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“A STUDY ON THE COVERAGE OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT AMONG AUDIENCE”
(A study conducted at Chennai)



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

Rape has reared its ugly face almost every day in all the newspapers nowadays. After the brutal gang rape of a para medical student in Delhi, many rape cases have been filed in police station. It does not mean that, such brutal crimes are causing more crimes but now women are less afraid to come out in open and boldly file a case against the predator. Incidents of rape and other forms of violence against women have created lots of furor

and anguish, and rightly so amongst middle class throughout the country. According to the National Crime Records Bureau 24,923 rape cases were reported across India in 2012, but experts agree that, the number of unreported cases of sexual assault brings the total much higher. The latest estimate shows that, rape cases are reported every 22 minutes in India. Such reports are given through media to the public and this paper aims to study the coverage of crimes against women in media and the response of people towards it. **The paper also tries to understand the contribution of media towards preventing these gory crimes and the image it offers about a country to its citizens.**

KEYWORDS

Crime Against Women, sociologists, psychologists and critics.

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INTRODUCTION:

The media can both perpetuate and reflect cultural myths and beliefs. (Reinholtz, Muehlenhard, Phelps & Satterfield, 1995; Korn & Efrat, 20004). Therefore, the media serves as a socializing factor that, influences conventional values, and also a mirror that reveals common attitudes and assumptions (Brownmiller, 1975). By examining various media sources researchers can identify, isolate, and examine common societal beliefs. Our Society is exposed to many different forms of media such as television, feature films, documentaries, radio and newspapers. Media have been a dominant avenue through which the public has gleaned information about important current events and issues for over 100 years.

In addition, sociologists, psychologists and critics of the media have pointed out that, news reports are often framed as stories by the media, or as what Bennet (1983) called drama narratives. **Rape is a taboo subject that is not frequently discussed.** For this reason, media’s portrayal of instances of rape and sexual assault are especially important, since a crucial part of the way the public understands sex crimes is through media. Representations of rape and sexual assault are unique for several reasons. The perpetrator is not often the only person whose actions are questioned. Often, the victim of rape falls under intense scrutiny as well. Media has the ability to represent rape victims in a sympathetic light and to challenge and discredit rape myths.

INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA:

For more than seventy years, sociologists, social psychologists, writers and artists have explored the ways that exposure to mass media affects the public. There has been an important shift in the theoretical approach used to examine the media effects. Much of the early research examined the effects of media exposure on the individual, but a more recent body of work strives to understand how mass media influences the public and society as a whole. This more recent approach provides the theoretical framework for the study.

RAPE IN THE NEWS:

A number of books and studies have examined the elusive theme of what events and stories make it to the news. Crime news, compared to news of other non violent events is vastly over represented by media (marsh, 1991). Almost most of the media stories explored only the current state of rape in the news, while few have taken a historical perspective and examined how the reporting of rape has changed over time. Taking a historical perspective is important because it allows the researcher to track the way cultural understandings – and the discourses that surround these understandings - shift.

Brutal rapes are more likely to be covered by newspapers than rapes with less physical injuries to the victim. When asked what would make a rape or sexual assault newsworthy, one reporter answered, “if the person is beaten up badly, or is gang raped” (Meyers, 1997). This is consistent with Marsh’s (1991) finding that, violent crimes are covered more frequently than non violent crimes. These findings are particularly relevant to an understanding of how the media impacts cultural view on rape, because research indicates that, neutral observers assign more blame to victims who are not physically

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injured (Kanekar and Nazareth, 1988; Kurlowitz, 1982).

Kanekar and Nazareth, (1988) found that longer prison sentences were assigned to perpetrators when the victim was severely injured. A possible explanation is that, observers begin to believe that, in a “real rape” the victim is hospitalized or injured, because this is typically the kind of rape that, they possibly read about in the newspapers.

