



Awareness and Preparedness for Safety among Girl students

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Abstract

Despite the marvellous feats of science and almost fairy-tale like creation of the technological world, this planet seems to be increasingly becoming an unsafe place for women to inhabit. Women are continuously living in an increasingly violent society in which the fear of crime is ever-present. Today, violence against women remains one of the biggest challenges. In the present descriptive study the researcher tries to explore how aware and prepared our females are about their safety. A random sample of 100 females reveals that we failed not only in providing a safe environment for them but also failed miserably in equipping and empowering them for their own protection.

Keywords: Women safety, awareness and preparedness for safety, violence against women.

Introduction

No matter how much technologically we have advanced or conquered the space, we are still far from the so called 'civil-society'. The sad reality is that we live in an increasingly violent society in which the fear of crime is ever-present. Personal safety has become an issue of importance for everyone, but especially for women¹. Violence against women, in its various forms, is endemic in communities and countries around the world, cutting across class, race, age, religious and national boundaries².

Fear of victimization and crime is quite widespread among women. Almost every crime survey reports that women are much more fearful of crime than men. While the fear of rape and serious violence from men may lie in the back of many women's minds, feminist scholars also argue about an existing continuity of violence against women, which includes intimidation, groping, sexual comments and harassment, threats, and other nuisance crimes with sexual undertones³.

Women's lives rest upon a continuum of unsafety. This does not mean that all women occupy the same position in relation to safety and violence. Many other features of their lives will mean that their circumstances differ. Somehow, though, as all women reach adulthood, they share a common awareness of their particular vulnerability. Learning the strategies for survival is a continuous lesson about what it means to be female⁴.

The United Nations Declaration defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life⁵.

Though, physical violence is pervasive against women, it can take other forms which generate an atmosphere of threat of reprisal. Multi-country surveys conducted by World Health Organization estimate that between 10 to 69 percent of women have been physically hit or harmed by a male partner at some point in their lives⁶.

Therefore, reducing violence against women remains one of the biggest challenges – be it rape, or sexual assault, or dowry deaths, or female foeticide, or acid attack, or trafficking – the list goes on. The infamous December 2012 Delhi gang rape is a stark reality and reflection of the society where women are treated not as equal human being but rather as an object or – even worse – as commodity. This particular incident is just the tip of ice-berg – many such horrendous crimes against women go unreported and unnoticed. Why aren't India's women and girls safe? Who is responsible for their safety? How should that safety be assured? Since December 2012, these three questions have become a fixture on the national agenda, as has the issue of safety, or more precisely, freedom from violence⁷.

The decades after independence have seen incredible and chronological transformation in the status and position of women in Indian society. Further, the employment of women statistic shows that the employment status leads to education of girls and it promotes development and reduces their poverty⁸, thereby giving a general but false feeling of empowerment.

Though all this may make one think that finally the day has arrived when women can stand shoulder to shoulder with the men but the hard hitting dark reality is that crime against women is at its all time high. The crime ratio in India increased from 0.01364 in 1960 to 0.01845 in 2010. The average ratio of crime rates in the country from 2008 to 2012 is 0.01849. Total crimes in country punishable under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) shows an alarming rate of 39.1% of increase in the 10 years

(2003 – 2012) and 66.73% in the period 1987 – 2012. Reported incidents of rape increased by 57.27% in the period 2003 – 2012 and 173.9% in the period of 25 years (1987 – 2012)⁹.

The major proportion of the rape victims belongs to 19-30 years of age group which states that young women are usually found to be more at the risk of rape than older women. It is also found that women have more danger from their acquaintances (i.e., Parents/ Close family members, Relatives, Neighbours and Other known persons) as compared to the unknown persons to an extent that the share of crime by known persons vary between 84 percent to 97 percent.

