

Response Patterns of Girl Students to Eve-teasing: An Empirical Study in a University Setting

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Abstract: *Eve-teasing is a euphemism used in India for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. The indifference shown by the society to eve-teasing and the way eve-teasers move around freely without any objection from the people concerned serve to nurture the sexual harassment tendency. The present study to identify the response patterns of girl students to eve-teasing was taken up in the campus of University of Calicut, Kerala. The sample consisted of 120 respondents who were post graduate and research scholar students and the data was collected using a questionnaire. The results revealed that the whole sample have faced many attempts of eve-teasing in their life. But is the place in which majority of the eve-teasing incidents happen. Most of the sample was against the opinion that the dressing style of women and women's behavior patterns is responsible for eve-teasing. Lack of respect to women and lack of strict punishment to the offenders were found to be the major reasons for amounting incidents of eve-teasing. A few members of the sample were given advice from family members, especially brothers as not to show any reaction to the offenders but adjust with the situation and escape from the humiliations that may follow. While half of the sample expressed their willingness to respond directly to the criminal, the other half conveyed that they will make a complaint to the authority. Suggestions to curb eve-teasing as proposed by the respondents are included in the paper.*

Keywords: *eve-teasing, human rights violation, reasons and response patterns, legislative measures*

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has become one of the most visible and articulated social problems around the world. It is a critical human rights and development issue. Being a universal phenomenon, it takes different forms in different socio cultural and religious contexts. The United Nations General Assembly defines "violence against women" as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life".

Women's suppression is rooted in the very fabric of Indian society-in traditions, in religious doctrines and practices and within the families. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India submitted on the eve of the declaration of the International Women's Year, brought to light the issues and problems of women which hinder their development and relegate them to a disadvantageous position in the society among which violence against women is a major issue.

Concept of Eve-teasing

Eve teasing is a euphemism used in India for sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. The concept of eve-teasing vary among and within societies, depending on whether individuals are born and socialized as men or women in a specific socio-economic class in a society. Universal consensus exists on the key characteristics and definition of sexual harassment or eve-teasing. This is a common phenomenon in work places and education institutions and goes mostly unnoticed and unreported. Despite the existing

provisions for legal protection of girls and women and the regular fight against eve teasing, it is still widely prevalent.

Origin of the Term: Many people consider the term "eve-teasing" as rooting from the word "eve" which literally means early. So it is generally concluded that "eve-teasing" means teasing girls who are at their early age of youth or at the early stage of their sexual growth. However, the fact is that the term does originate from the word "eve" but it actually refers to our first mother "eve" from whom we human kind are said to come from. So "eve-teasing" means to tease girls, at any age, who hold the characteristics of eve or of a mother.

Eve-teasing is probably the most common act of public violence against women which includes various forms of harassments like making vulgar comments, indecent proposals, unwelcome gestures with hands, legs, fingers or other organs, attempting to make physical contact etc. Any kind of verbal or non-verbal behavior, physical conduct or display of objects or pictures and comments about a woman's looks or body can also be considered as eve-teasing. Eve-teasing is a typical social crime. In fact, within the patriarchal social fabric, eve-teasing is a weapon to weaken, hurt or force women to confine to domestic affairs. It restricts women's mobility in the public sphere, which contributes to their diminishing participation in outdoor activities. Sexual harassment results in violation of the fundamental rights of a woman to equality under Article 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India, her right to life and live with dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution and right to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business under Article 19 which includes a right to a safe environment free from sexual harassment.

