

Topic: Sexual Harassment And Safety Of Women On Campus-Challenges And Remedies

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Sexual harassment and safety of women on campus - Challenges and remedies

Abstract

Safety of girls in and outside campuses has become a topic of hot discussions after several incidents ranging from minor cases of threats and verbal abuses to the extent of rape and murder are being reported daily. The newspaper carries reports of girls, even minor ones, being molested in the school and college campuses either by fellow class mates, senior students or even by people with authority and power, the teachers. Sexual harassment is taking place on a day to day basis in campus and outside. It takes place anywhere even in public places under broad day light. Are girls safe in campuses has become a question and the tension is carried to the parents to the extent of making a rethinking about the future of their daughters.

The issue is gaining more attention and becoming an issue of serious concern because more and more girls are entering the gates of education and girls are more vulnerable than boys in terms of sexual harassment. Knowledge explosion in recent years made our campuses to witness an inflow of large number of girl students seeking admission. Unlike the early periods the enrolment of girls in higher education is overwhelming. The patriarchal nature of Indian society always has given a second position to women which resulted in low level of education among girls. But the recent developments in the field of education, industry, employment etc. helped the girls to break the patriarchal bond and to embrace education. However the mindset of people about women as objects of pleasure still continues which remains as a hurdle questioning the freedom and safety of girls. The educational institutions need to develop mechanisms to ensure safety of women on campus.

Key Words: sexual harassment, safety measures, patriarchal society

Safety of girls inside and outside campus: Whom to be blamed?

Safety of girls in society has become a subject of hot discussion as several instances of rape, molestation and harassment are reported in the media. Such instances are getting more attention due to the wider publicity given by the media and victims ,today, are courageous to report it to the police to get justice. However the situation is becoming worse as more such cases are reported every day.

The educational institutions are also feeling the seriousness of the situation as they witness an ever increasing flow of students, especially girls in all levels of education starting from the primary education to higher education. The number of girls opting professional courses are also on the increase. This inflow of students' poses a threat to the girl students as the institutions are not properly equipped with facilities to protect and safe guard the interests of them. The modern education demands the participation of students in different activities and requires the presence of students in the campus even beyond the regular working hours. The need to complete assignments and projects, using library and Lab., participation in cultural and sports activities, force the students to stay back in the campus beyond the usual working hours. In the absence of proper mechanism to check the movement of students, especially in the night, calls for unpleasant incidents. Girls coming from a strict patriarchal environment may find it difficult to adjust with the co-educational system and the environment of big campuses. The deteriorating value system in the family and educational institutions add further difficulties to the campus life of girls. The social media, increased use of drugs and alcohols, pornographic literatures, luxurious life and lavish spending of the young generation often become harmful to the safety of women in campus.

The problems usually suffered by girls inside or outside the campus include demands for sexual favors, open or concealed promises of preferential treatment, promotion, higher grades etc for sexual favors, or threats of losing marks or job if such favors are rejected, communicating or displaying obscene letters, posters or photographs,, harassment through telephone calls or E-mail, following and passing comments, whistling, physical contact and blackmailing.

Sexual harassment: Sexual harassment often equated with eve teasing in the past but today it is redefined to include many other activities that hurt the feelings and dignity of women. Sexual harassment is a serious criminal offence. The supreme court's landmark Vishaka judgement of 1997 redefined sexual harassment and sought to protect women from sexual harassment by placing the responsibility of providing a safe work environment to the management or administration. Thus it is mandatory to have a sexual harassment redressal mechanism to ensure safety of women. The UGC guidelines also provide guidelines to the institutions for constructing forums and cells to deal with any problem related to harassment. Regardless of legislative and other measures the problem seems to amounting to a large extent where the school children are also not spared.

Supreme Court had redefined sexual harassment in the following terms :- "Sexual harassment includes such sexually determined behaviour such as : physical contact, a demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography, any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature." This means that sexual harassment is different from sexual desire, mutual romance or love. It is unwelcome sexual behavior. Sexual harassment can come in many forms like physical, psychological, verbal or non-verbal.

