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## SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN MEGHALAYA

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**Abstract-** Sexual violence in Meghalaya is the most critical Human Rights violation, which remains for a very long time. Sexual violence in Meghalaya continues to be a devastating phenomenon with destructive repercussions for victims and their families and whole communities. The present study examines the issues related to rape and sexual harassment and analysis the factors liable for the crime in Meghalaya, India. It also attempts to understand the theoretical framework highlighting the act of sexual violence. The study found that sexual violence causes physical harm to the victim and leaves a permanent scar in the victim's life permanently. The content analysis method has been used to discuss the issues regarding violence against women. The terror of sexual violence affects the victim extremely that it lingers in their mind throughout their lives. In every patriarchal society, male superiority is powerful, highlighting male honour, physical strength, and dominance. Sexual violence has become the most often selected way of abusing women. Since the day they were born, women become a victim and are determined by social norm to dominate and control female sexuality. With this regard, the NGOs and Government agencies like State Commission for Women, women support centers etc. need to work more on conducting awareness programmes and workshops and seminars, especially in rural areas where various aspects of violence committing against women.

**Keywords: Gender Violence and Gender Inequality, Sexual Harassment, Rape, Women Rights**

### I. Introduction

Sexual violence can be explained that intentional use of sex as a weapon to signify power over and to impose torture and disgrace on another person. Sexual violence may be defined as any type of violence, physical or mental, achieved through sexual techniques or by choosing sexuality. Sexual violence involves both physical and psychological attacks targeting person's sexual feature. Sexual violence may be considered as threats, humiliation and intimidation, it does not necessary include direct physical contact between offender and victim (Vandana, 2009). The World Health Organizations defined sexual violence as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their personal relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home or work" (WHO, 2012). Sexual violence is considered to be one of the most traumatic, pervasive and most common human rights violations.

Sexual violence is one of the serious health problems which result in extreme short or long term impact on victim's physical and mental health. Sexual violence happens in every culture. It plays an important role in continuing sexual violence, especially against women in every society. Rape has its root in the historical socialization of men since Vedic period (Vandana, 2009). Rape is a type of violence that can happen to anyone at any age perpetrated by parents, caregivers, relatives and strangers, and intimate partners. It shows power and dominance over the victim which is rarely a crime of passion, and is rather an act of aggression. Sexual violence is defamed in all situations thus, victims are reluctant to disclose the assault and it varies between regions. Husbands who pressurize their wife into sexual act believe that their acts are legitimate because they

are married are also called domestic sexual violence. Sexual violence has been known to occur in times of armed conflict also. The armed forces use sexual violence as a tool or strategy during war (Anholt, 2016).

Sexual violence in Meghalaya is the most critical Human Rights violation which remains since very long time. Sexual violence in Meghalaya continues to be a devastating phenomenon with destructive repercussions for victims and their families and whole communities. Sexual violence constitutes total violations of women's rights to equality and dignity. Statistics of the Meghalaya police (Table1.) reveals that rape alone is the most committed crime in Meghalaya, which increased from 82 cases in 2007 to 190 cases in 2016. Among all the crimes against women, rape becomes the highest number of crime recorded every year. The total number of rape cases recorded in 2017 was 119, including two of gang rape (Police, 2020). These reported cases are only the tip of the iceberg since most of the sexual crimes go unreported.

Table 1. Incidence of Crime against women in Meghalaya from the year 2007-2017.

SL	Crime Head	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
1.	Rape	82	88	112	149	130	164	183	118	93	190	119
2.	Attempt to commit rape	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	26	23	15	20
3.	Kidnapping & abduction of women	22	25	26	37	37	24	33	38	58	51	56
4.	Dowry deaths	2	2	0	0	1	1	2	1	1	0	1
5.	Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty	45	54	72	48	74	43	98	105	95	68	88
6.	Insult to the modesty of women	1	4	1	0	1	0	0	54	20	17	21
7.	Cruelty by husband or his relatives	19	32	24	24	21	16	23	42	44	26	20
8.	Importation of girls from foreign country	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
9.	Abetment of suicides of women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
10.	Cyber crimes/ IT Act	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
11.	Dowry Prohibition Act 1961	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
12.	Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
13.	Protection of Children from	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	239