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Yadav and Dutta [8] opine that eve-teasing has become a day today phenomenon in the cities. This type of harassment is part of the life of Indian women. The college and school girls on the roads, trains and buses, or young girls in slums are teased every day in broad day light. Eve-teasing is not just omnipresent but fabricated into the very thread of the society. The offenders are not punished and they continue violating a women's privacy assuming that they have a right to do so. It is an offence every woman faces in her life and not just once and ignores the offence and accept it as a price, she has to pay for being a woman. Most of the people are not aware that eve-teasing is an offence and legal action can be taken against it. It has been a notoriously difficult crime to prove, as perpetrators often devise ingenious ways to attack women, even though many feminist writers term it as "little rapes" and usually occur in public places, streets and public transport. Eve-teasing is a deplorable act that injects shame, fear, disgust and helplessness in the victim. Being subjected to many instances of eve-teasing is an inseparable part of every girl's life, causing much unavoidable mental agony to her. This in turn adversely affects her self confidence, self esteem and mobility.

Modes of Eve Teasing

An offensive watch, a sly whistle, a well-timed clap, an unwarranted knock, a seemingly casual touch, a lasting look at a helpless time, suggestive song with closed lips, slang comments, cheap gestures, the display of an indecent video, passing by in slow moving cars, blasting loud music with many eyes....all these are typical examples of eve teasing.

Though the problem received public and media attention in 1960's, it was in the following decades, when more and more women started going out to colleges and work independently, without being accompanied by a male escort which had been the norm in traditional societies, that the problem grew to an alarming proportion. Soon the Indian Government had to take remedial measures, both judicial and law enforcement, to curb the menace and efforts were made to sensitize the police about the issue and police started rounding up eve-teasers. Various states responded to the issue by setting up Women's Helpline in cities, women police stations and special anti eve-teasing cells by the police.

According to Shah [3], the menace of eve-teasing is increasing in the contemporary society where the behavior of young men towards young women is unmannerly and rude. They hover near girls' schools, colleges, bus stops, cinema houses, bazaars of fairs and festival and make provocative remarks, stare brazenly and jostle against women. Even respectable person who happen to hear or see the ugly incident might pretend not to have heard or noticed it pass of the place quickly in their own safety. The result is that the offenders indulge in the crime freely without any fear of consequences to themselves. Public apathy is also largely responsible for the rising trend in eve-teasing. Impact of cheap films on impressionable mind, influence of romantic novels and sexy pictorial books, lack of parental control and guidance are also suggested as reasons for amounting eve-teasing.

According to the study conducted by Leach and Sitaram [2], in South India, public discussion of sexual matters, especially

relating to children is a taboo and the findings revealed that girls were vulnerable to sexual harassment both within the school ground (mostly by male pupils) and while travelling to and from school (by older boys and adult men), especially on public transport. For some girls, sexual harassment reduced their desire to continue their schooling, for others it increased their fear of being withdrawn if parents came to hear of any incident.

According to Hassan et al. [7] the adolescent girl respondents in Chowgacha report that Romeos tease the girls and if the girl counterpart defend them, the girls are given threat of acid assault, lifting them away etc. 75% adolescent girl respondents replied that they often come across eve teasing, proposal for love, giving mobile number, whistling and evil hints. Adult girl respondents in Chowgacha also stated that they face threat of acid assault and rape. Adolescent boys also showed a pessimistic perception stating that girls often face eve-teasing.

Kuruville and Anu [5] in their study on perceptions about sexual harassment done among postgraduate girl students and women employees in a university campus found that 100 percent of the student sample has correct awareness about the definition of sexual harassment whereas the women employee sample had several misconceptions regarding what all behaviors amount to sexual harassment. While 66 percent of women employees considered dressing style of women as a major cause for sexual harassment while only 20 percent of student sample agreed with this. 68 percent of employee sample consider misuse of mobile as a factor leading to sexual harassment whereas 40 percent of students shared the same opinion. Differences between the employee and student samples were found with regard to their perceptions about various reasons for the increasing incidents of sexual harassment but total agreement between the two groups was found in the case of lack of respect towards women and lack of strict punishment as factors responsible for the prevalence of the evil.

The National Crime Records Bureau [6] reports a total number of 77 cases of eve-teasing as been recorded from the state of Kerala for the year 2014 (Up to March).

