

Demographic and spatial dimensions of violent crime against women: A study on selected major cities of India with special reference to Kolkata

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Abstract

Atrocities against women in India is as old as its history. It takes place in the Indian patriarchal society, irrespective of women's age, economic standard and the social rung to which they belong to. At the same time, women in urban India are the targets of physical and mental torture at home as well as outside i.e. on road, workplaces and public places. The present work concentrates on a heinous crime against women—rape in the major metropolitan cities of India viz. Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai in recent times. Statistical reports of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) suggest that these major cities have been the major centres of violence against women, hence, the work attempts to explore the spatio-temporal dynamics of the aforementioned crime in these cities; to assess the demographic and social vulnerability of victimization of women in such crime; status of such crimes in Kolkata in comparison to other major cities and finally to suggest remedial measures to combat these atrocities in an urban set up. In Kolkata, these crimes against women are low in comparison to other metro cities. However, women in the city still feel insecure and have apprehensions of victimization. Crimes against women may also be seen as a consequence of anomalous dimension of social ecology. The work is based on secondary and primary data collected from National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Quantitative techniques have been applied for spatio-temporal analysis and pictorial representations have been made through cartograms. This academic endeavour is a humble attempt on probing violence against women through demographic and social perspectives.

Keywords: patriarchal society, rape, domestic violence, demographic and social vulnerability, social ecology

Introduction

Violence against women is expressed through various types of atrocities committed on them both within the domestic domain by relatives as well as outside the house — at workplaces and on road. Display of violence against women is a common phenomenon across all patriarchal societies like that of India, with few exceptions in tribal pockets where the society is more egalitarian. The root causes of such atrocities are not necessarily or inherently on the basis of biological bias but are grossly influenced by social conditions in which women live. The demographic and social milieu pose several risk factors under which women become vulnerable to various oppressions committed on them not only by the men but also by other women irrespective of their relation to the victims of such violence.

The present academic endeavour attempts to explore how social and demographic conditions act as vulnerable factors to the victimization of women in the most gruesome form viz. rape in the major metropolitan cities of India which include Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai. Such a crime is predominantly partner abuse which is associated with physical as well as psychological oppressions and has ever-lasting adverse impact on victim's mind, family association and over all social status. Although, women in highly urbanized aforesaid study area are supposed to be educated, economically independent and thereby empowered, yet they fall prey to brutal oppressions in several occasions. Thus, the popular notion and parameters of

gender related development have almost no relation with the victimization of women. In this context, Brownmiller's theory of rape suggests that, it has an underlying association with sexual and class politics. Raping a woman not only humiliates her but also convinces her and her offender that she is inferior and a man deserves to dominate (Bhattacharya, 2008) [1]. This theory is more relevant in urban context as studied through this work because women's work participation high along with several expressions of social freedom like independent ideas of dressing, independent commutation and mobility etc. In these cities these may be perceived by men as threats to their hegemony in the economic arena and hence they take up several weapons of atrocities against women, especially sexual crimes which they think would curb the free thinking and actions of the second gender and malign their self-esteem, through which they try to establish the superiority of the men in the social and economic sectors. Domestic violence is also associated with human ecological relations of women with their spouse in particular and other family members in general. As suggested by Heise such relations operate at societal level, community level, primary group or family level and even at individual level (Heise, 1998) [3].

The scenario of incidences of rape and domestic violence in the major metro cities reveal that the demographic and social factors are major risks for vulnerability of women for getting victimized. These factors include—age, level of education, marital status, relationship with primary group etc. Victimization of women in major metro cities of India is an

indicative of the fact that, despite the relevance of comparatively higher score of gender related development indicators among women, yet these cannot ensure safety and security or respect in general for women.

