

A perception and awareness study of undergraduate students of media studies in Delhi NCR towards rapes and molestation of women in India

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Abstract: Security of women in India is being continuously challenged by the increasing number of crimes against them. The root cause of these attempts lies in the unequal relationship between man and woman. The traditionally male-dominated Indian society is witnessing its young females breaking barriers and entering the liberal life of pubs, late night parties and drinking etc. that was earlier enjoyed by males only. The discomfort caused in the society by such acts is reflected in the debates about women's lifestyle that are raised whenever any sexual crime is attempted. Keeping in view this conflict between tradition and modernity and the sensitive nature of such cases, the current paper attempts to explore the mindsets of undergraduate students of media studies in Delhi NCR towards such crimes and towards the victim also. Taking into consideration all the factors that affect opinion of the society, this paper argues that though the budding journalists are challenging the rape myths of good values, dressing style, non-virginity, many of them do not know the basic punishment and proceedings in sex crimes against women. The paper recommends conducting of legal awareness workshops as well as image analysis of institutions like police and hospitals as most of the female students view these as insensitive to victims.

Keywords: woman, rape, molestation, male-domination, media students, mindset

INTRODUCTION

As the crime rate against women got increased by 46% in 2021, the 21st century Indian woman is not safe either at home or outside. According to the data of National Legal Services Authority (nalsa.gov.in), 3,582 cases of domestic violence between April, 2021 and June, 2021 were registered which clearly points out to the current scenario in gender relations and the mindset of the people towards women. According to a reply on the question asked by congress MP Santosh Singh Saluja in Parliament, 3,327 cases of rape were registered in 2021, a 33% increase since 2018. Whenever the cases of sexual molestation and rapes happen in India, a debate about the reasons and accusations get started. This was widely evident after Nirbhaya Rape case in 2012 in Delhi when one of the convicts justified the treatment given to a girl due to her going 'out of the ideal conduct or gender norms'. Experts point out to various rape myths and cultural stereotypes that together or solely act to form perceptions of a society about sexual assaults and crimes. These myths can be about women causing, deserving and enjoying rapes. Also, these can be about the doubt over a victim's claim and judgement regarding her dress or lifestyle as factors of causing such attempts. Moreover, such acts are seen as acts of male dominance over woman. Whereas Uttar Pradesh witnessed the burning of jeans by young females, Haryana Khaps were on to reduce the marriageable age for girls after a series of rape attempts were reported.[1] As the nation watched a 22-year old girl being molested by 30 strangers on road in Guwahati in 2013, it is very important to understand the current environment of the society in the light of various socio-legal factors associated with it.[2] The public disclosure of a victim's identity by National Commission for Women and the reaching of police on the spot 30 minutes late in this case raises questions about the efficiency and willingness of various institutions in dealing with such sensitive cases.

Burt (1980) defined the rape myths as 'prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists.' [3] The term refers to the mindset of different sections in society about who is at fault in cases of sexual crime. While one perspective views it as being an act of exerting power as a form of dominance of males over females, another perspective sees it as a consequence of women violating the traditional norms of conduct for girls. This brings into fore the question of boundaries and behavior prescribed or assigned to different sexes by the society, like what to wear and when to go out. These myths and norms form an individual's attitude towards women and cases of sexual violence including rapes. Since the role of journalists and media is crucial to initiating a public discourse over such issues, their perceptions and awareness about such cases becomes important.

