

Eve Teasing: A Social Menace in India

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Abstract

Mental health basically comprise of our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act and also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Good mental health is an important part of a woman's overall health. Although men and women are affected equally by mental health conditions, however some mental health conditions such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and social phobias occur more often in women and can play a considerable role in the state of a woman's overall health. Today, there is a growing recognition that the stresses imposed on women effect their psychological, physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. Women's mental health cannot be considered in isolation from social, political and economic issues. The circumstances and conditions that society considers as normal or ordinary often lead to mental health problems in women. Apart from the conflicts and dilemmas in the context of marriage, family, relationships, reproduction, childbearing, divorce, aging, education, work, to name a few, stresses that have more impact on women's mental health are eve teasing, physical and sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sex discrimination, unwanted pregnancy, etc. Women are more vulnerable to psychological disorders as compared to men due to psycho-social stressors that are present throughout their lives. This paper initiates to throw light on the various psychological, physical, social and mental issues that women go through in dealing with eve teasing. It also points out future directions for research and action to be taken not only by the government but also by the society and stakeholders in terms of policies and law to avoid such menace in the society.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women has become one of the most visible and articulate social problems around the world. On the one hand, with increasing educational levels, women become more and more aware of their own identity. But on the other hand there is no change in the patriarchal and conservative structure of family and society. Men harassing women are many but that the root of the problem is that women's lives are changing. Women are increasingly venturing out of their homes, taking jobs, wearing western clothes, going for higher education, so on and so forth. Many Indian men feel threatened by this, and sexual harassment in the form

of eve teasing is one of many tools used to keep women in their place according to the traditional norms as perceived by them. Eve teasing as one of the most common violent manifestation of sexual harassment to women in India is becoming one of the utmost ordinary concerns where a girl is sexually or mentally harassed in public and which poses a great mental stress and anxiety among women. Young women in India are frequent targets of this gender based violence. The term 'Eve teasing' is an act of perversion and is used to refer to sexual harassment of women in public places such as the streets, public transportation, parks, beaches, and cinema halls. While legal definitions refer to crimes that outrage the modesty or insult women, eve teasing then acts as a control on most women by censoring their general mobility in and accessibility to public spaces, thereby affecting their sense of personhood and security. Eve teasing can be further interpreted as an attitude, a mindset, or a set of behaviours, or any act or acts that can be understood as insult, an act of humiliation or embarrassment to the female sex. This type of a public harassment by a lone man or gangs of men includes verbal assaults such as making passes or unwelcome sexual jokes; nonverbal assaults such as showing obscene gestures, winking, whistling, and staring; and physical assaults such as pinching, fondling and rubbing against women in public places, email/phone call/ cyber bullying or even deliberate accidental push. It has numerous other definitions because it would be ignorant to classify it as a single act of harassment. Several instances of eve teasing have been followed by more violent assaults such as rape and murder.

Eve teasing, a ridiculous form of enjoyment for men and a physical as well as mental torment for women violates a woman's basic right to live with dignity. It heightens feelings of dependency on men for protection even though some women may be economically or emotionally independent. It often adds to the traumas experienced in other spaces, be it other work places or in the domestic sphere, making the experience of male violence a rather seamless and everyday affair. Women too internalize the idea that eve teasing is normal, harmless and often deserved. Each day, hundreds of women and young girls face the threat of eve teasing. While negligible cases are reported, most go unaddressed as women prefer silence. Eve teasing should be prevented from the root itself so that in long run it does not turn into massive crimes like rape, molestation, murder, etc in the society.

TYPES OF EVE-TEASING

There are many forms of eve teasing, which are power-player, intellectual seducer, mother-father, one-of-the-gang, unintentional and the eve-teaser are conducting eve teasing toward girls by these forms. Therefore, eve-teaser may be anyone, such a client, a co-worker, a teacher or professor, a student, a friend, or a stranger and eve-teasing may occur any place such as

beaches, roads, cinema halls, buses and sadly even in educational institutions. It is a crime easy to commit but difficult to prove.

Eve-teasing today has become malicious, appalling and disgusting practice. The Indian Journal of Criminology and Criminalistics (January- June 1995 Edn.) has categorized eve teasing into five heads viz.:

- (1) Verbal eve teasing;
- (2) Physical eve teasing;
- (3) Psychological harassment;
- (4) Sexual harassment; and
- (5) Harassment through some objects.