This alarming increase of the crime rates signals to the fact that moral orientation in the masses is facing a notable shift that needs to be viewed seriously. Despite improvements and innovation in the modes of crime prevention and systematization of the law enforcement agencies in the country, most major forms of crimes and incidents of anti social behaviour are increasing at a faster pace disproportionate to the increase in population and the measures implemented by law enforcement agencies in the country to prevent crime. Even worse is the fact the access to the justice remains a far cry and on top of that, if at all the justice is delivered to the victims it is either too late or a mockery of their plight. Most of the times the scarcity of legal aid compel the women to accept more dismissal and ex parte decrees that affect the quality of justice they get from the courts¹⁰.

Violence against women, especially young women, is not a new phenomenon. Large numbers of women experience violence in relationships, this experience of violence is a severe social problem. The aetiology of this violence, the impact on children and the long term impact on the women and on our society are questions that require urgent answers¹¹. We need to increase our understanding of both the situational and lifestyle factors that predispose young women to violence. We need to develop prevention programs which will help to reduce the violence towards young women.

There is an urgent need to pay special attention by our policy makers, family system, community and women themselves if they really want to see themselves genuinely independent, stronger and safe¹². Unfortunately, despite years of struggle, the fear faced by women has not combated. Though the women have equal participation in human development and they make up almost half of the human race, but tragically she does not enjoy an equal status in the society. Constitutional provisions are not sufficient to get her the respectable position in society¹³.

The soaring rape rates and violence against women reflects the social status of women as weaker sexes who are being exploited. In the so called 'Modern times' the status and position of women is rather deteriorated and has touched a new low. There is need to educate people as well as to make women aware about their social surroundings. As our nation and the world at large ponder over the strategies to check the violence

against women, this study makes a humble attempt to find out how aware and prepared our girls are for their personal safety.

Objectives: i. To study awareness for the safety among girl students. ii. To study preparedness for the safety among girl students.

Delimitations: i. The sample for study is taken from Panjab University, Chandigarh only. ii. The sample doesn't equally/proportionally represent different segments of university girl students, viz., graduates/post-graduates/research scholars/science stream/commerce stream, etc.

Methodology

Design: This study is descriptive in nature consisting of survey so as to understand and ascertain how aware and prepared the girl students are about their safety.

Sample and Sampling: A sample of 100 girl students was randomly selected from the various departments and hostels in the campus of Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Tool used and statistical analysis: Data was collected from the girl students using a self-prepared (content validated) questionnaire. The responses obtained on the questionnaire were converted into percentages so as to arrive at conclusions.

Results and Discussions

To study awareness for the safety among girl students: The results reveal that 41% of the female students do not feel safe and/or comfortable in stepping out alone, they always prefer to have someone along their side even if it is day time. Majority of the girls (68%) do not find public transport safe and 100% of them reported that moving out alone late in the night in a cab or auto is a complete NO for them.

Girl students still do not possess adequate knowledge / information about their safety. As the results indicate 59% of them are not aware of the legislation or the laws for women safety or the sexual harassment at the workplace. Also, 31% are not aware of the safety kits or the apps available for women's safety. Despite extensive advertisement, 12% girls still are unaware of the toll free women helpline number.

The results reveal the vulnerability of the girls as majority of them (68%) are not aware of the date rape drugs yet many of them freely socialize with boys and go for parties with them. Their innocence or ignorance can be judged when 39% of them reported that they are not aware of the fact that in most of the rape cases, the criminal is known to the victim or is someone in the close circle – a friend, a relative or a neighbour. Even bigger shock is that 78% of them never attended / participated in any seminar / workshop / awareness program or campaign for women safety.