This research aims at analyzing the mindset of the students of media studies towards rape myths and stereotypes associated with victim and accused in cases of rapes and molestation. By knowing the way they perceive these statements, role of various institutions and the level of their awareness about legal action may reveal the direction of their work in future as budding journalists.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concern for the safety of women has also been highlighted by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare in its report '*Safety of women in Delhi- a perception based analysis*' in June 2009.[4] Lack of social protection and sensitivity on gender issues, inadequate functioning of police and private security, portrayal of women in Media were the factors of insecurity told by majority of males and females. The victims of sexual crimes are not only affected by the attitude of society but also by the treatment and dealing of various institutions of the society. This becomes more clear when we go through the experiences of rape victims compiled in September 2012 by CNNIBN Live under the title '*After men, society raped me again and again*'. [5] The suggestion by policeman

to victim not to go for FIR for it can denigrate her rapport and dignity, the unattentive attitude and insensitive touching of private parts after rape by hospital staff and the questioning from an 8-year old child victim in a court whether she understands the meaning of male private parts and about the situation of her clothes etc. during the incident –these factors affect the way a society perceives its institutions. The most common debate after any case of sexual assault centres around the question that who is responsible for the act—victim or rapist?

Among the studies that explored these kind of questions, Victim Blame studies and analyses the various factors that work solely or in combination to form perceptions not only of the people, but also of the victim and the rapist. *D Lester and M Blumberg (1991)* discovered in their study that those adolescents who are associated with rape myths blame the victim more than those who are not.[6] *Courtney Elizabeth Ahrens (2002)* found that prevalent cultural stereotypes and rape myths in society prevent the victims from disclosing the incident to their associates .The major reason is their insensitive and unsupportive behavior which creates fears of getting negative reactions and being questioned about the authenticity of their rape claims[7]. *Mark A Whatley (2005)* found that the traditional attitudes towards marriage caused people to rate suggestively dressed females more responsible and deserving of rape than those who were somberly dressed [8].

Another study on ‘Attitude and Myths towards Rape among Medical Students in Rajkot,India’ conducted by *Rajesh K Chudasama(2013)* and his colleagues analyzed the acceptance of factors like rape being an exercise of male power over female, the reason being sex, victim should feel guilty, raped women being less desirable, women secretly feel raped among many. They found that 1/4th male and female resident doctors had a very good positive attitude and 1/4th of them fell on the extreme negative side of the Likert-scale.[9]

METHODOLOGY

The authors adopted quantitative approach of research wherein a survey from 160 Undergraduate students (18-21 yrs.) of media studies was conducted. A structured questionnaire containing 13 statements related to rape myths, 5 questions about the impact of films, albums and advertisements in such cases and 7 questions about legal awareness in this context. A total of 200 students from Delhi-NCR region were approached using convenience sampling method, out of which 160 (85 boys and 75 girls) agreed to fill the data. The respondents belong to Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, Delhi, Amity University, Noida and K R Manglam University Gurugram. The data was collected using nominal scale with options of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ and the legal awareness was evaluated in the form of ‘Know’ (right answer) and ‘Does not know’ (wrong answer) and analyzed in the form of simple percentages.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary data

which was collected was then analyzed in three different segments as follows:

- A. Perception on rape myths:** The first set of questions were statements about different beliefs around rape cases. The following charts and tables reflect the perception of budding journalists on these issues-

List any five crimes against women that you are aware of—

Out of the total females asked, hardly 20 percent could name all the five crimes . While 93 percent females could not list more than 3 crimes, there were 29 percent females who could not name even a single crime. As far as the males are concerned, the situation was almost the same. Only 29 percent were able to list all the five crimes, whereas 26 percent could not name even a single crime against women.

Tables 1 : Listing of crimes against women (percentage)

Respondents	Zero	Less than 3	Five
Males	26%	29%	29%
Females	29%	36%	58%

Pubs and Bars are not meant for girls—

Out of total 160 people, 58 percent disagree with the statement. Out of the total males, around 62 percent believe that these places are not meant for girls (see fig 1) ,while 56 percent of the females disagree with it(see fig.2) If we look at the tally of middle-aged people, 74 percent don’t think these places are meant for girls.(see fig:4)