Sexual harassment like eve-teasing of women amounts to violation of rights guaranteed under Article 14, 15 as well. In the absence of effective legislation to contain eve-teasing, normally, complaints are registered under Section 294 or Section 509 IPC. Although eve-teasing has not been defined as an offence in any law in India, similar behaviour is punishable under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and the legal remedy available to the victim is lodging a complaint with the police or magistrate.

- Section 298 (A) and (B) of Indian Penal Code prescribes up to three months imprisonment for making obscene gestures or remarks to a woman.
- For showing pornographic or obscene pictures, books or slips to a woman, Section 292 of the IPC prescribes up to two years imprisonment. The same punishment, with or without a fine, is meted out under Section 354 (IPC) to those who use force or assault a woman to outrage her modesty.
- If the complaint of making obscene gestures, indecent body language and lewd comments concerning a woman or exhibiting any such object, which intrudes upon the woman's privacy, is proved, Section 509 of the IPC prescribes punishment up to one year imprisonment or fine.

REPERCUSSIONS OF EVE TEASING

Violence does not need to be in physical form always, sometimes verbal violence is more painful and hurting than the physical which leaves one emotionally wrecked and psychologically disturbed. And there is where a person feels emotionally and psychologically so disturbed that one can even choose to do something as serious as suicide.

The consequences of eve teasing can be summarized as below:

- ***Suicide:*** The victims of eve teasing in many cases, being unable to bear with the psychological scars left by the eve-teasers, commit suicide to escape the anguish. Most of them never report to their parents about eve-teasing. Feeling of shame, guilt, fear of over control by family members, etc., forbid them to hide about the incident of eve-teasing from their parents/guardian. When the victims do not get any support from the family and realise that there is no scope to rescue from this situation then most of them resort to suicides. Besides, even though most of them are aware of the existing laws, most of them fear that they might not get justice. Further, if the teasers happen to belong from affluent class, they might threaten and revile the victim's family with dire consequences. So, finding no other alternative the victims commit suicide.
- ***Blocking Education:*** Eve teasing has become so disquieting that many students and their guardian are compelled to stop education of their children. They are of the opinion that it is better to save life of their children than to educate them.
- ***Child Marriage:*** Eve teasing is a main cause of force marriage and child marriage and most of the time child marriage is resorted to save girl from the clutches of the eve teasers.
- ***Mental Stress:*** Most of the girls under the fear of the eve teaser, suffer from various types of mental stress and trauma. It affects the victim so badly that it confers number of problems like tension, fear, anxiety, sadness, etc. Most of the victims suffer from broken sleep and found it difficult to sleep due to repetition of flashes of incident of eve-teasing along with problem of light headedness and unsatisfactory sleep. In other words it effect physic of victim that abuser cannot imagine. Sometimes her parents and other family members also become upset and suffer from various mental shocks. When confronted with instances of harassment, women's overt reactions that may range from moving away to confronting the harasser are mediated by a variety of considerations. The physical effect can be backache, headache, irregular periods, injury during harassment and injury during self defence, etc. Although women would rather confront the harassers than ignore them, it is most strongly the fear of retaliation and the concern that their reaction may be misinterpreted as an invitation that inhibits women from taking action. In such circumstances, confrontation may lead to further harassment. However, the choice to remain silent and ignore harassers is also a difficult one for women, as silence is also seen to perpetuate the culture of harassment. Women's responses to eve teasing are more of endurance than of resistance for the fear of double victimization.
- ***Family Trouble:*** Sometimes, eve teasing may bring new and unbelievable family trouble. A girl under the umbrella of eve teasing when discloses the matter to the family

members, a troublesome misunderstanding may arise in the family. Parents might blame the victim unknowingly rather than the teaser. There may be some troubles regarding marriage proposals of the girls. The family blames the girl as soon as the proposal is negated.

- ***Killing and Oppression:*** Given the very nature of street harassment, the fact that it carries dangers of further harm, such as rape and acid attacks and the sheer dismissal of the issue at various fronts, women report feeling a variety of negative emotions in response to it including anger and fear. Eve teasers and their hoodlums never hesitate to kill, suppress, loot, arson, torture the opposite parties if they fail to tease or if teasing is countered by kith and kin and others. The various types of activities by teasers are throwing stones, undressing, throwing acid, kidnapping, raping, torturing and killing etc.
- ***Eve Teasing Encourages Early Marriage:*** Eve teasing is a traumatic experience which can leave deep psychological scars and has negative consequences for the greater community. Parents, who are concerned about their daughter's honor or safety, sometimes keep them home from school and/or marry them off at an early age. Girls who are teased or harassed are pushed into marriage, before they are physically and mentally prepared which creates major problems associated with teenage pregnancies, including the risk of maternal and infant death.