Extent of the problem

Harassments or attacks on girls on campus often go unreported because educational institutions do not have proper mechanism in place to monitor the behavior of students, counsel them, record complaints and initiate proceedings and also because of the fear of losing the reputation of the institution. The institutions largely try to protect their face rather than helping the victim and finding out the culprit. Moreover the victim keeps it as secret because of the fear of social disapproval and fear of discontinuing education. Fear of being attacked and the impact of harassment interfere with female students' activities in all fields in the campus. The recent incidents like the Delhi gang rape case or the incidents in Bangalore schools made the university and school administrators to take some stringent measures to safeguard the dignity of girl students.

The reports and surveys conducted on the issue of safety of girls noted that in India sexual harassment is wide spread and it occurs on a daily basis, every day a woman is harassed

every 51 minutes and sexually molested every 26 minutes. The Gender Study Group of the University of Delhi, 1996 shows that 92 percent of women in hostels and 88 percent of women day scholars have faced sexual harassment on campus. A 1997 survey of colleges in Mumbai found that 39 percent of women students have experienced harassment.

Reports on child molestations in campus have become a regular feature of the media. A few such incidents reported in India Today on August 4, 2014 are noted, which shows the intensity and frequency of such incidents.

1. This incident is from Malda, where a 13 years school girl belonging to a village called Barampur, was molested inside her school campus by a group of youths who often used to tease her once she was outside the campus. Just because she turned down the proposal of one of them, all three of them conspired against her to take revenge of their insult.

2. An eight years old girl from Maxfort School, Rohini, Delhi was molested by a teacher for a second time in April this year, the last time being in August last year within the school premises.

3. In another sad incident, a hearing impaired student studying in a reputed Prabhadevi school for the deaf and aphasic was molested by the school's principal, aged 42 along with a teacher, aged 37. The victim had named six other students who had gone through the same horrible ordeal.

4. In yet another shocking incident a 14-year-old girl student of Jadavpur Sammilita Balika Vidyalaya, Kolkata was molested by a youth in the toilet, who had entered the school premises after jumping a wall.

5. Another incident that came into light was that of one of Bangalore's Vibgyor High school, where a six year old girl was allegedly molested by a school staff person.

These are only few of the reported cases and many more are unreported and often go unnoticed by the public. These incidents are eye openers for the authorities to take stringent actions to ensure the safety of girls in the campus

Objectives:

- To find out the nature of harassment suffered by girls in campus.
- To understand the major causes of insecurity of girls in campus

- To find out the measures introduced to provide security to girls and
- To find out the effectiveness of the safety measures.

Methodology

The materials relevant for the study were collected mainly from secondary sources. The News paper reports were analyzed to find out the nature and extent of the problem. Unstructured interviews of school and college authorities including administrators and teachers, and students were conducted to find out the causes, measures introduced to safeguard the interest of students and the extent to which these measures are effective.

Findings:

Nature of harassment:

It has been reported that the widely spread and common form of harassment is passing vulgar comments and whistling with bad intentions. The perpetrators sit in groups near the college gate, bus stop or nearby playgrounds with the intention of passing comments which affects the confidence the girls especially when they are alone. Another form of harassment is unpleasant way of staring at the girls. However the most irritating and the most condemned act is the physical touch. Physical touch is reported to be a daily nuisance in bus, canteen, corners of the campus, staircase etc. almost all the students interviewed revealed that one or other form of physical touch has been experienced by them in and outside the campus.

Causes for insecurity of girls in campus:

It has been noted that the male domination in every sphere of life and the consideration of women as second class citizens is a great hurdle in the path of women to protest against any untoward incident. The condition of women in India has always been a matter of grave concern. Since the past several centuries, the women of India were never given equal status and opportunities as compared to that of their male counterparts. The patriarchal nature of Indian society, which even though gives respect to women as they are our mothers and sisters, has greatly hampered both the independence as well as the safety of women and suppressed them to the extent that they are left with no option of protesting and reporting the insult. One of the main reasons of violence against women is the mentality which deems women inferior of men and merely limits their importance to the maintenance of the

household, the upbringing of children and pleasing their husbands and serving other members of the family. Unless and until this mentality changes safety of women is in danger.