Fig1: Opinion of males

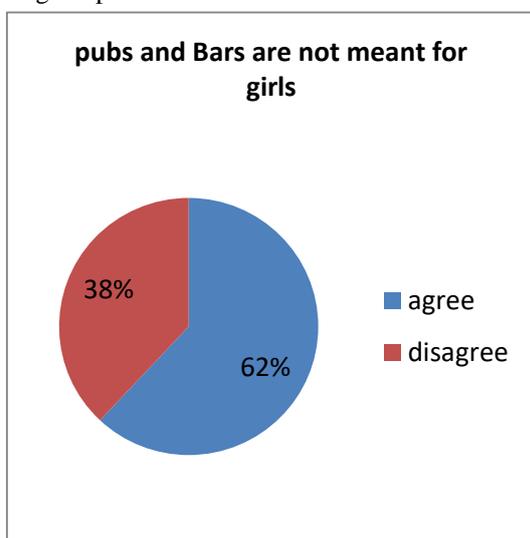
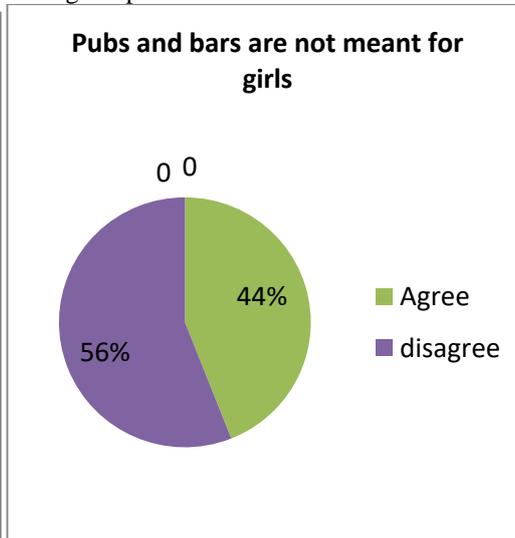


Fig2: Opinion of females



S No	Statement	Males		Females	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Girls should not go out late in night as it makes them more vulnerable to such incidents as rape	55%	45%	80%	20%
2	Such cases as rape, molestation etc. don't occur with the girls with good culture	20%	80%	5%	95%
3	Such cases don't occur in high society families	10%	90%	5%	95%
4	A girl's dressing style is also responsible for the occurrence of rape, molestation and other such cases with her	30%	70%	40%	60%
5	If a girl is habitual to sex, cases of rape don't apply to her	20%	80%	35%	65%

Table 2: Response on statements related to rape myths (percentage) - i

S No	Statement	Males		Females	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	A rape victim should not get FIR registered because it may spoil her image in the society	20%	80%	35%	65%
2	If a girl sleeps with a boy at her own will, that is ok but if the boy does it forcefully, then she claims a rape! This is not fair!	50%	50%	30%	70%
3	If a rape convict is ready to marry the victim, should the girl accept it?	35%	65%	40%	60%
4	Acts of sexual violence and rapes are an exercise of men's domination over women as it exists in society	55%	45%	80%	20%
5	Do you think the upcoming culture of MNCs /BPOs is also responsible for increase in rape cases?	45%	55%	20%	80%
6	The cases of rapes are increasing because more and more girls are coming out with complaints.	40%	60%	15%	85%

Table 3: Response on statements related to rape myths (percentage)- ii

Which place do you think is safer for girls to live?