Many of the authors had interesting suggestions for ways the media can improve how they cover and report on rapes. Benedict (1992) suggested that, reporters should: use vocabulary that avoids any suggestions that, the women enjoyed the incident or was an active participant, avoid focusing on the victim’s behavior and stop questioning the veracity of victim’s stories. Marsh (1991) asserted that, there should be more information provided about the roots or causes of crime, and the society’s impact on the nature of criminals, instead of treating crimes as completely individualistic.

These studies do not merely seek to criticize, blame or cast aspersions on the press, but instead seek to find ways in which the public’s overall understanding of rape, rape victims, and the climate that, surrounds sex crimes, can be bettered. But until the media implements these changes, it will remain “a prominent part of the cycle of injustice that traps victims” (Benidict, 1992). **This study attempts to understand the narratives that press is constructing about rape, rape victims and perpetrators.**

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Rape seems to be the recent epidemic in India which needs our complete attention to eradicate the problem at the grass root level from our country. Orthodox Indian society stigmatizes rape victims. Many rape cases do not even enter the police station for fear of being spoken ill by the public. But the gang rape of a 23-year-old woman in a bus in New Delhi in December sparked debate and introspection in India about sexual crimes against women. An outcry quickly grew over her case and expanded to include widespread concerns about women's safety and inequalities, triggering demonstrations in various cities. In response, the nation's lawmakers have introduced tougher laws and punishments for sexual crimes and harassment. Despite such action, frequent episodes of sexual violence are reported in India. Here the researcher wants to study the coverage of such crimes in the different types of media and the impact it has on the young adults. This study aims to find out the role of media in curtailing gender based violence and the image it gives about women to the society. Its finding may helps to explore and create a scope for further research.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The research study has the following limitations.

The study on its face appears to be limited as it is carried out in a particular city i.e. **Chennai**. The study is purely based on the **respondents’ opinion and their perception**. The researcher felt that, the respondents might express a biased opinion, which may limit the validity of the study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For this purpose, the researcher referred various journals, books and web resources, got information from the previous studies which are connected with the nature of the problem. This

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literature review helped the researcher to know about the current study's concepts and carried out by others with the same problem. The researcher depended upon internet and gathered only a minimum number of concepts and the Ministry of Human resource development's reports of government of India.

PROFILE OF THE STUDY AREA

This study was conducted at Chennai city which is the capital city of Tamil Nadu. It has a very popular background in all aspects. It is a happening city with a metropolitan background. It has women from all communities and classes who stay at home and also work in night shifts. Hence, this area is best for the study in this context.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Systematic scientific enquiry helps to understand the concept rationally. There are lots of tools and figures that are unique in terms of approaches and subject matter under investigation. This research investigation being objective and unbiased has followed a scientific approach in conducting this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objective of this study is **to know the impact of coverage of crimes in media among people**. In addition there are some specific objectives, these are:

- 1.To study the attitude of male respondents towards crime against women.
- 2.To know which medium offers the largest coverage of crime against women.
- 3.To know the influences of religion and politics in gender discrimination.
- 4.To find out the relationship between crimes reporting in media and the mind set of people about the reason of the crime.
- 5.To evolve feasible solutions based on the study to reduce such crimes.

HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

Based on the objectives the following hypotheses are formulated.

- 1.There is significant association between coverage of crime against women in media and its influence among the respondents.
- 2.There is a significant association between the frequency of coverage of crime against women in media and the role of media in curtailing the crime against women.

CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK

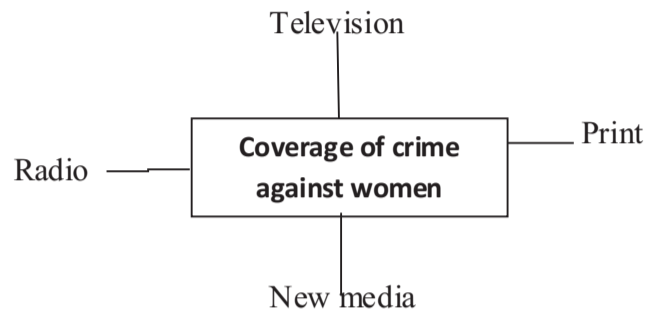
Based on the detailed discussion with journalists and NGO's who work to prevent crime against

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women the researcher has identified and formulated the following media for coverage of crime against women in India.



