

Sexual Violence Against Women: A Horrific Picture Of COVID- 19

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ABSTRACT

Sexual violence is a pervasive and fastest-growing crime in the society of India. Many ranking agencies have placed India in the first place in gender-based sexual violence. The purpose of this study was to investigate the sex crimes that happened during the lockdown in India. The study discussed the factors involved in strangers and acquaintances rapes during COVID -19. The incidents of sexual violence have been studied from the different parts of India during the different stages of lockdown. The news was collected from different online news outlets. The result indicates that the lockdown has intensified the cases of sexual violence against women. The evidence shows that men are committing strangers and acquaintance rape due to stress, unemployment, boredom, and having no fear of being caught. Frustration can be a major cause of sexual violence crimes. Another major reason for sex crimes during COVID -19 is social disorganization.

Keywords *India, Rape, Sexual Violence, Gender,lockdown,COVID -19*

1. BACKGROUND

A wide range of physical and sexual violations against any human being is considered as sexual violence and the women of all types of society are disproportionately victims of sexual violence(Merry, 2009).Sexual assault is considered as the most horrendous crime in which most victims are women and perpetrators are men. World Health Organizations has placed all types of sexual violence in the human rights framework (W.H.O,2002).Many international human rights laws have been formed to punish and prevent such violence. However, despite harsh punishments and international treaty different forms of sexual assault still exists in society and making the lives of victims painful and miserable(*Gender Based Violence,2019*). India is the largest democracy and fastest developing country in the world but still it is unable to protect its women.Rape is the fastest-growing gender-based crime in India and in 2018 India is ranked as the most dangerous place for women(*India most dangerous country for women with sexual violence rife,2018*).Everyday approximately 93 women or girls are sexually assaulted in India(Sharama&Dandona,2020) and this crime is spreading its tentacles in the society at this time of lockdown(5 May,2020,The Print) where everybody is struggling for their identity and survival. This paper is addressing the sexual assault issue during COVID -19. COVID-19 is a pandemic, which has forced the people to imprison in their own homes. The best solution was advised for this pandemic is social distancing and to maintain social distancing the government has enforced the lockdown but still, many women and girls are continuously being the target of men's masochistic behavior.The elimination of sexual

violence against women is one of the serious challenges in India (The Wire, April 20, 2020). Many theories explained the factors behind the violent behaviour of men against women. This paper is an attempt to identify the factors which are encouraging a man to sexually assault women or girls during the time of COVID- 19 (pandemic). This article reveals that the factors like hormonal imbalance, depression, and biological factors and no fear of being caught are some factors, which are provoking men and young boys to commit crimes.

2. OBJECTIVE

- To study the cases of sexual assault occurring during the lockdown in India.
- To study the factors influencing sexual assault during COVID -19 in India.

Sexual Violence cases during COVID 19

Presently the whole world is living in the fear of instability, fighting for their survival, everybody is staying in their house or a place, which covered by four walls to maintain social distancing but the Indian females are still not safe; Men are continuously raping and physically torturing them to satisfy their masochistic behaviors. COVID-19 has put a pause in all activities but the sexual assault is not getting any full stop. Strangers and acquaintances' sexual assault is still increasing in society.

Haryana reported 66 rapes, and 142 incidents of molestation in the month of April 2020 (during the second stage of lockdown) in which 17 were gang rapes, 45 victims, and four victims were raped by individuals and four raped after being eloped. A 21-year woman was gang-raped by four men in Panipat. They first lured her for help in crossing the border of UP via the Yamuna river. They took her in an isolated place and raped her. The story of Jind is also not different from other parts of Haryana a 14 years old girl was gang-raped by three youths including a 16-year-old in a school building. Other parts of Hisar and Jhajjar reported five cases of sexual harassment during the lockdown (The Tribune, May 23, 2020)

Jammu and Kashmir recorded 16 rape cases, 64 F.I.R. of molestation and one eve-teasing case during the lockdown period (Deccanherald, 29 April 2020)

A 40 years old woman was gang-raped by three men at a school in Sawai Madhopur. She was traveling alone and got stuck in Sawai Madhopur due to lockdown. The villagers asked her to stay in school. Three men of the same village sexually assaulted her when she was alone in the school building. (The Wire, 24 April, 2020)

The story of Madhya Pradesh is not different from the other parts of India. A 19-year-old girl was allegedly gang-raped by seven men in whom three perpetrators were minors. The perpetrator abducted her when she was coming back from the petrol pump. They left her near the non-working dam (World Asia, May 01, 2020)

In another case, a girl of Bihar was allegedly gang-raped by her inmates of a quarantine center while she was out for nature call. After raping her they kept her as a hostage and clicked pictures (Hindustan times, 23 May, 2020).