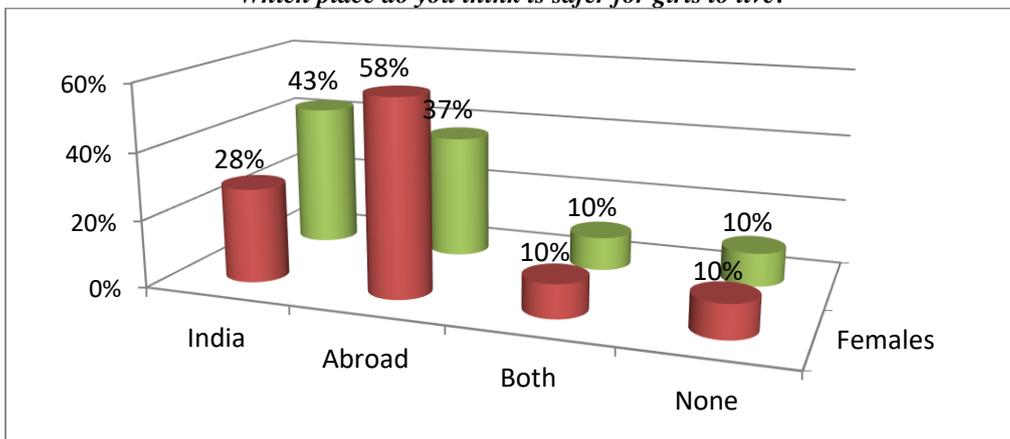


Fig 3: Opinion of males and females about India or abroad being a safer place for girls

Which is safer for girls- small towns or metropolitan areas ?

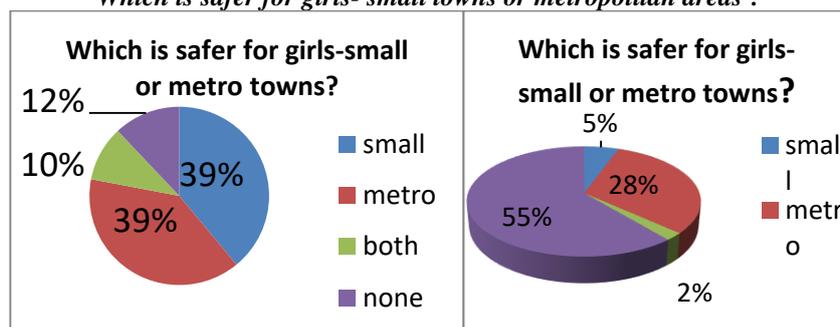


Fig 4: opinion of males

Fig 5: opinion of females

B. Role of Mass media in encouraging sexual crimes:

Questions about the role of adult films, pop albums and advertisements in promoting sexual crimes were asked to the respondents. The following table reflect analysis of this data:

S No	Question	Males		Females	
		Yes	No	Yes	No
1	Do the sex and adult scenes in the films promote such crimes?	20%	80%	35%	65%
2	Do the item numbers in films encourage such incidents with women as rape , molestation etc.?	50%	50%	30%	70%
3	Does the way women are shown in advertisements is also responsible for increasing such crimes against women?	35%	65%	40%	60%
4	The way of presentation of female models in Pop albums contribute to increasing such crimes against women	55%	45%	80%	20%
5	Do you think the upcoming culture of MNCs /BPOs is also responsible for increase in rape cases?	45%	55%	20%	80%
6	The cases of rapes are increasing because more and more girls are coming out with complaints.	40%	60%	15%	85%

Table 4: opinion on the role of mass media in encouraging sexual crimes against women (percentage)

C. Legal Awareness regarding cases of Rapes and molestation:

While the amended laws prescribe at least 10 years of imprisonment for raping a woman , be it in a hospital or premises of a police station or any other public office as well, the accused of molestation will get at least one year of imprisonment . both of these punishments can be extended along with a fine as well. The following charts reflect the level of awareness of media students in the capital region on these aspects-

What is the minimum duration of imprisonment for attempt to rape?