From the identified indicators such as the different broad classifications of media the researcher has formulated the questionnaire and had conducted the study. Simple random sampling was adopted for this study, since it is difficult to go for stratification with such a large universe. Hundred samples were collected from audience randomly belonging to age group ranging from 18 – 60. The method of study is descriptive as it is the most appropriate method. This research made an attempt to describe the influence of people towards the coverage of crime against women in media. The universe / population of the study are the Chennai based audience. In order to achieve the objectives of this research, data were collected both from the primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from the respondents through a structured questionnaire comprising four selected broad classification of media. The secondary data had been gathered from the sources like books, journals, and internet which has information on crime against women. Previous related research studies, national and international journals and related web journals were also studied. The data were collected from **100 samples using simple random sampling method** and the responses were edited and tabulated to suit the requirement of the study. The statistical tools and techniques such as **simple percentage** were used. The hypotheses framed for the study were tested using Chi-square test and one way Anova.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Analysis on socio-demographic factors of the respondents

S.No	Details	A	B	C	D	E
1	Gender	65%	35%	-	-	
2	Age Group	44%	32%	16%	6%	2%
3	Marital Status	32%	68%			
4	Employment Status	2%	31%	3%	4%	60%

Table 01:

The above table no-01 reveals the socio demographic details of the respondents. From this 65 per cent of the respondents are from male and remaining 35 per cent are female whereas the age group varied from 18 – 55 having 44% of the sample belonging to age group below 20, 32% belonging to age

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group 21 – 30, 16% belonging to age group 31 – 40, 6% from age group (41 – 50) and 2% above 50. Regarding marital status 32% were married and 68% were unmarried and regarding employment status, 60% were not working, 4% were unemployed, 3 % were self employed, 31% were working in private sector and 2% were under government sector.

Factors influencing the crime:

S.No	Parameters	A	B	C	D	E
1	Dress code	7	14	26	26	27
2	Punishment of crime	4	3	8	37	48
3	severity of the punishment	1	2	9	32	56
4	Role of movies	5	6	25	35	29
5	Westernization	2	10	32	35	21
6	Involvement of Political parties	6	9	25	35	25
7	Religion	6	3	23	26	42

Table 02

After doing the review of literature extensively, a **questionnaire** was prepared in order to understand the influence of media among the people in crime reporting against women. Each question was given value top response options on 5 point rating scale, 5 being strongly disagree to 1 being strongly agree. Audience feels that various factors such as dress code, movies, westernization and the punishment of the perpetrators are reasons for sexual assault on women. Almost 60% of the samples felt that the criminals are protected by political influences and 68% felt that religion plays a strong role in gender discrimination.

Factors that can reduce the crime

S.No	Particulars	A	B	C	D	E
1	Can strict laws reduce crime	1	10	8	34	47
2	Legalization of prostitution	17	13	19	28	23
3	Counseling	2	6	35	37	20
4	Punishment for juveniles	4	9	18	47	22
6	Acceptance of rape victims	11	2	18	24	45
7	Government	18	7	13	27	35
4	Sex Education	1	13	17	40	29

Table 03:

The above table indicates the factors that, can help in reducing the crime. More than 80% of the samples felt that more strict laws has to be enforced to prevent sexual assault and 50% of the samples felt that if prostitution is legalized it can help in reducing the crime. 69% felt that sex education can help in eradicating the crime at grass root level and 60% feel that the government has taken enough steps to prevent the crime.