Major Objectives

The present work attempts to fulfil the following objectives:

- To compare the spatio-temporal dynamics of incidences of rape in the major cities of India with special reference to Kolkata city
- To study the age of the rape victims and their relation with their offenders
- To highlight the intra-city spatio-temporal variation of rape in Kolkata
- To assess the factors responsible for comparatively lower incidences of rape in the city of Kolkata

Major Indian Cities under Study

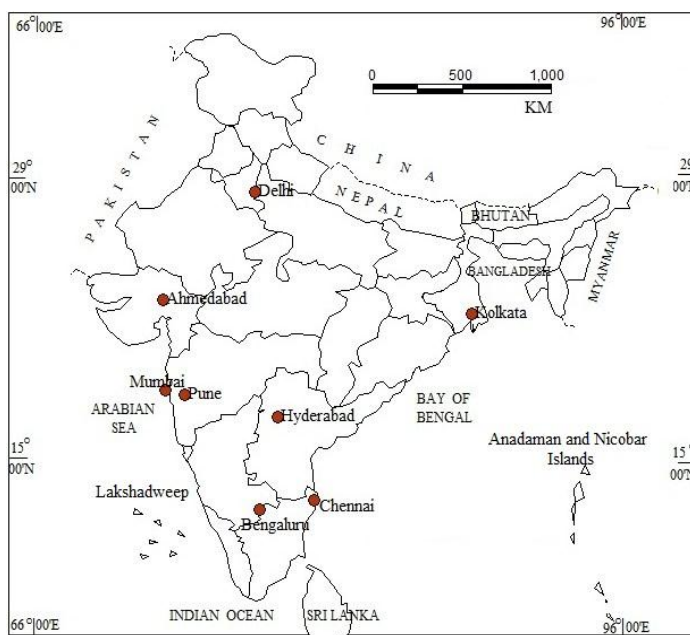


Fig 1: Map Source: Oxford School Atlas, 68th Edition

the foci of the anti-social activities. In cities women are often reported to be victims of sexual offences. Although, cities are presumed to be the centres of modern thinking and city dwellers are thought to have liberal outlook because of being privileged with education, yet equality in terms of respect and self-esteem of women are maligned in many occasions through crimes committed on them. Considering these factors the most important urban centres have been chosen in order to find out the level of atrocities on women occurring here. The result of the work may be studied and analysed under the following sub-sections:

Spatial Dimension Rape Incidences in Major Metropolitan Cities of India

From the adjoining Fig 2, it is evident that, the national capital Delhi is also the rape capital of the country. Consistently, about 50 per cent to 60 per cent incidences of rape occur in Delhi, followed by Mumbai. It is quite clear that such an offence is more associated with cosmopolitan nature of the city.

Materials and Methods

The secondary data source for the present work has been the annual statistical reports of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and records of the Kolkata Police. Decadal growth rate and annual share in percentages of the major cities for the incidences of domestic violence have been cartographically represented. Maps have been drawn to find the areas of concentration of rape and domestic violence within the city of Kolkata. The work has thus combined both quantitative as well as qualitative methods in interpreting the nature of atrocities against women.

Results and Discussion

Major urban centres of India have been chosen for the present study. These cities include Delhi, Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Pune, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Bengaluru and Chennai. As urban cores are