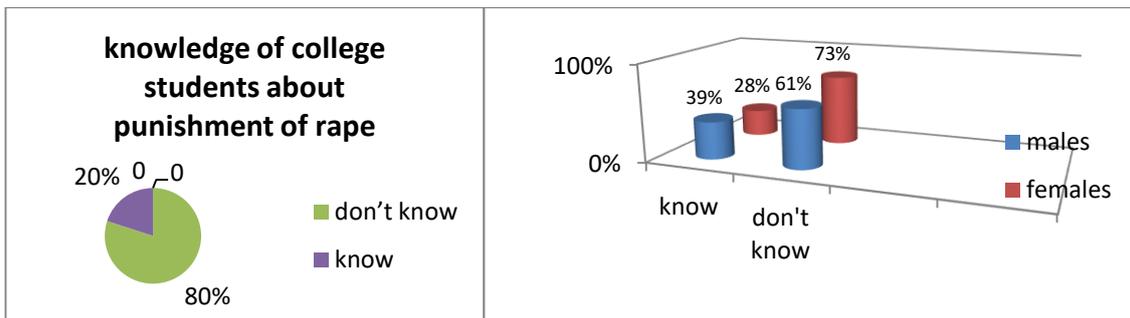


Fig 6&7: Knowledge of respondents about punishment of rape

What is the minimum duration of imprisonment for a police staff that attempts rape in police station ?

males		females	
know	Don't know	know	Don't know
30	70	10	90

Table 5: Knowledge of respondents about punishment of rape in police station

Media spreads awareness about rapes and other such crimes against women

males			females		
yes	no	Can't say	yes	no	Can't say
70%	05%	25%	85%	05%	10%

Table 6: Opinion on the role of media in awareness about sexual crimes

Across all the sections in the sample, the majority of respondents credit media for spreading awareness about rapes and other such crimes.

Sensitivity of police , hospitals , judiciary and society in dealing with rapes and molestations

Along with the above statements, the respondents were asked to rate various institutions of society in dealing with these issues. As they themselves form the society, it is important to look at the results-

Respondent	Avg. rating of safety on Delhi as a place for girls
Males	35% safe
females	30 % safe

Table 7: Opinion on the safety level of capital city for girls

Respondent	Avg. rating of sensitivity			
Respondents	hospitals	police	judiciary	society
Males	55%	18%	73%	23%
females	45%	20%	81%	16%

