

Eve Teasing: Safety Drives Crucial Element To Fight Back

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Abstract: --- Our society has grown by leaps and bounds; yet, a woman still struggles to protect her dignity, even in broad daylight. Eve teasing is a street level sexual harassment which includes unwelcome verbal, nonverbal and physically determined sexual behaviour by a man towards a woman. Actions like touching, rubbing, staring, pinching, making obscene gestures and remarks to a woman falls under the umbrella of eve teasing. Though it may seem as an innocent and harmless act, it often leaves the victim with fear, anxiety, shame and embarrassment questioning her own actions and her expressions of identity. In spite of the various measures taken to put an end to this heinous practice, it still continues to be witnessed in every nook and corner of our society. The current study conducted on 30 girls is an attempt to enquire whether the safety drives / campaigns by the government are an effective measure in fighting eve teasing from the society.

Keywords: Eve teasing, Sexual harassment

I. INTRODUCTION

Eve teasing is a global phenomenon of social menace. In every walk of life women are bullied, taunted, harassed and physically assaulted. (Kairy, 2009) Though it is an unacceptable sexual behaviour by men towards a woman, it is often justified as a mild and minor form of harmless act. A woman is simply accepted to tolerate this public harassment which includes a wide range of verbal, non verbal and physical assaults such as obscene gestures, winking, pinching, shadowing and remarks which are often sexual in nature (Bhattacharya, 2014).

It was during the 1980's nationwide anti-rape campaign that the issue regarding sexual harassment in public places was addressed. The movement threw light on the fact that though these kinds of acts are very common in public places; they are often seen as 'innocent fun' which tends to encourage the other heinous offences such as rape (Patel, 1985).

'Eve teasing' is a term for street level sexual harassment generally used in the Indian subcontinent. Though not defined in the Indian law, it is a euphemism, a conduct which attracts penal action' (Devi & Jasrotia, 2013). The term 'eve-teasing' refers to sexual assault or sexual harassment of women, verbally or by making vulgar gestures. Eve-teasing in simple words means harassment of a woman by making vulgar gestures, sexual remarks, winking, whistling, staring, touching her inappropriately,

groping, etc. , as published in the article of Law Leader dated 12th sept'2016.

Devi and Jasrotia (2013) listed the following five heads of eve teasing as categorized by the Indian Journal of Criminology and Criminalistics (Jan-June 1999 Edition) in their study:

- Verbal eve teasing
- Physical eve teasing
- Psychological harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Harassment through some object

Gadekar (2016) in his study described that a great source of encouragement to eve teasing is the wrong mindset of males who see women as open person in public places and a means to fulfill their physical needs. In a patriarchal society, the issue of masculinity and masculine agenda is prevalent in a large scale. Men always try to dominate women and reinforce his higher position over her. Degradation of social, cultural and moral values is a result of the bad impact of electronic and social media. And due to the absence of strong punishment and law, there is a failure to create fear against 'just for fun' attitude among the eve-teasers. While the perpetrators are left unpunished the incident faced by women has a negative psychological and socio-cultural impact on the victim. The fear of the eve-teaser can also cause various types of mental disease (Bhattacharya, 2014). Often a woman is blamed for inviting harassment and as a result is deprived freedom. In many cases the victim is traumatised to such

International Journal of Science, Engineering and Management (IJSEM)

Vol 2, Issue 8, August 2017

extent that she is pushed to commit suicide (Kairy,2009). To ensure safety of the girl child, the guardians of the victim are compelled to stop the education of their girl (Gadekar, 2016)

Eve teasing is the most underreported forms of harassment. Fear of shame, lack of family support and the attitude of the police to lodge a complaint only when the issue is reached to a new level make the victim reluctant to file a complaint against the perpetrators.

To stop the street harassment a country –wide standard decision was issued by the Indian Supreme Court, which was as follows (Kearl, 2012):

- To handle on the spot issue ,undercover police to be placed in public places prone to such incidents such as bus stands, railway station, metro station, beaches, parks ,cinema theatres and shopping malls.
- To prevent the act of harassment, holding the person in –charge of education institution, cinema theatres, railway station, bus stand, places of worship and staff of public transport responsible.
- To tackle the issue on a large scale, establishment of women’s helpline and even holding the bystanders responsible for their non-action

From time to time, police is launching various operations/drives to curb this menace.