A 16-year-old girl was gang-raped by ten men on March 24. She became a victim of acquaintance gang rape by her friends whom she asked for lift during lockdown. After committing rape the perpetrators left her in a critical condition in the forest (News Nation, March 28, 2020).

Although the number of crimes happened during the lockdown is very less in numbers as compared to the last year when there was no lockdown but still, these crimes need the attention of government, policymakers and social thinkers because these crimes of sexual violence have happened despite restrictions and strict surveillance on the movements of people during the lockdown. These crimes happened when there was a complete shutdown of

all types of public transportation. The migrants and daily wagers were walking hundreds of kilometers with women and kids in tow to their homes. Many daily wagers and the lakhs of people are struggling for their lives and for food. The situation is more alarming because all perpetrators of the above cases belong to the lower middle-class families.

3. DISCUSSION

The cases coming during lockdown shows that sexual violence is deeply rooted in Indian society and culture. Therefore, there is no wonder to see sexual violence cases during a time of COVID-19, where many people are struggling for their basic needs. Thousands of people are losing their jobs and their homes. Lakhs of people are forced to sleep without food and walk thousands of kilometres on their toes. However, in all the sexual assault cases the perpetrators took the advantage of weaker physical strength and isolated place. In each crime, the victim was alone except in one case where the victim was with her brother. The victims belonged to below the poverty line or middle-class family. Their educational and occupational status levels were low. Yodanis(2004) found in her study that lower educational and occupational statuses of women and girls make them an easy target of sexual assault.

Men attempt to sexually assault the opposite sex to establish their control over them. In this regard (Zillman and Bryant, 1982) have stated in their studies that males usually commit gender-based crimes especially rapes to exhibit their dominance over the victim. Men generally believe that women are only an element of pleasure or a subordinate to men both sexually and in daily life and it can be seen in the two incidents in which 21 years old women and 16 years old girl were sexually assaulted (gang raped) by a group of people, in both the incidents females were dependent on their male partners for help and support, which gave the feeling of supremacy to their male partners and encourage them to perpetrate the crime. During the lockdown period, sexual assault cases are coming from those states, which are known for enormity against women such as Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi (NCRB, 2018). In India, a girl child is trained to be mellow and discouraged from being independent and self-sufficient, whereas the boys are trained to be aggressive, in their daily lives and physical relationships (Indian women: Yesterday, today and tomorrow, 2015). Even television and cinema depict the stereotype image of men and women (Cuklanz, 2000). Many historical studies show there are many factors are involved in strangers and acquaintances rapes and gang rapes. This study will consider all factors, which have already identified much research and correlate it with the incidents of rape crimes that happened during the lockdown and prepare a model containing multiple factors that encourages the perpetrator to commit the crime.

Causes

Historical shreds of evidence suggest that violent behavior of perpetrators is a result of multi factors.

Cultural factors

The upbringing of the child is also responsible for the sexual violent behaviour of boys and men in Indian society. Generally, boys are raised in male dominating family structures, where males are encouraged to be more aggressive. The traditional dominance of male in the family encouraged becoming violent adults, who can have the habit to get involved in acquaintance rapes (Straus et al., 1980; Gwartney-Gibbs et al., 1983). Sexual talk is a taboo subject in

Indian society (WHO,2002). There is a tradition of hiding sexual abuse and sexual assault cases in the family. Generally, it has been seen the boys who sexually abused in childhood have developed as a perpetrator in young age and girls are considered to be an easy target of sexual assault(Bryce,2020).World health organization has defined sexual assault as intercourse with a female by using ‘coercion’.Every culture has a different understanding of forced sexual intercourse. In many parts of India polygamy is acceptable, one wife of several brothers.Marriages of a girl child are popular in certain parts of rural India(Straus et al., 1980). The patriarchal society supported the belief that man is a decision-maker of the family and he has all the rights to dominate over his wife and can perform any kind of violence to control her(Malamuth, 1981).

Biological factors

Males can have sexual relationships with multiple female partners at the same time but females have a task of pregnancy and nurturing the young, are often have one sex partner at one time.Several studies have shown that adult men have more interest in keeping a relationship with multiple females at the same time. They are less interested in long-term relationships. The desire of having impersonal sex is more in adult males than in adult females (Pazzani2007, Shukla&David, 2020).