	Sexual Offenses Act, 2012											
14	Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	1	3	1	3	2	7	4	3	0	2	0
16	Total crimes against women	172	208	237	261	269	255	343	388	334	398	569

Source: <https://megpolice.gov.in/crime-against-women>

### Objectives

- a) To examine the prevalence of sexual violence in Meghalaya.
- b) To analyse the factors liable for sexual violence in Meghalaya.
- c) To suggest the need for improvement in eliminating sexual violence.

## II. The Theoretical Framework of Sexual Violence

### Feminist Theory

Kelly “beyond victim or survivor: Sexual Violence, Identity and Feminist Theory” (L., 1996) explain that the purpose of feminism on sexual violence began with the necessity of exposing the women’s private pain and shame to the public, denying the fact of men’s crime and keeping it secrets. Tewksbury (2002) feminist started their various activities to remove the legacy of sexual violence from centuries. They have not just created this documentation of reality; they have created alternative institutions and they are the instigators of innumerable campaigns for change. Many women involve in these ‘change-making’ activities – activities that need using one’s power to act and have themselves aware of various forms of abuse.

(Barry, 1995) pointed out the ways of traditional responses of victimized women which put them in a position of victim whereas victimization is describing the characteristics of an individual’s identity and life experience. She argues victimization is a new standard to objectify women’s experience which dissolves the will for any question. Byrden (1973) says that “during the 1970s, as part of their critique of patriarchy, feminists developed a set of theories about rape; they soon replaced psychologists as the recognized experts on its causes and motivations.” (McPhail, 2021) says that feminist are responsible for educating public about dynamics and prevention of sexual violence as feminist were the frontline workers of rape crisis centres.

(Pitts, 2006) have analysed the method that combines feminism and routine activities theory and bring into discussion which explores the idea that although women are likely to be victim of sexual assault, lifestyles of the college women increases the victimization risks. Those lifestyles make them into frequent contact with men where men can easily take an advantage during vulnerable situations such as drinking alcohol. Flavin (2001) explains that men assault women both sexually and physically because they have opportunities and support for doing it, or it is an extension of men’s violence in general, or its shows men’s masculinity for such act.

### Individual Theory

Individual theory explains that the risk factors for perpetration are alcohol and drug use, delinquency, lack of empathy, general aggressiveness and acceptance of violence, early sexual initiation, coercive sexual fantasies, sexual risk taking, exposure to sexually explicit media, hostility towards women, hyper-masculinity, suicidal behaviour and prior sexual victimization and perpetration (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). Sexual assault prevention and awareness centre, University of Michigan (Center, 2018) studies about “Survivors of Sexual Violence”. The study shows that very few perpetrators are mentally incompetent and/or out of touch with reality. Rapes may be planned or carried out by acquaintances, intimate partners, family members or strangers. Alcohol is a weapon that some perpetrators use to control their victim and render them helpless. As part of their plan, an assailant may encourage the victim to use alcohol, or identify an individual who is already drunk. Alcohol is not a cause of rape; it is only one of many tools that perpetrators use.

### **Psychological Theory**

The psychological theory explains that the reasons for male’s violent behaviour are personality disorders or early experiences of trauma. The theory provides a neat conceptualization of the range of cognitive, social, developmental and behavioural factors associated with sexual violence and abuse. The study explains the range of psychological factors that ease sexual offences and highlight those psychological factors where treatment interventions are required (Theresa A Gannon, 2011).

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory attempted to explain why some individuals develop sexually abusive behaviour. They have also suggested that poor childhood attachment styles may be the reason for sexual offending (Dadds, 2000). The alternative approach to explain the starting of sexual abusive behaviour is social learning. According to the social learning theory behaviour is learned through observation of others’ behaviours. Earlier research on social learning theory explains about the acquisition of conforming behaviours of children, but the theory expands to study wider range of behaviours including aggression and sexual offending (Bandura, 1961). The study shows that abusive male adults are likely to have been raised in abusive homes which result in developing abusive behaviour.