In 1986 or 1987, to teach a lesson to the perpetrators a unique operation ‘Majnu ka Pinjra’ (Majnu’s Cage) was launched in Allahabad in which the perpetrators were put in a caged vehicle and were driven to the police station through the city (Ghose, 2017).

In 2012, Government of Madhya Pradesh constituted zonal women’s cells in Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Gwalior for effective control over crimes against women (Department of Public Relation, Madhya Pradesh, 2013). To ensure strict punishment to the eve teasers it was decided that the perpetrators will be denied of passport, driving license and other government facilities, as reported in The Times of India article dated 20th Nov ’2012. In January 2013, women’s helpline ‘1090’ was started and the Self –defence programmes by sports ,police and school education department came into force (Department of Public Relation, Madhya Pradesh, 2013). In 2015 in the state of Punjab , the Deputy Collector of Ferozpur, decided to take various initiatives such as the instructions to school to leave girl’s 15 minutes before the school timing, free of cost pepper spray to all girls of government schools and in case of not taking any

action by the village panchayat ,the suspension of development grant ,as reported in the Hindustan Times article dated 20th may 2015.

To tackle the growing concern against women, an all women patrol team was launched by Udaipur in 2016 which made it the first city to launch such drive (Singh , 2017)

To ensure safety in public places and transport, Government of Delhi has directed police verification of school bus staff, allotment of lady police officer, installation of GPS and CCTV cameras and increase in the number of PCR vans. (Phukan, 2014). As an effective measure to check crime against women Delhi police launched a ‘She to Shakti’ campaign in Delhi University to train girls in unarmed combat so that they can patrol crime –prone areas along with the policewoman , as reported in the IndiaTV article dated 9th march 2015.

To provide information about women related government scheme programs and 24 hour immediate and emergency support and assistance to women, both in public and private places under one roof across the country, a women helpline (WHL) will be integrated with One Stop Centre scheme (OSC). A short code 181 has been allocated to all states/UTs which is being used by some states/UTs such as Delhi, Chandigarh, Chhattisgarh as Women Helpline (Ministry of Women and Child Development Government of India, New Delhi, 2015).

However, the campaigns which were expected to combat eve teasing in it are marked by the harassment of innocent youths. The ‘squads’ do not have any definite role and any legislation to follow; they often seem to indulge in moral policing , as reported in The Wire article dated 4th April 2017.

In 2005, ‘Operation Majnu’ was widely criticised as the couples who were found together in gardens were thrashed and even the boys were pulled at crossings and markets by police ,as reported in the Times of India article dated 22nd march 2017.

As reported in the Mail Online India article dated 5th April 2017. In 2017,under one of the preventive measure of harassment called ‘Anti-Romeo Squad’ boys were penalised for standing outside college, young students were roughly interrogated and beaten , couples were chased at public places such as shopping malls, railway station ,college campuses, even the heads were shaved and faces were blackened in the name of women safety. Such controversial acts have led to a demand by the women right activist to disband these ‘squads’.

Ganesha and Nithya (2015) stated that eve-teasing is a kind of sexual harassment. The study analysed the

magnitude of eve-teasing and its relation to age, socio-economic and psychological factors. Devi and Jasorita (2013) in their study described the violence faced by women and the rights of women to live their life with dignity and freedom. Study by Bhattacharyya (2014) suggested that the society needs a strong legislation to combat eve-teasing. The various laws to prevent harassment in our country were described. Gadekar (2016) in his study stated the harmful impacts of eve-teasing on the victim. The humiliation and traumatic experience results in the underestimation of oneself. Also the acts committed by eve teasers are considered an unlawful intrusion on the rights of privacy and sanctity of female.

As eve teasing can impact a girl's mental and social status throughout her life, strict legislation can be a helpful tool to prevent the threat of violence. This paper discusses the various preventive measures and their effective role in fighting back eve teasing from the society.

Study

The present study focuses to understand the effectiveness of suggestive measures proposed to curb eve teasing.

Sample

The study was conducted among the girls residing in Bhopal. The sample size of 30 girls who were of the age group of 17 to 25 years was selected.