Existing Legislative Measures

The protection against sexual harassment and the right to work with dignity are universally recognized human rights by various international conventions and instruments such as Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Government of India ratified this convention on 25th June, 1993. One of the requirements of the convention is for the states to have a legislation to protect the interests of the working women.

Under the Indian Penal Code the term eve-teasing as such is not used. There are three sections under which action can be taken against eve-teasers. They are:

- Section 294, IPC that deals with obscene acts and songs and lays down that whoever, to the annoyance of other: (a) does any obscene act in any public place or (b) sings, recites or utters any obscene song, ballet or words in or near any public place, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to three months or with fine or both.

Visakha vs State of Rajasthan – Supreme Court Guidelines (1997)

The Supreme Court on 13th August, in the context of the Visakha vs State of Rajasthan case, issued specific guidelines for employers to constitute committees against sexual harassment at workplace so as to ensure a conducive gender friendly atmosphere to women at their workplace.

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (SHAW Act, 2013)

The Sexual Harassment Act was implemented in India on 9th December 2013. This Act provides protection against sexual harassment of women at workplace and for the prevention and redressal of complaints of sexual harassment and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. According to this Act Sexual Harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behavior (whether directly or by implication as – physical contact and advances; or a demand or request for sexual favours; or sexually colored remarks; or showing pornography; or any other unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of sexual nature.

Section 3 of the Act lists out the circumstances that may amount to sexual harassment at workplace as: implied or overt promise of preferential treatment in her employment; or implied or overt threat of detrimental treatment in her employment; or implied or overt threat about her present or future employment status; or conduct of any person which interferes with her work or creates an intimidating or offensive or hostile work environment for her; or humiliating treatment likely to affect her health and safety.

The SHAW Act 2013 has specifically included the unorganized sector including hospitals, agriculture farmlands and households also as workplaces for which following the Supreme Court guidelines was not mandatory hitherto. The Act also insists the constitution of local complaints committees in every district in addition to the internal complaints committees at institutional/organization levels.

Background of the Study

In the backdrop of the gang rape of December 16, 2012 in the capital city of Delhi and the widespread protests that followed, there have been lots of discussions and deliberations going on in the nook and corner of the country, especially among the higher education institutions about the nature and extent of sexual violence in the country and the targeting of girl students more specifically. Kerala is considered as an elite society as far as women's development is concerned. It is the state with the best women development indicators comparable to the developed west in matters regarding education, health and sex ratio. The highest female literacy rate, lowest maternal and infant mortality rates, the longer female life expectancy rate, the overall sex ratio in favor of women and the lowest fertility rates etc have all contributed to the specific status of Keralite women among their counterparts in the rest of the Indian subcontinent. At the same time the Keralite women are cautioned to have the lowest mental health profiles by the Indian Psychological Association. Violence against women and mental distress are growing to be a serious problem in Kerala, warranting social concern and intervention [1, 4].

Violence like eve teasing in educational institutions is generally ignored by staff and students alike as a trivial issue without probing into its far reaching consequences on the everyday lives and aspirations of girls. At times girls themselves fail to realize it as a violation of their rights. The indifference shown by the society to eve teasing and the way eve teasers move around freely without any objection from the people concerned serve to nurture the sexual harassment tendency among them. It was in this context that the present study was taken up in the campus of University of Calicut, Kerala.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the present study were the following:

- To assess the level of awareness about the definition of eve-teasing among the women students of university campus.
- To analyze the reasons for the increasing trend in eve-teasing cases as per the opinion of the sample.
- To identify the response patterns of women students during instances of eve teasing.
- To understand the suggestive measures proposed to curb eve-teasing.

II. METHODOLOGY

Sample: For the present study the sample consisted of 120 respondents who were all post graduate / research scholar students of Calicut University Campus situated in Malappuram District of Kerala state. The students belong to different districts and different socio-economic and religious backgrounds.