Both Delhi and Mumbai have heterogeneous population composition

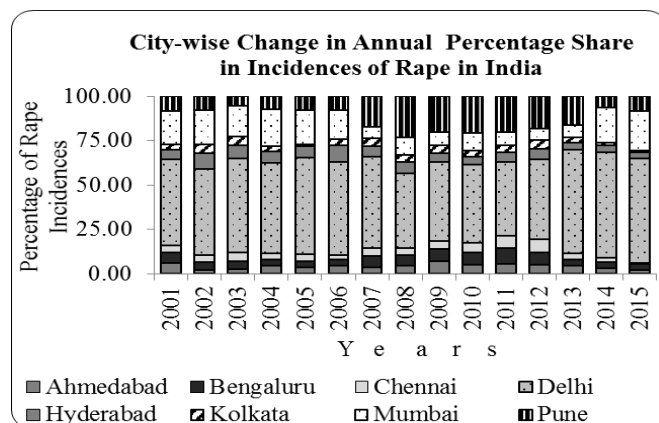


Fig 2: Data source: Computed by the authors from the data provided by NCRB

Men and women arrive in these cities from various parts of the country for work, education etc. many a times women especially those from outside the city are allured on false promise of job or marriage and are often sexually exploited. But, cities having lesser heterogeneity like Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Chennai have comparatively much lesser incidences of rape. In these cities most of the sexual offences are limited to sexual harassments like molestation, stalking etc. and offences of grievous nature are lesser in number. Bengaluru, a rapidly transforming cosmopolitan urban centre is again catching up with higher number of rape incidences. According to V.S. Sridhar, a member of Citizen's Initiative for Peace, Bengaluru, as many young professionals across India flock together in the city, they become easy targets of crimes. They do not understand the local language and also do not have a support system (Verma, The Telegraph, 2014) [9].

It may be interesting to note that the decadal growth rate of incidences of rape from 2001 to 2011 is very low or even negative in those cities with higher number of such incidence, while it is higher for those cities recording lower number of rape cases. For instance the decadal growth rate of rape incidences for Mumbai had been -4.64 per cent between 2001 and 2011, yet Mumbai shows higher percentage share among other cities, while Kolkata with a lower percentage share records a decadal growth rate of 9.25 per cent from 2001 to 2011. Thus it may be inferred that cities with lower percentage share are also fast catching up with those having higher number of rape incidences. This trend is also indicative of growing vulnerability of women in getting victimized of rape irrespective of inter urban status of the major metro cities in the country.

However, lesser number of such incidences in official records does not merely suggest lesser occurrences. In fact, incidences of rape often go unreported. Some of the factors responsible for non-reporting of sexual offences like rape which lead to low official figures, are as follows:

- Complaining and publicizing of crime would malign self-esteem of the victim
- A victimized woman is considered as an accursed person
- Family honour many-a-times is thought be maligned if complains are made and the issue becomes public
- Physical assaults on women often leads to social exclusion of the victims
- Inability to record a complaint against employer, in case the employer is the offender. The victim apprehends losing job and assault on self-esteem in the professional world.

Reporting a crime is easier for women in global cities like Delhi and Mumbai because, people have comparatively more modern and wider outlook. Moreover, because of fast and busy lifestyle, they are less involved in so called 'moral policing' on women about their complaining of rape incidences. Women in these cities are therefore, less stigmatized if they lodge complaints and rape incidences get officially recorded. But, despite urbanization and prevalence of apparent modern outlook, in cities like Kolkata,

Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Chennai, which are still in the phase of social transition for becoming a global city, women often hesitate to report crimes like rape because of social stigma. They feel their moral character would put to judgement and tarnished if such complaints are reported. Thus, official pictures often do not reveal the real picture for sexual crimes like rape.

Demographic Dimension of Rape Incidences in Major Metropolitan Cities of India

Considering age as a demographic parameter, it is quite evident from the adjoining Fig.4, that, women belonging to the age group between 18 and 30 years get mostly victimized. Such a trend prevails in almost all the cities under probe. The second