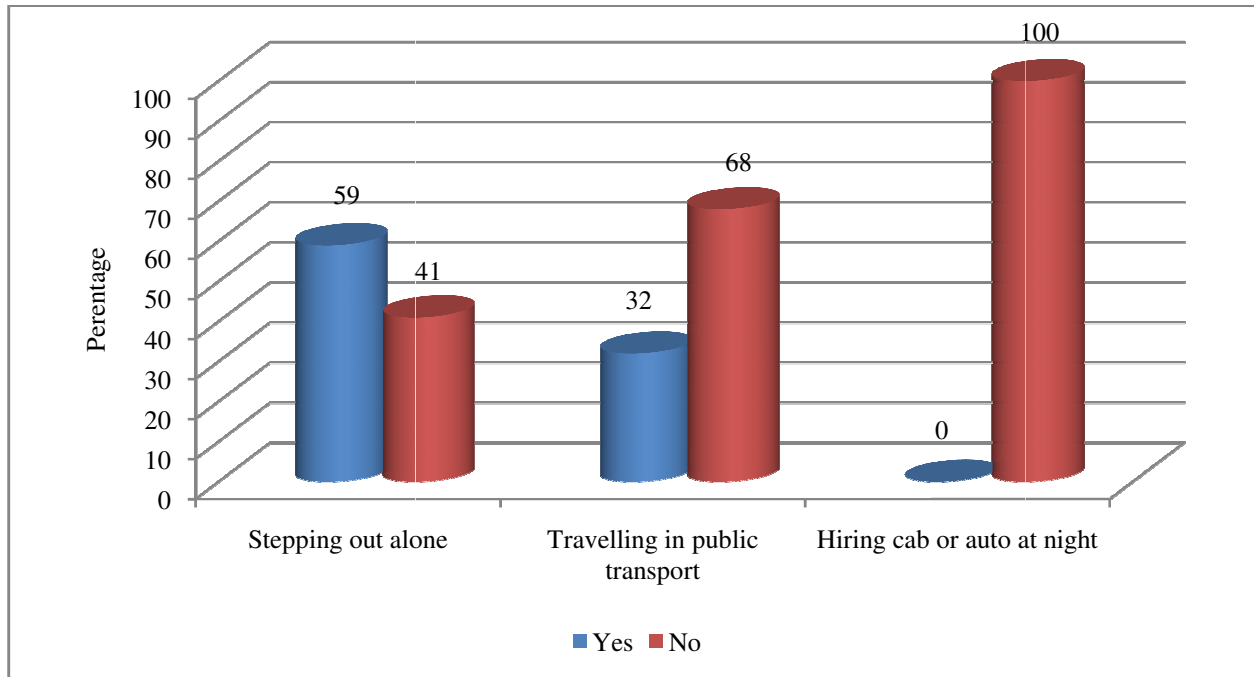


Figure-1
Comfort of moving about independently and without fear

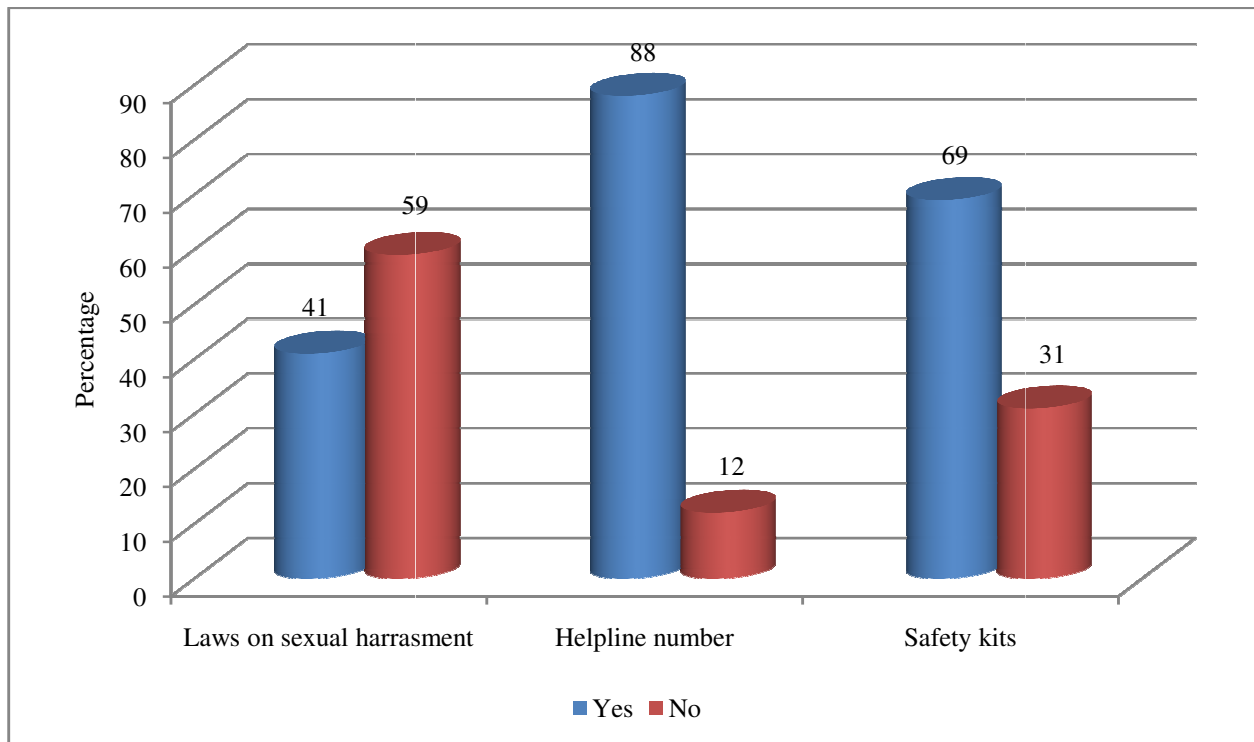


Figure-2
Awareness of laws and other facilities

Objective 2: To study preparedness for the safety among girl students.
Figure 4

Shockingly revealing is the lack of preparedness of girls for their safety as the results show that majority of them (76%) had never taken any training in self-defence. Though each one of

them carry a mobile (rather a smartphone), still 26% of them do not have emergency or the helpline numbers on their speed dial. Even the institutes from where they have passed out or where they are continuing their studies do not do much to prepare the

girls as 44% of the respondents reported that in the past two years their institutes have not organized any seminar / awareness program on women safety.