Tool: A Questionnaire was developed for the collection of data based on the questions related to four major aspects of eve-teasing such as:

- a) Awareness of the sample about the concept of Eve-teasing
- b) Reasons for the increasing trend in eve-teasing.
- c) Response pattern of girls against attempts of eve-teasing.
- d) Suggestive measures proposed to curb eve-teasing.

The questionnaire was administered to the respondents personally.

III. MAJOR FINDINGS

The present study tries to investigate the awareness and response pattern of women students to eve-teasing. The data obtained from the study was subjected to quantitative analysis. The major findings of the study are:

1. Awareness of the sample about the concept of eve-teasing

It was revealed that the entire sample were of the opinion that there is an increasing trend in the incidents of eve-teasing in these days. The analysis revealed that the whole sample have faced many attempts of eve-teasing in their life. Majority of the sample (90%) have a clear awareness about 'what constitutes eve-teasing'. Half of the sample had heard about the IPC sections related to eve-teasing, but with no idea about the punishments given to the offenders.

Majority of the respondents (96%) agreed that the victims of eve-teasing must get help and support from the society.

2. Reasons for the increasing trend in eve-teasing

97 percent of women students were against the opinion that the dressing style of women is a cause for eve-teasing. 95 percent of the sample disagreed that the women’s behavior patterns are responsible for eve-teasing. Almost 100 percent of the sample agreed that lack of respect to women is the major cause for eve-teasing. While 92 percent of the sample considered lack of strict punishment of offenders as a reason for increasing trend, 90 percent considered negative influence of media and pornography in movies as the major factor leading to eve-teasing. The indifference and negative attitude of the society were also considered to be contributing to the amounting violations of women’s dignity. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table I.

Table 1: Reasons for increasing trend in Eve-teasing

	Major Reasons	Percentage of Sample Agreeing
1.	Dressing style of women	3
2.	Women’s behavior patterns	5
3.	Lack of strict punishment of offenders	92
4.	Lack of respect to women	99
5.	Negative influence of media	89
6.	Pornography in movies	91
7.	Indifference and trivial attitude of the society	72

3. Response pattern of women against attempts of eve-teasing

The sample of the study expressed mixed response patterns against attempts of eve-teasing. Almost all the sample expressed the readiness to react if they happen to witness an attempt of eve-teasing. While half of the sample has an opinion that they will respond directly to the criminal, the other half conveyed that they will make a complaint to the authority. 90 percent of the sample agreed that they will express an assertive ‘no’ to the offender if they happen to face an attempt of eve-teasing. When half of the sample opined that they get support from other people, the other half responded that they haven’t received any support from anyone when they were in trouble. A few members of the sample shared how they were given advice from family members, especially brothers as not to show any reaction to the offenders but somehow adjust with the situation and escape from the humiliations that may follow. According to the sample bus is the place in which majority of the eve-teasing incidents happen. Results of the analysis of the response pattern of women are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Response Patterns of Women against Eve-teasing

	Response	Percentage of Sample Agreeing
1.	Will react if happen to be witness of the crime	96
2.	Respond directly to the criminal	50
3.	File a complaint to the authority	50
4.	Express an assertive ‘no’ to the offender	90
5.	Ignore the issue as if nothing has happened	10
6.	Suffer in silence	5
7.	Will react frankly if the context seems supportive	50

4. Suggestive measures proposed to curb eve-teasing

Specific strategies as listed below were suggested by the sample to curb the evil of eve-teasing from the society:

- Women only buses at peak school and college timings
- Separate queues for women in all enquiry and ticket counters including bus, railway and other public transport stations, hospitals, theatre and all other public spaces where survival of the fittest is the norm today
- The committees against sexual harassment should be strengthened and the matter should be given more access and visibility.
- Initiatives aimed at changing cultural norms about the gender roles of men and women should be taken up.
- Awareness about women’s rights and punishments for eve-teasing should be generated so that it will be treated as a serious offence.
- From the primary level of schooling onwards both boys and girls should be taught to respect each other and behave in responsible, friendly and equal manner.
- Women should get trained in the martial arts like Kung-fu, Karate, Taikonda etc.
- Girls should get assertiveness training to react against eve-teasing and other types of violence from school and house.
- Girls must get help and support from the parents and teachers in situations of trouble.
- Promote co-education at the primary level of schooling and sex education must be included in the school curriculum.
- Girls should have awareness and belief in their own rights and freedom.
- Self confidence of girls should be boosted up and they must be made aware of the need to discover their identity and keep presence of mind in all adverse circumstances.
- There must be drastic changes in the legal system in order to provide justice to women victims. Fast track courts must be set up in every district headquarters to resolve the complaints filed by affected women.
- Set up strict women shadow police system to curb eve-teasing in public places.
- The women helpline system must be made more effective and gender friendly.
- Research on the psychology of the offenders must be taken up.
- Indian Cinema Censor board should be strengthened to ban the unnecessary pornography in films which as per the sample of the present study is an important factor leading to eve-teasing.
- Ensure strict punishment of offenders irrespective of their political affiliations.

IV. DISCUSSION

Through the present study, it was revealed that the sample of girl students believe that there is an increasing trend in the

evil of eve-teasing. Through their public contacts, the post graduate and research scholar students have gained correct knowledge and awareness about the concept of eve-teasing. Half of the sample had clear awareness about the IPC sections related to eve-teasing, but most of them have no correct idea about the punishment for the offenders. The students vehemently opposed the usual victim blaming and were totally against the notions that women's dressing style and behavior patterns are causes for this rising trend. They shared the opinion that if dressing style provokes eve teasing, there would not have been any rapes in Islamic Countries. The findings are similar to that of the study conducted by Kuruvilla and Anu [5] where less than 50% of the respondents consider women's behavior patterns and mannerisms as a casual factor of sexual harassment. The sample conveyed that lack of punishment of the offenders, lack of respect to women and the indifference and trivial attitude of the society are factors responsible for increasing number of eve teasing incidents. The sample also expressed their concerns regarding objectification of women's bodies and pornography as reasons contributing to this form of gender based violence. The sample expressed their gratitude towards the investigator for the awareness they have gained through participating in the present study.

The study also revealed that the fear of further attack and fear of support from society pressurize women not to react against an attempt of eve-teasing. It was a striking finding that there are parents and brothers even today who advise their daughters and sisters to adjust, suffer in silence and ignore atrocities meted against them and that too out of fear of social stigma. There is still much taboo associated with an affected girl, whether it be an incident of physical advance or a demand for sexual favors or making sexually colored remarks. While there is no humiliation associated with the offenders, the woman has to bear the brunt of the issue. This taboo and the awareness regarding the rising trend in gender based violence, might be the reason why majority of the sample opined that they will always be conscious about their body and surroundings.

V. CONCLUSION

It is a pity that the educated and rights conscious girls have to live under the threat of violence and at least a few of them pressurized to remain helpless even not to react against the injustice meted on them. Such violations of human rights of girls need to be recognized by the society. The women empowerment programmes going on in the country have empowered our girls to respond and react to injustice meted out on them. Despite the advice from aged parents and brothers, the youngsters of the sample expressed their willingness to provide immediate support in spirit and action to any other girl who is in trouble. Fast track courts to deal with gender based violence and strict punishment of offenders as suggested by the sample are measures to be taken on one side while change in mindsets so as to enable our boys respect girls and women and to eliminate the taboos associated with the affected girls and women are the immediate steps to be taken up on the other side. But above all change needs to come in the attitude and mindsets of society for which massive campaigns are to be taken up by the gender

sensitized men and women. Efforts taken by various NGOs and women's groups are worthwhile. But the government initiatives in this regard also need to be strengthened further. Education should be used as the strongest tool for bringing about change in mindsets by including gender studies components from the primary schooling to postgraduate and professional levels of education.

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