.7%) of adolescent girls did not possess any knowledge regarding police laws against rape. The remaining were aware of F.I.R. Whereas 26.6 per cent of the respondents reported that parents/relatives can file F.I.R in case of rape and 89 per cent of adolescent girls notified that victim herself can file F.I.R for rape. In case if police refuses to file F.I.R, the data generated from the study revealed that 59 per cent of adolescent girls did not possess any knowledge regarding other options. Whereas small percentage of girls reported that senior officials and courts could be approached in case police refuses to file F.I.R. The reason for the lack of knowledge regarding F.I.R or other laws might be due to the fact that adolescents do not receive any knowledge regarding the rights and laws for women, if they face any problem. The curriculum did not provide any significant information about it and there are no formal or informal talks about theses laws in general at school. Therefore awareness camps for adolescent girls in schools and colleges regarding rights and laws about sexual harassments and precautionary measures to avoid these advances would be beneficial to increase their knowledge level.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage distribution of adolescent girls regarding knowledge of police laws against rape

	Total	V_1	V_2	V_3	V_4	V_5
Knowledge about F.I.R						
No response	58 (51.7)	12 (35.2)	15 (75)	16 (47)	5 (25)	10 (50)
Police report	49 (43.7)	5 (27..7)	7 (35)	16 (47)	12 (60)	9 (45)
Case on people	1 (0.9)	0	0	0	1 (5)	0
Who can file F.I.R						
No response	66 (59)	12 (66.6)	14 (71)	20 (58.8)	9 (4.5)	10 (50)
Victim	10 (8.9)	0	1 (5)	4 (11.7)	4 (20)	1 (5)
Parent/Relative	30 (26.6)	2 (11.1)	7 (35)	9 (26.4)	5 (25)	7 (35)
What if police refuses to file F.I.R						
No response	66 (59)	13 (38.5)	17 (85)	17 (50)	8 (40)	11 (55)
Go to senior officials	19 (15.1)	1 (5.6)	0	9 (26.4)	7 (35)	2 (10)
Go to courts	13 (11.6)	2 (11.1)	3 (15)	3 (8.8)	3 (15)	2 (10)

Figures in parentheses indicates percentages

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this research study that adolescent girls do not possess knowledge regarding rape and police laws against rape. What is required is awakening of social conscience to reduce this evil and increasing avenues should be made available for providing justice and opportunity for women. Educating the girls and creating awareness among them regarding the precautions and causes of rape and laws are the ingredients to bring a change in knowledge level of the adolescent girls. Law alone is not enough to root out this social evil. A holistic approach and a social movement are also necessary to eradicate this problem. Society has to change its attitude and girls should be made aware of the preventive measures.

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