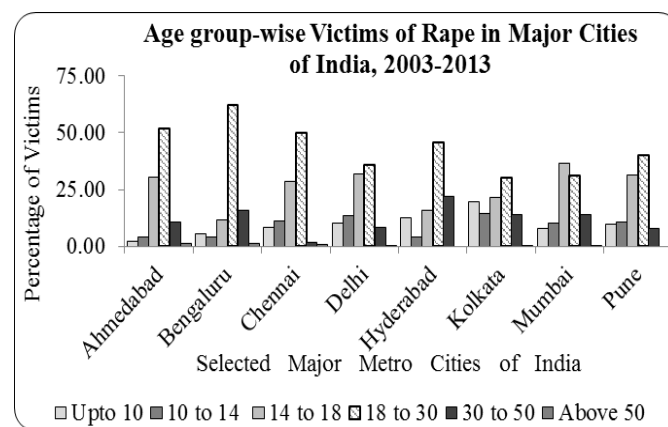


Fig 3: Data source: Computed by the authors from the data provided by NCRB

Highest group of victims belong to the teenage from 14 to 18 years. Both the age groups are thus considered demographically vulnerable because women in these age groups are most tender and voluntarily or involuntarily attract male gaze. In the heightened urban environs, women are engaged in the workforce, be it organized or unorganized, hence, their life outside the so-called protected domestic domain expands without much security. On roads, at public places, at workplaces no-where women find themselves secure from obscene male attention, which are no less offensive as rape. It is also shocking to observe that even girl children below the age of 10 years and elderly women above 50 years are safe from sexual exploitation in big cities especially those under study. Often liberty of mobility and liberty to work in these big cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru and Delhi, make women vulnerable to such crimes. In these metropolitan cities, there is a flow of women folk from the surrounding smaller towns or even from rural areas for education or employment. These women often blindly trust inappropriate persons who later on harass them in several ways. For instance, in Kolkata about 50 to 60 per cent rape cases have been reported as sexual oppression offended by their partner on false promise of marriage or that of providing employment.

**Spatial Dimension of Rape Incidences in Kolkata:
Police Division-wise Temporal Variation in Percentage Share of Incidences of Rape in Kolkata City**