Material

A questionnaire consisting of 17 questions was developed for the collection of data based on the following aspects of eve teasing:

- Awareness of the sample about the concept of eve teasing
- Possible situations faced by eve teaser
- Reasons of eve teasing
- Role of police and the existing framework to tackle the issue of eve teasing
- Suggestive measures to curb eve teasing

Instructions

The following instructions were given to the subjects: The questionnaire consists of 17 questions. There is no right or wrong answer and hence no evaluative judgements. So, feel free to give the honest responses also the confidentiality of the identity would be maintained

Procedure

The subjects were given the questionnaire to select the response among the given options. After the data collection was over, scoring of the responses and their data analysis was done.

Interpretation and discussion

In response to the question number 1, What do you understand by 'Sexual street harassment' / 'Eve Teasing'?- 28 subjects responded that any unwanted and uncomfortable behaviour towards a woman is eve teasing while 2 subjects responded that it is a means to get a woman's attention in the public space whereas none of the subjects responded that it is a light hearted flirtation in public space.

The responses show that the subjects were aware of the concept of eve teasing. They were of the same view that eve teasing cannot be attributed as light hearted flirtation which is a general view in the eyes of the society. Only when the society would accept it as an unacceptable sexual behaviour by men towards a woman, this societal crime could be kept in check.

In response to the question number 2, where are the incidents of 'Sexual Street Harassment' / 'Eve teasing' prevalent in your city?-just 3 subjects responded that the incidents are very rampant while 4 subjects responded that they are not sure, 13 subjects responded that they are common while 11 subjects responded that there are a few incidents of eve teasing but none of the subject responded that their city is safe.

This shows that in spite of the various initiatives taken against eve teasing, girls still find their society to be unsafe. Since the existing provisions for legal protection of women have failed to keep the society safe for a girl, it remains a regular fight for her to maintain her dignity and sense of security.

In response to the question number 3, 15 subjects responded that the incidents generally occur on a road or street, 5 subjects responded that they occur generally in busy markets, 5 subjects responded that they are almost in every public space while 2 subjects responded that they are not prevalent in the city.

The response shows that eve teasing is a common practice on roads or streets but less prevalent in public transport. Eve teasing occurs everywhere, whether it is road, busy market, shopping mall, railway station or any other public place. But by targeting a woman on the streets by sexual remarks and physical advances is more common and convenient to the eve teaser; it affects the mobility of a woman to any public space.

In response to the question number 4, Do you think Sexual Street Harassment/ Eve Teasing is a matter of Concern?-15 subjects responded that it concerns them very deeply, 1 subject responded that it is a trivial matter, 12 subjects responded that they do think about it as it concerns them, 2 subjects responded that they are not sure but none of the subjects responded that it's not a serious problem at all.

The responses indicate that eve teasing which is often a trivial matter for the society is rather a matter of deep concern for the girls. Eve teasing can result in an experience which could be very traumatic for a woman. It can push a woman in a state where she is susceptible to everyone, make her feel helpless, impact her personal and academic development and also affect her sense of security to a great extent.

In response to the question number 5, tick the situations of eve teasing, as common and rare according to your knowledge/ experience -17 subjects reported that the incidents of staring is very common, 13 subjects reported that the incidents of whistling is common while the incidents of touching by 18 subjects, pinching/poking by 16 subjects and pushing against them in public transport by 15 subjects was reported to be rare.

The results indicate that the perpetrators are generally found to be involved in verbal and non verbal assault rather than the physical assault. Eve teasers undergo passing lewd comments about looks and body, winking, whistling, staring, unnecessary touching, pushing and shoving in public space. Regardless of the frequency of these incidents, the fact that every girl has to face it cannot be put at the backdrop.