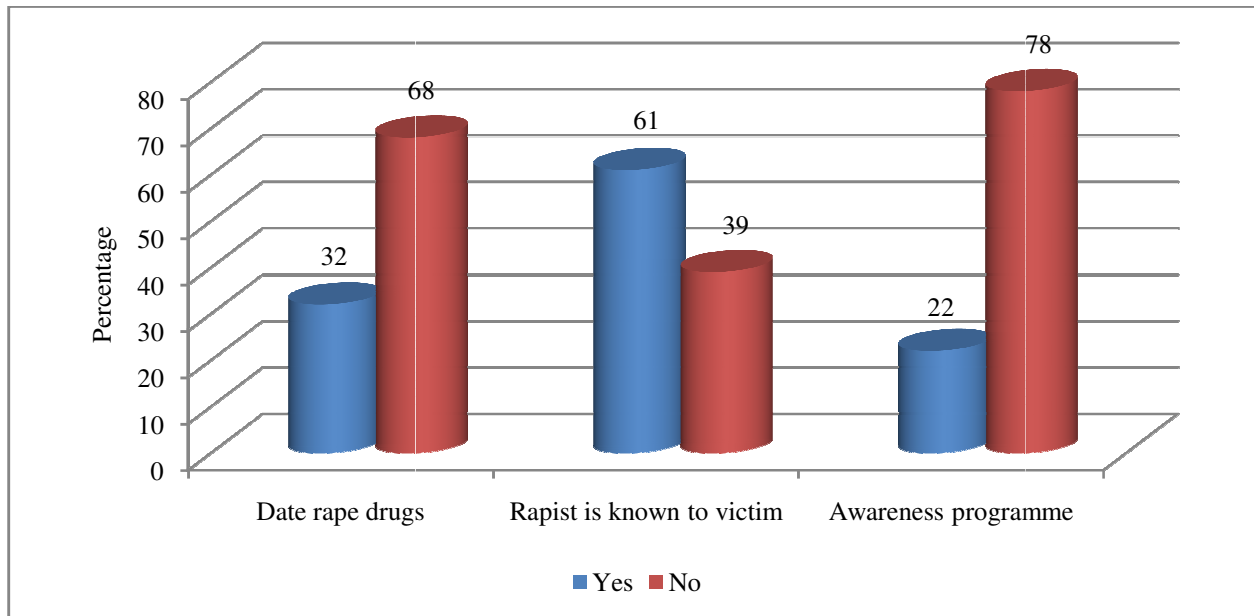


Figure-3
Awareness of preventive measures

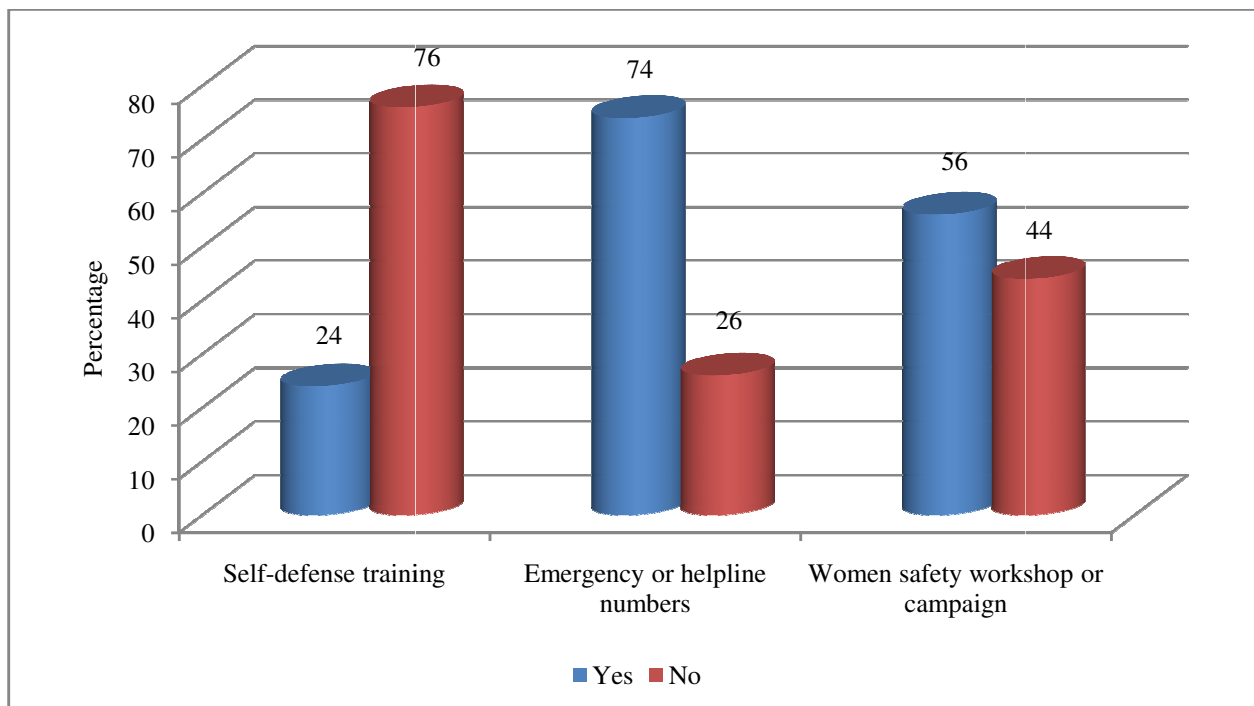


Figure-4
Preparation for the safety and self protection

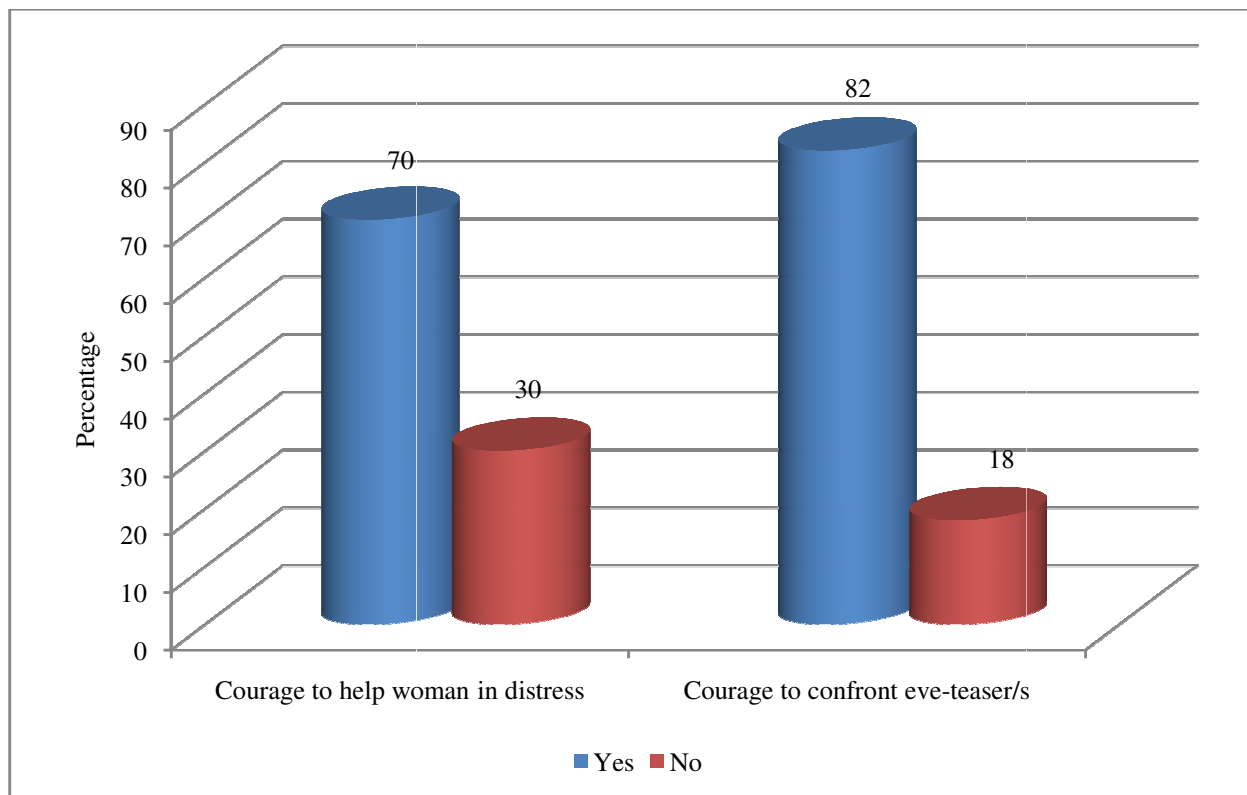


Figure-5
Courage to confront

Our girls are showing their grit but still a lot remains lacking. The results show that girls still feel helpless (30%) and feel that they do not have the courage to stop and stand by a woman in distress, forget about helping her. 18% of them reported that they do not have the courage even to confront an eve-teaser.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the need to educate our girls about their safety and also empower them to confront any threat with courage. Results show that though the girls are pursuing their higher education, they still remain uninformed. It is not that girls are not concerned about their safety. They have always thought about safety. How could they not, when the threat of violence is pervasive and shadows them from conception through their lifetimes? Concerns about safety limit women's mobility and activities and teach them to strategize everything from timings to travel to how to walk to the office or college toilet. But the real question is as to why should they have to live their lives considering 'when to go?', 'where to go?', 'with whom to go?' and so on. We are talking about 'knowledge-societies' and the 'civil-societies', and we are definitely not living in a jungle – so let's create a society where women are completely free from the fear of being a 'prey'. It is high time that we develop 'Zero tolerance' for any type of crime against any individual – not just women.

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