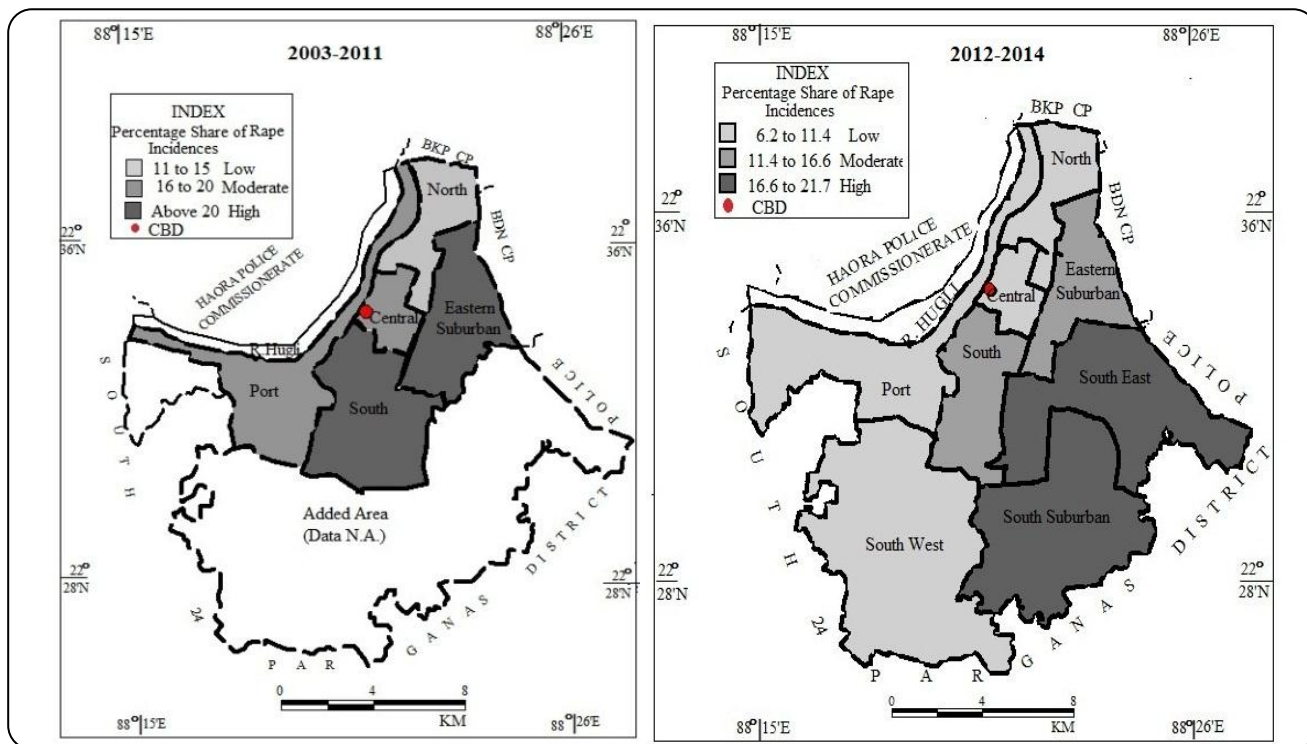


Fig 4: Data source: Computed by the authors from the data provided by Kolkata Police

The Fig.4 speaks volumes for itself that, there had been five Police Divisions under the jurisdiction of Kolkata Police viz. North, Central, Eastern Suburban, South and Port until 2011. After 2011, three more Police Divisions were added under the jurisdiction of Kolkata Police area from that of South 24 Parganas District Police of West Bengal, in order to merge the Police area with that of the Municipal Corporation Area. These were the erstwhile Added Area in the Kolkata Municipal Corporation Area (KMCA). These new Police Divisions were South East, South West and South Suburban. The higher percentage shares of incidences of rape were found in Eastern Suburban and South Division. The Eastern Suburban Division has higher concentration of slums, where about 45 per cent to 65 per cent of slum households to total households have been recorded in the Municipal Slum data of 2009. In such poverty stricken condition with low female literacy and inadequate empowerment of women in the true sense, they often become potential victims of crimes like rape. On the contrary, South Division is a posh area with independently living women. The reports of Kolkata Police suggest that many women opt for live-in relationship and after sometime they are betrayed by their partners. They complain of breach of trust and rape by their partner on false promise of marriage. They in a way become victims of sexual exploitation on false promise of marriage or even sometimes that of employment. Although, percentage share of North, Port and South West Divisions are apparently low, but this however, does not necessarily mean that these areas recorded lesser incidences of rape. North Division being one of the traditional and old neighbourhoods of the city, women even if victimized of rape would hesitate to complain of rape with the apprehension of their self-esteem and family honour to get vilified. Again, poverty stricken and backward areas of Port

and South West Divisions recorded lesser percentage share of rape incidences because several parts of these areas are dominated by the minority communities who are socially backward in terms of education, economic empowerment along with financial freedom and awareness. Many-a-times under such circumstances, their family forbid them to lodge complaint of such atrocities. These might be some of the causes behind lower recorded incidences of rape in these areas of the city.

There has been a visible shift in the higher percentage share of incidences of rape from South and Eastern Suburban Divisions during the period 2003-2011 to the South East and South Suburban Divisions in 2012-2014. The probable reasons for such spatial shift can be studied as follows:

- At the time of creation of new Police Division in the latter half of 2011, the slum dominated and blighted areas of Topsia, Tangra under Eastern Suburban Division and similar areas under South 24 Parganas District Police like Tiljala, came under the jurisdiction of South East Division. Incidences of rape had been high in this area. Hence, spatially South East Division recorded a higher share as these areas became a part of the said Police Division.
- In recent times there has been a spurt in the mushrooming of beauty parlours, spas, video clubs, pubs and night-clubs in the urban sprawl of the eastern and south eastern fringe of Kolkata comprising of South East and South Suburban Divisions. Unmonitored growth of such lewd entertainment hubs characterized by people with low moral values has led to several illicit activities resulting in shooting up of incidences of rape in this part of the city.

Thus the spatial shift of higher incidences of rape may be explained.