Physiology and Neurophysiology

Many physiological or neurophysiological studies show that the reason behind the violent and aggressive behavior of males is steroid hormones such as testosterone.The evidence of several studies showed that high testosterone levels will increase the probabilities of aggressive behaviors, supersuperiority in nonhuman mammals and they also believe that hormones are the major reasons of aggressive behavior in humans also(Batrinis,2012; Montesana&Adreani,2020)

Psychiatric and personality disorders

Most studies argued that the perpetrator has several psychiatric and personality disorders. They have a very peculiar temperament. Studies also showed that the accuser is generally posed a low-status occupation profile and have a very poor education (Sarkar,2013).

Social Learning

Social learning theory advocated that humans first observed the behavior of others and their consequences. They adopt social behavior, which is appropriate for them,and have positive outcomes. The theory does not explain the aggressive and violent behavior of men but it supports that people acquired social behavior after observing its outcomes(Gatimu,2019).

Media

Pornography and objectification of women in the media encourage the sexual aggression of men.Several studies showed that today’s television programs and films are full of sexual violence content. The story generally narrates the visual depiction of sexual violence and rapes. The long-time exposures to violence on television encourage aggressiveness in boys and turned into an adult with a violent nature (Kalra&Bhugra,2013).

Social disorganization theory

Social disorganization theory explains the factors involved in different types of crimes.The theory states that the society, which has a lower control on social mechanism have higher crime rates than a society that has social control. Different variables like a large number of tourists and a large percentage of migrant’s movements increase social disorganization Single parenting, disorganized family and the places where neighbors have no interaction and affinity has more number of crimes (Pazzani,2007). Bursik and Grasmick (1994) tried to establish a relationship between social disorganization and sexual assault. He stated that gang

activates are highly active in social disorganization society and gang rapes are a group activity.

Social Factors

Feminist theories argue the gender inequality is a major factor behind the sexual assault. It also states that in a patriarchal society women are oppressed (Sharam&Donovan,2020, Shukla& David,2020).Men have a higher place in society and family. Females are forced to follow their male partners and if they resist the male can use power to control them. The belief that sexual violence releases tension, leaves the perpetrator feeling better, often achieves its ends by cutting off arguments and is rarely associated with serious punishment for the perpetrator.

Sex Ratio

Many research studies show that male and female sex ratio also plays a major role in the prevalence of sexual violence. In India 930 females per 1000 males.The higher difference between the numbers of males and females increase the possibility of sexual assault(Shukla&David,2020)

4. RESULT

In most of the crimes the perpetrator were leaving the victims at isolated places and did the crime in the night.21 years old women were raped near the bank of Yamuna river,14 years and 16 years old girls were gangs raped at the forest and near nonworking dam (Elsa May 01, 2020).In another case a 40 years old lady was raped in a school building when nobody was there.A series of studies showed that on average every males have a tendency to rape females (Boylon,2019).Malamuth(1981)conducted a survey and focus group study in which many male respondents accepted that they love to rape women and girls for their sexual pleasure. They avoid doing so because of the fear of being caught and punished. Lockdown has created an appropriate situation for them. They can easily rape the victim with no fear of punishments.The biological factor to have sexual relationship with many fertile femalescould be a reason for them to commit rapes. The involvement of minors in gang rapes shows that the males having no female partners are more likely to perpetrate the rape (Shukla&David,2020).India has a patriarchal society, where the females are completely or partially dependent on their male partners. This dependency leads to exploitation and sexual assault of females. The reliance on the other gender confines their dynamic limit, development, public activity, unrestrained choice and even make them more vulnerable to sexual violence (Sexual Abuse and Domestic Violence During Lockdown,May 11,2020).This happened in two gang rape cases one is 21 years old lady and other of 16 years old girl .

5. CONCLUSION

Every perpetrator has different motivation to commit the crime(Pazzani,2007).There have been a plethora of studies which identified multiple factors which encourage men to perpetrate the sex crime,such as biological factor (Shukla& David,2020), media portrayal (Zillman& Bryant, 1982), inequality in gender (Shukla& David,2020), cultural factor (Kalra, &Bhugra, 2013), and social learning and disorganization (Pazzani,2007). Indian men also have different reasons to get involve in sexual assault. Sexual violence against women cannot be prevent only controlling one factor. Thefinding of this study shows patriarchal structure of society, different upbringings of male and female, media, low education, depression, social learning,social disorganization theory(moment of migrants from one state to other), insecurity of future, frustration,are some major factors of existence of sexual assault during COVID19. Another set of social thinkers also stated the boredom, monotonicity of daily life are some

other factors, which compelled the rapist to get involved in sexual assault crimes to indulge in the pleasure of adventure. The rape culture is growing in India and this is the time to work in this area is very important.

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