We always bring up our girls under strict rules and regulations and we are very liberal in our ways of upbringing of our sons. We never bother to tell our sons the need to respect the opposite sex and indirectly send a message that they are the commodities to be used by the male.

The increased use of electronic media with all new applications became a threat to the safety of women. Electronic media is largely misused than used for passing abusive messages, taking photos and sharing, passing false information etc. Electronic media increased the accessibility to pornography and exploitation of girls. The social media like twitter, facebook and other online communication methods are used to establish contacts with girls and blackmail them. Though the universities and colleges have banned the use of mobile phones inside the campus, girls have reported many incidents of taking photos and passing messages within or outside the classroom.

The safety audit carried out by Jagori, an NGO, in association with Pehel and the United Nations Trust Fund's Gender Inclusive Cities Project on sexual harassment in Delhi University noted the following infrastructural problems. Open campus with badly maintained roads, Speeding vehicles, lack of street lights, blocking of roads due to construction activities, no visible sign boards to locate the departments and other places. Large trees and bushes often provide safe haven for the perpetrators to hide and attack the students unnoticed by others. Educational institutions often fail to provide infrastructure that cater to the needs of the female students. Most schools and colleges do not have toilet facilities or poor maintenance of toilets. Many students reported the unclean and poorly maintained toilets in the campus forcing them to use secluded places, which often invites trouble.

Sexual harassment and violence in educational institutions is an abuse of power by teachers and lecturers and corrupts the education system.(University World News December 2014) Students, especially girls, may be deterred from participating actively in class and seeking academic excellence for fear of attracting unwanted attention from teachers. This creates a stressful and intimidating learning environment, lowers concentration and motivation and

contributes to poor performance,” (Leach). Professors, research guides, Principals, headmasters and teachers who have power and authority often misuse it. Asking for sexual favours and threatening the students with giving low marks, failing in exams etc. has become very common.

In higher education, sex in exchange for good grades or leaked exam questions, and sometimes also admission to an institution or to a high-status course. “The price of resistance is likely to be failure or exclusion,” (Leach). Perpetrators can be lecturers or administrative staff. In higher education, female staff is also known to be targeted by predatory male staff and sometimes by male students. The female research scholars have reported of sexual favours demanded by their research guides which they have to obey because of the fear of not awarding degree. Many such cases have been reported from the universities of Karnataka.

Scared of the consequences, only a small per cent of the students have reported such incidents to the police. The incidents are not reported because of the fear of social stigma, or the fear that their education will be stopped. The society often targets the girl and they are isolated and criticized or blamed for getting into such situations and inviting trouble due to their fault. However, more cases are now being reported which becomes an eye opener for others.

The demands of modern higher education where the students have to stay back in the campus even after working hours give the culprits more opportunities to take advantage of the situation. Lack of proper assistance and supportive mechanisms to safe guard the girls, they often falls into the hands of perpetrators. Moreover, large open campuses with public roads passing through the campus become a double trap as public also will get easy access to the campus. As students move from one department to another or to library which are located in isolated areas, they become prey to attack by outsiders.

Today the family values are changing with both parents becoming busy in their work and not having time to share with their children and inculcate values in them. The negligence or inability of parents to provide care and protection to children and to check their daily activities often lead to children watching unwanted movies and spending time with their friends away from the control and attention of their parents. inherently leading to development of misbehaviors. Moreover the readiness to spend lavishly to meet the demands of children goes a long way in putting them in trouble.