Demographic Dimension of Rape Incidences in Kolkata

Intra-city variation of rape victimization in Kolkata also reveals a similar picture. In all the Police Divisions of Kolkata, most of the rape victims belong to a younger age group between 10 and 20 years followed by 20 and 30 years. In socio-economically areas of the Port

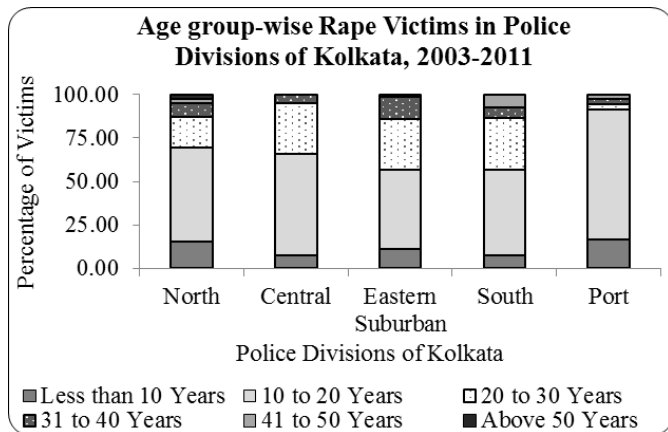


Fig 5: Data source: Computed by the authors from backward the data provided by Kolkata Police

Division, victimization of the children through rape is highest among all other Police Divisions. However, such victimization is lower among women belonging to higher age groups. Socio-economic backwardness therefore can be attributed for child victimization. Many of the neighbourhoods of the Port Division are slum dominated. Both parents of the children go out for work mostly as daily workers mainly in the unorganized sector, while the children remain at home unmonitored and insecure. These factors pose as risks for such children as well as the potential offenders who would victimize them.

Offender-victim Relationship in Incidences of Rape

An interesting deduction emerges out of the study on offender-victim relationship in case of rape incidences. It is revealed that most of the offenders are known to the rape victims in the selected major cities of India. The Fig. 6 shows that only about

10 per cent to 22 per cent of rape victims are victimized by the people unknown to them in almost all the cities under study except Pune, where about 51 per cent of rape victimization has taken place by unknown offenders. The highest category of known offenders is the 'other known'. This group includes friends, acquaintances, colleagues and co-workers, employers, male family members of the employers etc.

The second highest category of known offenders is the neighbours. It is most scandalous to find that even parents and close relatives also turn atrocious to women or girl children of the household and take to heinous offences as rape. But, percentage share of such offenders is comparatively low. This might be the result of low reporting in order to suppress the family scandal.

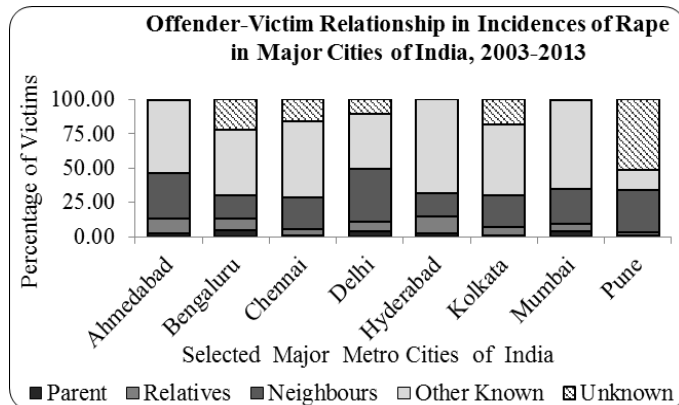


Fig 6: Data source: Computed by the authors from the data provided by NCRB

Even in Kolkata, a similar condition has been observed which is reflected in Fig.7. In both the years over a decade, women have been victimized of rape by known offenders. In fact, rape offences by known offenders have increased from 81 per cent to 88 per cent between 2003 and 2013 respectively. One of the major reasons behind higher incidences of rape by known offenders is because known people are aware of the woman's weaknesses—physical, situational as well as emotional weakness. Hence, they easily and suitably attack women's weak points to exploit them.