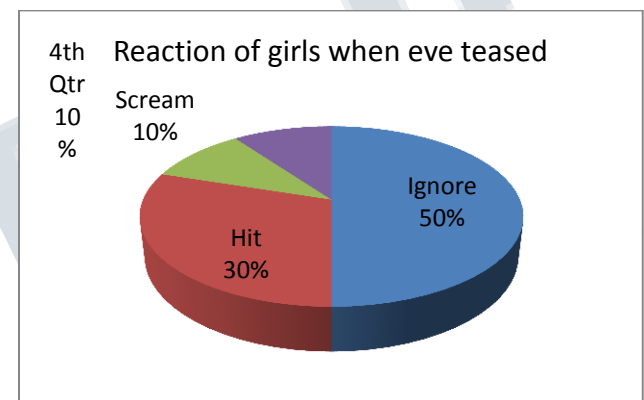
In response to the question number 6, do you feel secure or insecure in respect to your clothes and time- 16 subjects responded that they sometimes feel insecure irrespective of their clothes and time, 9 subjects responded that they feel secure as long as their clothes and time are appropriate, 4 subjects responded that they never feel secure irrespective of their clothes and time and only of the 1 subject responded that she feels secure irrespective of her clothes and time.

The responses show that the girls feel insecure regardless of what they are wearing and at what time they are present in public places. Police and the society have failed to provide an environment where a girl can feel safe. Boys should be imparted moral education that girls should be respected and not viewed as sexual object no matter what a she wears, where she goes and at what time thereby giving her a sense of security and freedom of choice.

In response to the question number 7, How would you react if you have been eve teased?-15 Subjects

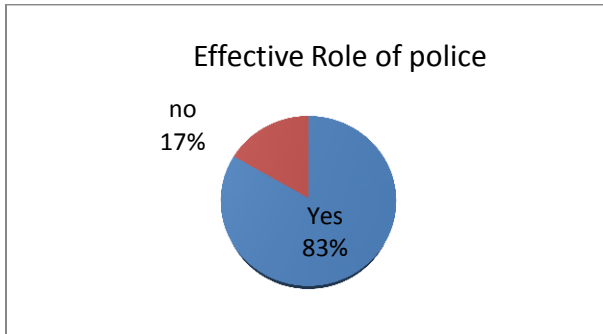
responded that they would ignore the act of eve teasing, 9 subjects responded that they would hit the eve teaser, 3 subjects responded that they would scream while 3 subjects responded that they would take help of their male family member.

When faced with the incidents of eve teasing majority of the girls prefer to ignore the unwanted behaviour of the men. Though eve teasers try to get a girl's attention either by passing sexual comment or physical advances, she prefers to ignore such unwanted acts to avoid it to rise to a new level of troublesome act for her in the near future. Also, due to the lack of support from the society and the ignorant attitude from the police pushes her not to pay any attention to it.



In response to the question number 8, Do you think the role of police in curbing eve teasing is crucial?-25 subjects responded that the police play a crucial role in eve teasing while 5 subjects responded that they do not think the role of police is crucial in this matter.

Effective policing can be a key to protection and enforcement of women's safety. Police should be sensitive to such matters. Under such incidents, local police can play a crucial role in providing immediate help, support and compassion towards the victim thereby not letting her to feel helpless. Police should even try to build a relationship of trust where in need of help the victim can approach them without any fear and hesitation of being misjudged.



In response to the question number 9, At a broader level, why do incidents of Sexual Street Harassment occur in society?- 5 subjects responded that the police is inefficient in ensuring safe environment, 17 subjects responded that there are no stringent punishment to deter the culprits, while 17 subjects responded that males have a wrong mindset about females, 1 subject responded that women dress inappropriately however none of the subjects responded that women invite trouble themselves by going to 'wrong places' at 'wrong times'.

The society needs to understand that it is not the dress of the women that instigates such incidents but rather the mindset of the men that see women as sexual object.

In response to the question number 10, Which if ensured will have the most positive impact to stop 'Sexual Street Harassment'?- 25 subjects responded that there should be strong laws to punish culprits to deter future incidents, 9 subjects responded that women should understand how to dress suitably and where to go at what time, 13 subjects responded that there is a need of change in perception of men towards women and their rights, and just 1 subject responded that the reporting of such incidents could ensure a positive impact in this matter.

According to the responses lack of stringent punishment for the culprits and the wrong mindset of males about females are the major reasons of eve teasing. If effective measures are ensured to tackle these causes, it would lead to the most positive impact to stop eve teasing.