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Role of media:

S.No	Details	a	b	C	D	E
1	Frequency of Crime reporting in media	10	41	40	7	2
2	Sources of News	30%	2%	52	14	2
3	Categories of crime reported	35	5	47	4	9
4	Media exposure can reduce crime	5	11	15	34	35
5	Sensitizing the crime	10	14	18	30	28
6	Voyeurism	11	17	11	32	29

Table 04:

The above table indicates the role of media in crime reporting 61% felt that, media has a voyeuristic attitude when it comes to reporting sexual assault and 58% felt that, media is just sensationalizing the crime, while 74% felt that constant exposure of such crimes by media can help in reducing the crime. The sources of news include Newspaper, Radio, Television, Online news sources and Social networking sites respectively.

Overall impact:

Particular	No. of respondents (n=100)	Percentage (100%)
Low	46	46.0
High	54	54.0
<i>Mean: 71.75 / Median: 72.00 / S.D.: 5.281 / Min.: 58 / Max.: 84</i>		

Testing Hypotheses:

Chi-square test

	Overall impact						Statistical Inference
	Low		High		Total		
	(n=46)	(100%)	(n=54)	(100%)	(n=100)	(100%)	
Age							
Below 20yrs	23	50.0%	21	38.9%	44	44.0%	X ² =1.586 Df=4 .811>0.05 Not Significant
21 to 30yrs	13	28.3%	19	35.2%	32	32.0%	
31 to 40yrs	6	13.0%	10	18.5%	16	16.0%	
41 to 50yrs	3	6.5%	3	5.6%	6	6.0%	
Above 50yrs	1	2.2%	1	1.9%	2	2.0%	

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Do you come across news about crime against women							
Yes	39	84.8%	49	90.7%	88	88.0%	X ² =.835 Df=1 .361>0.05 Not Significant
No	7	15.2%	5	9.3%	12	12.0%	
How often do you hear about crime against women							
More than once a day	7	15.2%	3	5.6%	10	10.0%	X ² =5.331 Df=4 .255>0.05 Not Significant
At least once every day	15	32.6%	26	48.1%	41	41.0%	
Once in a week	21	45.7%	19	35.2%	40	40.0%	
Once in a month	2	4.3%	5	9.3%	7	7.0%	
Every rarely	1	2.2%	1	1.9%	2	2.0%	
What are the resources through which you hear about such crimes (tick as much as applicable)							
Print medium	15	32.6%	15	27.8%	30	30.0%	X ² =2.895 Df=4 .576>0.05 Not Significant
Radio	1	2.2%	1	1.9%	2	2.0%	
Television	22	47.8%	30	55.6%	52	52.0%	
Online News sources	8	17.4%	6	11.1%	14	14.0%	
SNS	0	0	2	3.7%	2	2.0%	
What are the general crimes against women that you come across through media							
Rape	16	34.8%	19	35.2%	35	35.0%	X ² =5.125 Df=5 .401>0.05 Not Significant
Molestation	1	2.2%	4	7.4%	5	5.0%	
Sexual harassment	21	45.7%	26	48.1%	47	47.0%	
Dowry	3	6.5%	1	1.9%	4	4.0%	
Gang Rape	3	6.5%	4	7.4%	7	7.0%	
Others	2	4.3%	0	0	2	2.0%	

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Do you feel that enough protection is given for women in the country							
Yes	3	6.5%	8	14.8%	11	11.0%	$X^2=1.745$ Df=1
No	43	93.5%	46	85.2%	89	89.0%	.187>0.05 Not Significant
In your opinion which is the safest place in India for women							
Urban	5	10.9%	10	18.5%	15	15.0%	$X^2=2.314$ Df=3 .510>0.05 Not Significant
Rural	5	10.9%	5	9.3%	10	10.0%	
Both	8	17.4%	5	9.3%	13	13.0%	
None	28	60.9%	34	63.0%	62	62.0%	

Statistical test: Chi-square test was used the above table

Finding:

There is no significant association between Age, frequency of crime, source of news about the crimes, general crimes against women, feel that enough protection is given for women in the country and opinion which is the safest place in India for women of the respondents and their overall impact. Hence, the calculated value greater than table value ($p>0.05$).