Measures to ensure safety to girl children

Safety of girls is a growing concern that must be addressed by college campuses, particularly by the management and administrators. In order for college administrators to address safety concerns, they must be aware of the types of safety issues present on their campus. The wide spread outrage after the Delhi gang rape case, India's higher education regulatory body, the University Grants Commission was forced to review the safety of women in higher education institutions. Similarly the recent incidents of sexual harassment of school children reported from Bangalore opened the eyes of school administrative bodies to pass more stringent actions to protect the safety of girls.

The move towards establishment of Women Development Cells and Prevention of Sexual Harassment Cells is a welcome initiative taken by the government and universities. The supreme court verdict (the Supreme Court's landmark VishakaJudgement in 1997) and the UGC guidelines resulted in the setting up of sexual harassment redressal cells in educational institutions and working places.

Efforts have to be taken for Gender sensitization programmes. There is a need to change the mindset of the people about women and her role in society. Gender sensitization discussions should be made an integral part of public discourse in campuses in order to build awareness on the same. Gender sensitization can be included in the curriculum to make both boys and girls to be aware of dignity and worth of each human being. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has taken decisive step for safety and security of girl students and woman teachers in colleges, campuses and educational institutions across the country in accordance with the "Saksham," a report of the Task Force set up by UGC to "Review the measures for ensuring safety and security of women in campuses and programmes for gender sensitization." There is need for awareness generating programmes for faculty and students in college with respect to the sexual harassment laws, the policy of the university body and the punishments for different types of harassments.

Installing Surveillance cameras in the campus and public places can effectively check the movements of people within the campus. Campus security providing some form of security patrol, safety escort service, emergency phone system and emergency phone numbers can prevent possible threat. Regular patrolling of the campus by security guards is the institutional responsibility to protect the students from possible threats.

Appointing mentors and conducting regular mentoring sessions can help the students to share any form of harassment experienced by them and the culprits can be immediately identified and punished. The mentoring sessions give them an opportunity to open up and to freely express their feelings to come out of the trauma suffered by them

Of course strict legislative measures have to be introduced to punish the culprits and to prevent others from such heinous acts. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act and other rules clearly states the role of the school in ensuring the safety and security of children. .

Effectiveness of safety measures

The effectiveness of the security measures was assessed to make suggestions for further studies.

The forums or cells to address the grievances of women are found to be of limited use and the reasons pointed out in this respect include- students are not properly informed about the working of the cells such as how to place their grievances before it. Many students do not know that such cells are existing in their college. Some said that they have seen in the hand book about such a cell but could not actually locate from where it functions or identify the person in charge of it. The students reported that the complaint or suggestion box is kept in the college but they have not received any answers to the queries that they have asked for. That shows that the suggestions box is not opened regularly and the issues are not taken care of. Also there are no experts to deal with the complaints received. Thus it becomes a mechanism that established for namesake.

Even the surveillance cameras are not regularly checked and perpetrators are not identified on a regular basis. Only when some issues develop the camera footages are scrutinized which may help to find out the culprit and punish him but the incident could not be prevented.

When the established systems fail to provide security to students it becomes necessary for the students to take some precautionary measures by themselves. It can be suggested that for preventing such untoward incidents:

- Students can move in groups
- avoid using secluded places beyond the visibility of security guards
- equip themselves with some measures to escape from the culprits
- take care not to respond to anonymous calls and messages
- inculcate confidence to say no to demand of sexual favours even if it is made by a person in authority
- be brave to report any unpleasant incidents immediately to the authorities and parents
- don't easily fall prey to blackmailing of any kind
- When they are staying back in the campus it should be informed to the parents, warden, friends etc.
- Be ready to give an alarm to anyone nearby when suspect any possible attack

The security of girls in campus is the responsibility of all concerned from the parents to the society at large. The institutions have to follow the guide lines given by the government and other controlling bodies by establishing necessary mechanisms. The mindset of the society towards women has to be changed to welcome the girls as citizens with dignity and worth. A general awareness creation is needed in this respect. Moreover the girls also need to be equipped with facing situations with courage and not to invite incidents by their carelessness.

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