In response to the question number 11, Do you/ would you report a case of Sexual Street Harassment to the police?- only 6 subjects responded that they would always report a case to the police while 8 subjects responded to report only when the incident is severe, 4 subjects responded if only there is an easier way to report, 1 subject responded that they are not aware of the process, 4 subjects responded that they don't think it is required, 6 subjects responded that they will never report a case as they do not see any advantage in

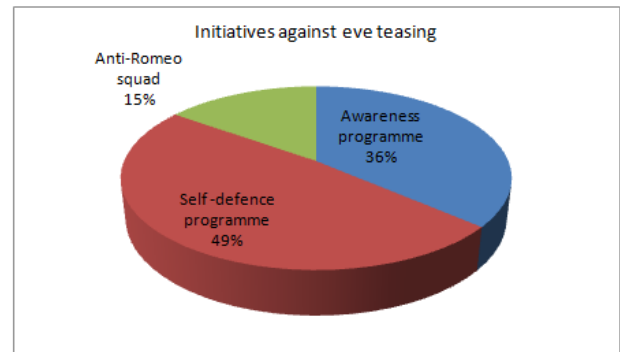
reporting and 3 subjects responded they would rather report it to their family member.

In response to the question number 12, In your opinion, what are the reasons that majority of such cases are not reported to police?-4 subjects responded that there is no easy way to report, 4 subjects responded that there is lack of awareness of existing mechanisms, 8 subjects responded that there is lack of strong laws to convict the culprit, 2 subjects responded that they have prior bad experiences, 4 subjects responded the reporting to insensitive staff, 3 subjects responded that there is a general fear of police, 6 subjects responded the hassles related to the legal procedures, 4 subjects responded the social stigma attached to reporting and only 5 subjects responded that there are no problems, it is pretty convenient and effective to report a case.

The responses show that even though the girls are aware of the process of filing complaint they would report a case only if it is severe. Absence of strong laws is a great factor in encouraging the eve teasers to indulge in such acts and also the major reason among women of not reporting the case. Also due to the social stigma attached to eve teasing, the fear of public shame adds to the non disclosure and unreporting of such incidents.

In response to the question number 13, What can be the possible initiatives against eve teasing?

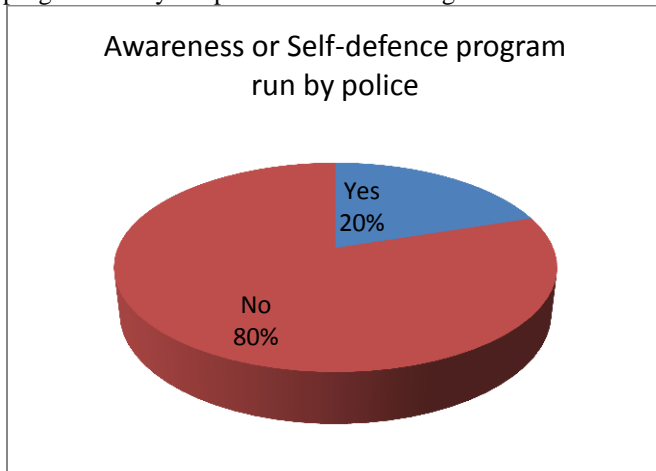
16 subjects responded the need of Self Defence programme while 12 subjects favoured Awareness programme, only 5 subjects see the need of Anti-Romeo squad.



Women should not feel that they are the weaker sections of the society rather they should take self defence training and increase her physical power. Self defence techniques should be the first and foremost things of which each and every woman must be aware and should get it for her safety.

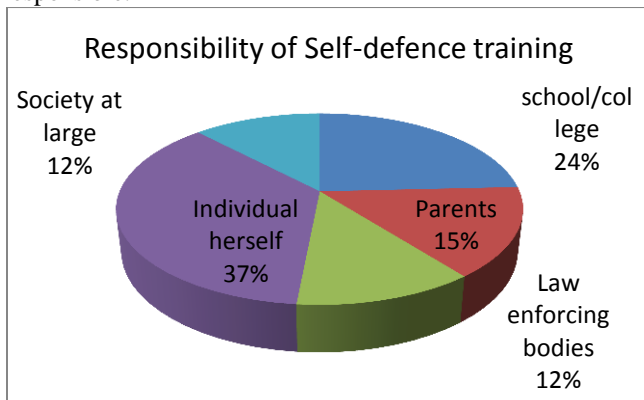
In response to the question number 14, Has police ever run an awareness or self- defence program in your

school/college against eve teasing?- there are only 6 responses in relation to the awareness or self defence program run by the police in school/colleges.