### **Evolutionary Theory**

Evolutionary theory has been offered to explain the variety of human behaviours and sexual aggression. Evolutionary theory views human behaviour as an adaptive change since millions of years which are designed to meet on-going challenges within the environment. Another evolutionary theory views rape as an outcome of competitive disadvantage for some men that cause them to scarce the resources to find mate by appropriate means (Figueredo, 2000). Another theory describes sexual offense as a “courtship disorder” that results from interference in normal mating process (Freund, 1988).

### **Personality Theory**

Personality theory is known to be one of the first sources to study the behaviour of sexual offense. In Sigmund Freud’s work, he explains that sexual violence is an expression of an unresolved problem experienced during the early stage of person’s development. Lack of empirical evidence, Freud’s work on personality theory was not in favour of etiological researchers in difference to other theories. However, personality theory later suggested that the early childhood relationships which involve trauma and mistreatment could lead a child to internalize negative attitudes and believe about themselves and relationship towards others resulting in alteration of how a child perceives sex and their role in sexual relationship. (Leguizamo, 2015). (Ward, 1995) explain that sex offenders are likely to have difficulty forming attachments with others, thus engaging in distorted thinking such as “courting” a child and treating them as their lover (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2001) analysed that juveniles who committed sexual offense are lower in attachment with their fathers than those who committed non-sexual offences. Personality theories shows that disturbances occur within the personality of sex offenders but the theory fail to explain why these disturbances occur.

## **Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Meghalaya**

As per National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4 , 2015) among age 15-49, 27 percent have experienced physical violence and 4 percent have experienced sexual violence. In all 28 percent of women in Meghalaya experienced physical or sexual violence by their husbands/partner.

- Four percent of women experienced sexual violence and 27 percent of women have experienced physical violence by their partners.
- Women of age 15-49 have experienced sexual violence the most.
- Most women residing in rural areas have experienced more sexual violence compared to urban areas.
- Among married women three percent report that their husbands have physically forced them to have sex even when they did not want to.
- 2 percent of women report that their husband forced them with threats or other ways to perform sexual acts they did not want to perform.
- More than one-quarter of women who have experienced spousal sexual violence have suffered injuries as a result of violence. The most common type of injury is cuts, bruises or aches.
- Among person committing sexual violence, 85 percent of women experienced sexual violence by their current husband/partner; 10 percent of women experienced sexual violence by their formal husband and 1.2 percent of women experienced sexual violence by strangers.
- Only 12 percent of women who have ever experienced sexual or physical violence by anyone have sought help.
- Almost three-fourth (74%) of women has neither sought help nor told anyone about the sexual violence.

## **Factors liable for Sexual Violence**

To understand the main causes of sexual violence are complex and like some other crimes, sexual violence may not be completely understood or explained by a single factor because there are many other different factors responsible for the sexual violence. Therefore some factors which are universal and important are discussed here.

### **Illiteracy**

Illiteracy is the one of the causes of sexual violence against women in Meghalaya. People with low reading and writing skills often have less control over their own lives, less knowledge of their legal rights, lower self-esteem, lack of leadership and ultimately a higher risk of sexual violence. There are number of school dropouts in Meghalaya. During the year of 2013-17 total number of school dropouts are 1,09,495 (The Shillong Times, 2017).

### **Alcoholism**

Alcohol consumption is very common in all the societies of Meghalaya. Alcoholism is also one of the major reasons for sexual violence against women. According to Mumbai based psychiatrist Dr. A. L. Deshpande, 70 out of 100 are alcoholics in Meghalaya (Meghalaya Times, 2017). Sexual violence is associated with perpetrator's alcohol consumption. Abuse of alcohol is one of the risk factor which increases the likelihood of sexual violence. Perpetrators often use substances to paralyse their victims in order to ease a sexual violence. Alcohol is the drug most commonly used by perpetrators to help commit sexual violence.