Table 8: Opinion on the sensitivity of various public institutions

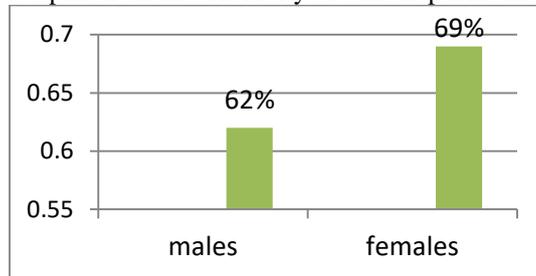


Fig 8: respondents who feel police is 0% sensitive

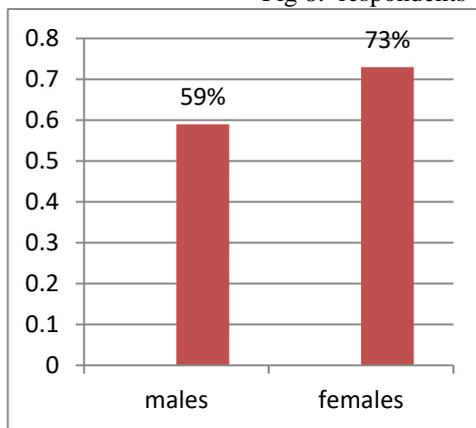


Fig 9: respondents who feel judiciary

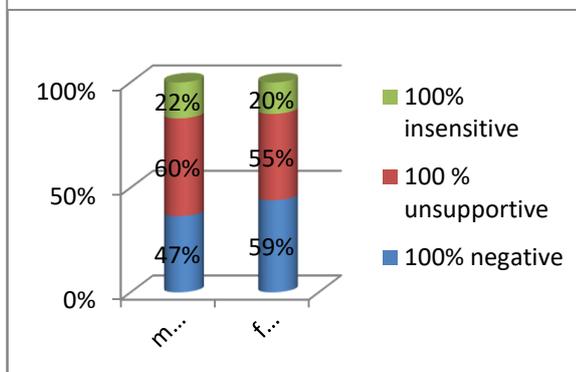


Fig 10: opinion of respondents about society

is 100% sensitive
FINDINGS

- While the majority of male students feel that girls should not go to places like pubs and bars, the female budding journalists seem to be divided on this aspect. It seems that the students don't associate the activities of drinking and dancing with females.
- More than 3/4th female budding media persons don't consider it safe to go outside late night while some of the young boys seem to disagree with their opinion. Overall, it can be said that a good majority of the respondents don't think it is safe for women to roam around late at night.
- Both male as well as female students of media studies reject the stereotypical relationship with strong majority between girls having good values and being safe from sexual crimes as well as the association between women's dressing style and attempt of rapes. That is, they believe that these factors have no role to play in the cases of rapes and molestation of women.
- The majority of respondents do not relate the concepts of woman's non-virginity with being available for sex. But in contrast, the young male future journalists are divided on the aspect whether having forced sex with a woman who exercised her will about sleeping with someone is wrong or not. This reveals a clear contradiction in the minds of boys who seem to consider women their property if they had physical relations with them. That is, for half of the budding male journalists, the willingness of a woman to have sex or not does not matter if she had physical relations with that man prior to it.
- A strong rejection of the concept of losing dignity or public image as a result of registering FIR against sexual crimes has come up by both males as well as female media students. It seems that the overall majority of respondents think that women should not fear while registering a police complaint against the incident of rape or molestation.
- The suggestion of getting a woman married with the man who attempted to rape her had been prevalent in the society as well as many films. But both male and female respondents have rejected this idea outrightly, probably owing to their concept of having a partner being wider than just the existence of physical relations between them.

- Most of the female future media professionals do not feel India as a safe place for women, rather other countries seem to be a better option of living for them. Besides this, a good majority does not see any place in India safe for them- neither metropolitan cities nor small towns. Their male counterparts seem to be divided whether India is a safer place for women to live or abroad. But if asked about India only, a good number feels that the metropolitan areas are safer for females than small towns. This may be because the metropolitans are seen as having better transport and food facilities as well as an exposure to a culture of night shift jobs. Though, one cannot forget that Delhi itself is known as the rape capital of India.
- Most of the respondents gave a clear hit to the way women are shown in advertisements on mass media as well as pop albums from having any role in instigating people for attempting sexual crimes. But many of them, both girls as well as boys, view adult films and sex scenes of films as encouraging the audience for attempt to molest or rape women.
- A shocking finding of the study revealed that 80% of the students of media studies in capital region do not know about the punishment for attempt to rape prescribed by the law of the country. Since the media professionals are supposed to be vigilant and wary of any provision or proceedings of cases or registering of FIRs, this finding conveys a lack of in depth reading about the crime cases on the part of students along with a disinterest in knowing the procedure and provisions as part of general awareness about their surroundings and the system in which they are surviving.
- Though the judiciary is trusted by a good number of respondents, other institutions especially police lacks credibility and are rather a fear factor. Even media has also lost its credibility among a large part of its audience. Such a situation is important to be dealt with as it can create a feeling in the minds of the people that there is nobody to help and care for them which is a dangerous indication for any system.
- Most of the respondents do not see Indian society as being sensitive towards the victims of rape and molestation. Not even 1/5th of the female media students trusts the society in term of supporting or caring for the victims of sexual violence. This may become a big hurdle in the victim's path of starting a new life in Indian society.

CONCLUSION

Though the young media students of Delhi NCR do not believe in the age-old concepts of virginity and loss of a victim's dignity after sexual crimes, but many of them do not feel that a woman's consent is important before making a sexual relation, even if she has been your partner before. In addition to this, there is a need of educating the young minds, especially the ones who are the future of mass media about the basic provisions and steps of proceeding for such crucial and impactful cases in day-to-day life. A legal awareness workshop by women cells across the colleges and schools can prove effective in this direction. The policy makers need to take cognizance of the growing distrust among youth of the nation. The fundamental institutions of law, order, protection and treatment need to improve their working as well as image in the minds of the citizens as early as possible.

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