In curbing eve teasing though the role of police is considered significant but the initiatives such as awareness and self defence programs by the police for the safety of girls have failed to be implemented. Failure to providing safety drives to the girls not only encourages the perpetrators but also puts a question over the role and effectiveness of police body

In response to the question number 15, According to you whose responsibility should it be to provide self-defence training to girls?- 8 subjects responded the responsibility of self defence training is of school or college, 5 subjects responded that it the parents responsibility, 4 subjects held the law enforcing bodies responsible, 4 subjects responded that it is the society at large, while 12 subjects responded that it is the individual herself who is responsible.

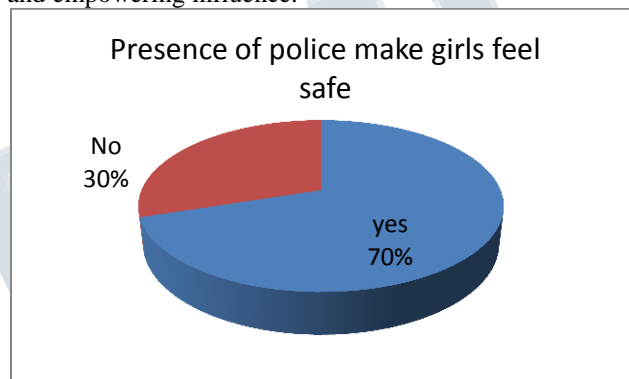


The responses conclude that neither the society at large nor the law enforcing bodies are responsible for providing self-defence training to the girls; it is majorly

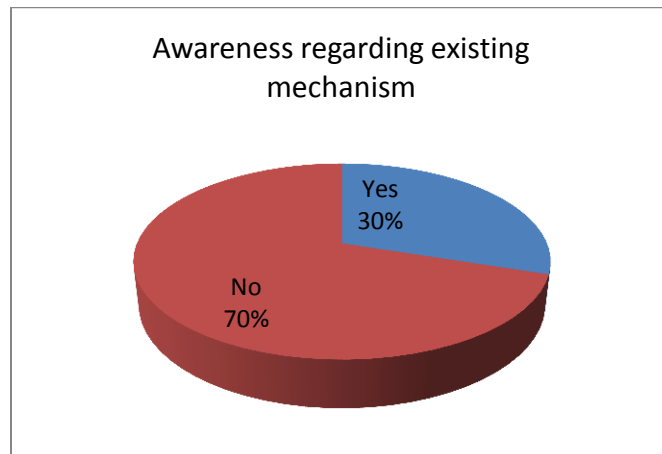
the individual's responsibility. Instead of relying on the help from some other person, girls should make herself strong enough both physically as well mentally to avoid feeling vulnerable and helpless in the face of such situation.

In response to the question number 16, . Does the presence of police in public areas make you feel safe with regard to eve teasing incidents?- 21 subjects responded that they do feel safe in the presence of police while 9 subjects responded that they still feel unsafe in their presence.

The presence of police in public places can be a positive and empowering influence.



In response to the question number 17, 'Are you aware that the government of Madhya Pradesh has decided the punishment of denial of passport, driving license and other government facilities to those found involved in eve teasing?'-only 9 subjects reported that they are aware of the punishment that is decided by the government of Madhya Pradesh against the eve teasers however subjects who reported that they are unaware are 21 in number.



International Journal of Science, Engineering and Management (IJSEM)

Vol 2, Issue 8, August 2017

The responses show that there is a lack of awareness among girls regarding the measures of the existing mechanisms to tackle the issue of eve teasing. Legislative bodies need to understand that awareness is of paramount importance to empower a woman and can also create fear among the perpetrators.

II. CONCLUSION

The existing framework to tackle the problem of harassment is necessary but not sufficient to address this issue. Deciding on the parameters of the mechanisms of women's safety and the effective implementation and awareness of the same could be an effective move by the legislative bodies. Law and order should be women friendly and women's safety should be a priority in policing. However, the actual challenge in combating this issue is the change in the attitude and mindset of society. Also, woman should never step back to defend herself or keep the suffering to herself, she should make herself strong both physically and mentally to fight for her right and raise her voice to safeguard her dignity.

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