### **Poverty**

Poor women and girls are more at risk of sexual violence in the course of their daily task than those of wealthy family for example when they walk home alone from work at night or work in the field or

collecting firewood's or going anywhere alone. According to the FIR recorded by the Meghalaya police, most of the sexual violence is experienced by women and girls whose families are poor. Poorer women are also vulnerable for sexual violence by their husbands.

### **Lack of Awareness**

Lack of awareness is the most convincing factor of sexual violence as most of the rural women in Meghalaya are not aware of their rights and existing laws available to safeguard against sexual violence. Speaking on the importance of awareness programmes, vice-chairperson of Meghalaya State Commission for Women states that they have conducted many awareness programmes where most of the women attended but very few men show their interest in attending the programmes (Marak, 2021). It is high time that men need to come forward and take part in such programmes in order to eliminate sexual violence from the society.

### **Lack of Moral Value**

Lack of moral value is also a root factor that is responsible for sexual violence. Violence happens in most families who do not accept moral values or teach their children about them. The act of violence starts from the environment where a person lives; for example, when a person is not corrected while doing wrong or not been taught about moral values, the person tends to do more evil acts, thinking that whatever he is doing is not wrong. Their families influence the perpetrators with no moral value. A child's moral value depends upon the upbringing by his/her family. Denial of imparting moral value to their children can lead to the growth of sexual violence. Therefore it is suggested that every family should give an effort to educate their children about moral value.

### **Role of Media and Technology and Free Access to Pornographic videos**

Easy access to internet and addiction to pornographic videos is desensitising people to sexual crimes. Porn videos help develop a new map in the brain of viewers based on their photos and videos. It changes the perceptions of younger ages when introduced through internet. When it comes to social media, facebook has been misused for uploading inappropriate photos and videos. There was a case where a man uploads his girlfriend's nude photo in facebook in order to revenge her for breaking up with him (U Rupang Shillong, 2016).

### **Ignorance of Law**

Society and the law enforcement agencies like police, medical authorities play a major role in the welfare of the people, but most of the times, rapes cases and other related sexual offences are not reported because they believe that they can resolve the case outside the court system. People who were in power have also committed sexual crimes as they have ignored the law completely. There were two incidents in Meghalaya; a complaint of alleged sexual impropriety against the Meghalaya Governor and an MLA's arrest on charges of raping a 14-year-old girl. Human rights activist Agnes Kharshiing blames poor implementation of law and lack of political will for such crimes. (India Today, 2017)

## **III. Conclusion**

Sexual violence against women causes trauma to the victim, which results in fear of violence in their mind and lack of participation in various areas of life. This trauma has been so deep in women's minds that it cannot be out easily even after eliminating violence against women completely from society. Therefore it is necessary to adopt stringent and appropriate steps against the perpetrator by the government to stop the crime. However, the best way to end sexual violence against women and girls is to prevent it from happening in the first place by understanding its root and related causes. The role of the Meghalaya State Commission for Women, the Police Department, the Department of Social Welfare, One-Stop Center, the NGOs and other organization has been remarkable as they have been working together to eliminate the presence of social evils in the society.



#### IV. Suggestions

Following suggestions have been made to find appropriate if any of these steps have been applied to tackle sexual violence against women in Meghalaya.

- Society has an important role to play in taking up the responsibility to control and prevent sexual violence.
- Women should be more vocal to express the violence against them in the right way so that the necessary action would be taken according to the crime.
- Family support is required for the victims who have suffered sexual violence to support them to be mentally strong.
- Educational institutions also have an important role to play as the younger ages are directly connected to them. Sex education need to be introduce to the younger ages for preventing the future problems in the society.
- The NGOs and Government agencies like State Commission for Women, women support centers etc. need to work more on conducting awareness programmes and workshops and seminars, especially in rural areas where various aspects of violence committing against women.
- Women police need to be strengthening by adding more human resource for easy handling of the case.
- Women from rural areas should acknowledge the free legal aids, compensation and medical assistance offered by the Government for the victims who deserved to be benefited.
- The concern authorities should implement laws honestly pertaining to crime against women.

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