T-Test

Difference between gender of the respondents and their overall impact

Overall impact	Mean	S.D	Statistical Inference
Male (n=65)	72.14	5.420	T=1.003 Df=98
Female (n=35)	71.03	5.009	.319>0.05 Not Significant

Statistical test: Student ‘t’ test was used the above table

Finding

There is no significant difference between gender of the respondents and their overall impact. Hence, the calculated value greater than table value ($p>0.05$).

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T-Test

Difference between marital status of the respondents and their overall impact

Overall impact	Mean	S.D	Statistical inference
<i>Married (n=32)</i>	70.69	5.051	T=-1.387 Df=98
<i>Unmarried (n=68)</i>	72.25	5.349	.169>0.05 Not Significant

Statistical test: Student 't' test was used in the above table

Finding

There is no significant difference between marital status of the respondents and their overall impact. Hence, the calculated value greater than table value ($p>0.05$).

One way ANOVA difference between occupation of the respondents and their overall impact

Overall impact	Mean	S.D	SS	Df	MS	Statistical inference
Between Groups			98.064	4	24.516	F=.875 .482>0.05 Not Significant
<i>Govt. (n=2)</i>	69.00	9.899				
<i>Private (n=31)</i>	71.23	4.890				
<i>Self employed (n=3)</i>	67.67	2.887				
<i>Unemployed (n=4)</i>	73.50	4.041				
<i>Student (n=60)</i>	72.20	5.495				
Within Groups			2662.686	95	28.028	

Statistical test: oneway ANOVA 'f' test was used the above table

FINDING

There is no significant difference between occupation of the respondents and their overall impact. Hence, the calculated value greater than table value ($p>0.05$).

Overall Findings:

- 1.From the above analysis the researcher has given the following findings.
- 2.Media influences the way people think about crime against women and there is no significant

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association between age, or employment status, marital status or gender and their overall impact.
3.41% received news about sexual harassment everyday from the media while 40% received information once in a week.

4. Sexual harassment and rape seems to have more coverage than other crimes against women.

5. 89% feel that, enough protection is not given for women in the country

6. 62% feel that, the both urban and rural areas are not safe for women.

7. Television seems to have higher coverage of sexual violence against women owing to 52% followed by print with 30%. 14% of the sample received news about sexual harassment from online news sources and 2 percent received news from radio and Social networking sites respectively.

SUGGESTIONS

Media is the watch dog of the society. It reflects the society like a mirror and hence any news that comes through it must have narrative structures that are not misleading. Reporters must be given adequate training and knowledge on sexual crime reporting so that news is not biased and involvement of female reporters in such cases can help a lot in that. A proper journalistic code of ethics must be followed while reporting the crime and media must act with moral sense of responsibility to slowly eradicate this evil from the society. Media should act as the voice of the public and constantly bring to light the crime against women and take necessary steps to prevent the crime.

CONCLUSION

Media have the power to greatly influence public attitudes about rape and sexual assault. Although many people think that media are accurately and objectively portraying instances of crime, it is clear that, media have been presenting a biased and inaccurate picture of who is raped, who rapes, and the situations in which one might be raped. In addition, the press coverage of rape, when considered as a whole, identifies which victims are worthy of sympathy, which victims are more likely to be telling the truth, which perpetrators are monsters, and which perpetrators can perhaps still be redeemed. Rapists are viewed as acting completely outside of society, and the crime of rape is completely individualized. As audience we must challenge these misconceptions and myths about rape. We must broaden our narrow definition of who is raped and under what circumstances, we must address the societal influences that, lead to a willingness to rape instead of merely blaming the individual, and we must treat all victims of rape with compassion and understanding.

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