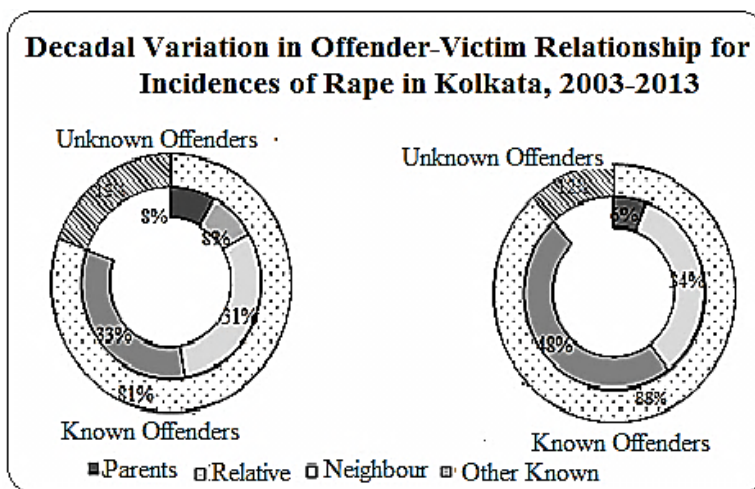


Fig 7: Data source: Computed by the authors from the data provided by Kolkata Police

Public Reactions and Impacts of Rape

Rape, like any other crime has adverse social, psychological

and health repercussions. According to Smith, there may be three types of public reactions to crime—Reactive, Protective

and Preventive (Smith, 2010) [8]. Reactive reaction to crime includes reporting to police or providing support to the victim at community level; protective reaction encompasses guardianship and avoidance behaviour, while preventive measures involve removal of perceived causes of crime etc. Applying Smith's concept in the present work, it has been duly noted that prevention of rape has not been brought to the notice of the authority widely. In fact, prevention of such a vice and instinct driven as well as impulsive crime against women is difficult to prevent from the society. Being reactive to such a crime and making complaints to the police also become difficult for Indian women even in urban areas due to a myriad of factors discussed earlier. Providing the victims with moral and medical support is also limited at community level unless such crimes are grossly brought forward by the media. Such supports are mostly provided by the attention seeking Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are found to work on such issues for their vested interests at several occasions. Hence, the popular reaction to rape most often becomes protective in nature. Rape victims or even potential victims in major cities especially in Kolkata try to avoid going out after dusk, they become over sensitive about their dressing and interacting with people, become sceptical about mixing with unknown people especially men; often male members of their family accompany them to unfamiliar places. However, such protective reactions become ironical when it is observed through the study that most of the victims have been raped by the people they presume to know well. So far the male dominated society in India is concerned though there are several contentions on accepting a rape victim. Most often such victims face explicit as well as covert social exclusion. Their moral character is put to question despite having no fault of themselves in getting victimized. Family of the victims do not readily disclose the obvious identities like names to the media who attempt to highlight the issue. It often becomes difficult for the victims to mix with friends and others in the society if such victimizations come to the forefront through media. Thus a sense of reticence tends to emerge in the victim's psychology quietly making them aloof. There are several social and public health issues associated with rape in the Indian context. Studies by Dobe (2008) [2] along with some specific observations by the authors regarding impact of rape have been enlisted as follows:

Emotional and Psychological Impacts at Personal Level

- Avoidance behaviour
- Self-exclusion from the society
- Low self-esteem and low self-confidence
- Depression
- Suicidal tendencies

Social Impacts at Community and Professional Level

- Society and even sometimes consider victim an accursed person or regard as a stigmatic person
- Societal avoidance or social exclusion
- Difficulty to establish social alliance such as marriages if such victimization is revealed
- Difficulty to find jobs or stay employed once such victimization is revealed

Health Impacts

- Unwanted pregnancies
- Risks of getting affected with HIV

- Adverse impact on reproductive and maternal health

Other Impacts

- Often in order to suppress rape, victims are murdered, so that they cannot lodge complaints to the police.
- Post rape acid attacks on victims are also not uncommon

Major Findings

The major findings of the study may be thus summarized as follows:

- Incidences of rape in Kolkata is much lesser compared to other major metro cities of India. Delhi, the National Capital may be also aptly called the 'Rape Capital' of India because of its consistent higher percentage share in the crime surpassing all the other cities under consideration, followed by Mumbai.
- It therefore may be inferred that greater the level of urbanization (Delhi and Mumbai being global cities), lesser is the security of women. This may be true for other emerging global cities like Pune and Bengaluru. This is probably because of heterogeneous population composition in these cities and flocking of people with various good or malicious intentions in the city who see women as soft targets for illicit exploitation.
- Lesser reported incidences of rape in Kolkata may emerge out of two reasons—firstly, there really have been lesser number of rapes in the city due to comparatively lesser mobility and liberty of women in Kolkata in comparison to other cities under probe. Hence, their vulnerability to such victimization is less. Secondly, there has been low reporting of such incidences for various reasons as already discussed.
- Considerable intra-city spatial as well as temporal variations have been observed in Kolkata. Social set-up of the city and urban sprawling have been attributed for such disparity in occurrences of rape incidents in the city.
- The demographic analysis reveals that age is no bar for getting victimized through rape. Starting from girl children below the age of 10 years up to the elderly women above the age of 50 years are becoming victims of rape incidences. However, the teenage and young adults are mostly victimized belonging to the age groups between 10 and 30 years. Hence, this age group can be considered as the most vulnerable age group for such oppression. The scenario is almost similar in other major cities under probe.
- It is a thought-provoking fact to come across the reality that about 81 to 88 per cent of the victims have been raped by the people whom they know very well in Kolkata. The computed data on the share of other cities under study revolves around 50 to 80 per cent. Most of them are under unclassified unknown category which includes friends, co-workers, employers etc. followed by neighbours. Even seldom parents and close relatives also brutally oppress women of this crime. Thus, knowing the person in closely and being aware about her weaknesses have been an advantage for the offenders, as they are well assured that such acquaintance or relationship would deter the rape victim to publicize the crime and the criminal and lodge police complaint with apprehension of ruining of relation or hesitation of spoiling familial ties because these two bonds are presumed to be very pious in Indian Society, especially for women.

Suggested Remedial Measures

The best remedy to combat any form of crime is good governance with effective policing and implementation of legislature by the judiciary. Incidences of rape can be also somewhat combatted with effective policing and fast trials by the courts. Example setting punishments for the rarest of the rare cases of rape must be implemented on quick trial.

Women especially girls should be given training on martial arts as a part of their physical education curriculum at school and college levels. Efforts taken by 'Sukanya' Project under Community Police Wing of Kolkata Police is worth mentioning in this context as school girls enrolled in this project are trained of martial arts which would provide them with tactics of self-defence.

Conclusion

Rape is a kind of crime which affects a woman's psychology, emotion and social status. It is a highly urbanized crime, although in rural areas most of such crimes do not enter into public domain. But even in cities, a lot of stigma is attached to such a crime and victims do not readily open up regarding lodging complaint of being victimized of rape. Hence, lower statistical records do not necessarily mean that incidences of rape have not occurred. The present study revealed that women become vulnerable and soft target of sexual exploitation by all members of the society including their family members. It is also an alarming fact, that women of all age and different social background become target of such oppression ranging from infants to children to teenagers to young adults and elderly women. This type of crime is not only a subject matter of social pathology but also a grave assault on the entire humanitarian value system. Therefore, apart from legal and penal measures to alleviate impacts of rape, implementing egalitarian respect for women and upholding their opinion at par with any decision making in the society or family needs to be imbibed among men from the very childhood. Thus, an orchestrated effort of police, legislature, judiciary and all members of the society should get forward to combat and alleviate the heinous crime like rape.

Acknowledgment

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