ERADICATION OF EVE TEASING

Eve teasing not only hurts a girl's dignity but also curbs her freedom to live. It becomes even more difficult for a girl to face society, which has always been male-dominated. Hence, stern laws should be implemented to curb this social evil completely. The ways to eradicate eve teasing are discussed below:

- ***Family Education:*** Family is the first institution of learning for a human being. If a man achieves proper values, ethics, education, etc. from his family he can not engage himself with such crimes like eve teasing once he steps out of the house. Psychologists and sociologists feel that this behaviour stems from deeper, gender stereotypes that we all grow up with. Social discrimination against women is extensively accountable for the ill treatment to women in the eyes of men due to lack of adequate presence of learning of morals, values to the children at family, socially and schooling level respectively. We need to inculcate the notion that girls are different but equal to men. Interaction between the two genders shouldn't be curbed and the whole idea of looking at boys being superior to girls must be brought down. If these values are encouraged in schools

and colleges, it will address the issue, at least to some extent. It's good that there are legislations to fight such instances, but unless the culture changes, no legislation can bring out a larger change.

- ***Both the victim of this social evil and offender need to be counselled:*** To make eve-teasing a non-bailable offence is a positive sign from the government. It is an offence that mostly happens on college campus and locally as well, but we see that society is unwary about it. We have to consider the victim of eve-teasing as well as the offender for counselling. A victim of eve-teasing can experience traumatic stress disorder, guilt and anger against the opposite sex, which can later interfere in building relationships with men. In the worst case scenario, if the victim is repeatedly targeted, it could lead to suicidal tendencies. In case of offenders, eve-teasing must be seen as an early sign among youngsters, which is identified as an anti-social behaviour. It has been observed that boys in the age group of 13-15 start getting involved in the eve-teasing practice in schools. The act must be addressed at an early stage by parents and schools otherwise there is a high chance of these boys getting into anti-social activities, aggressive behaviour, addiction to substances and have relationship problems.
- ***Victims must come forward and register a complaint:*** Right now, the situation is such that eve-teasers have no fear of the law as they know it is a bailable offence and one can get out within an hour's time. Making it non-bailable will surely discourage over 90% of these offenders, fearing the stringent law. Today, many girls who have fallen prey to this ugly practice of eve-teasing are forced by their parents to leave their college or education. There are many examples of eve-teasing taking an ugly turn wherein the victimised girls have become mentally disturbed to such an extent that they have committed suicide. The law has to be stringent to curb eve-teasing especially among youngsters. However, the police too should act promptly on such cases. Even the victimised girls must come forward and register a complaint so that police action can be taken.
- ***Giving stringent punishment to the offender:*** Offender must be kept under the ambit of law. Stringent law is needed to instil fear among offenders. If offender remains unpunished, crimes spread quickly in the society. However, having such laws alone won't decrease these crimes. We also have to change the outlook of men towards women otherwise such crimes will keep on happening. On the other hand, the police and lawyers must also take cases of eve-teasing more seriously, i.e., along with bringing this new law for eve-teasing, the state should also strengthen and train the police machinery and judiciary to deal with such an offence.

- **Role of Media:** Further, media should not portray men as powerful and women as powerless, vulnerable and in a position to be exploited; and it should not project women as sex objects and (especially cinema) should not portray eve-teasing as something harmless. Media should raise slogans against this evil and should make people aware about the seriousness of this issue. Religious and moral values should be imbibed so that the factors, which cause moral degeneration, are counterbalanced by moral values provided by religion.
- **Implementation of Regulations:** At the legal level, strict implementation of regulations prohibiting overloading on buses and maintenance of separate seats reserved in buses for women would be very effective measure for protecting them from physical assault; police should perform their duty honestly and special police forces should be employed for such offences which would take on spot action and more importantly would serve the purpose of putting constraints to potential offenders. The government should take 'zero' tolerance policy against the tide of eve teasing. Whosoever is found guilty must be punished. There must and also can be a provision of filling a complaint online for women victim on the website of the State police and a shortest possible response time must be achieved. Some States in India like Punjab has already launched a provision for online filing of complaints and women issues are handled by a dedicated wing under the IGP rank officer.

The government and non-government organizations as well as the common people of the country should be aware of eve teasing. The government should create more employment opportunities in the country. The government should also make effective laws and stress on its enforcement to remove eve teasing. The necessity of a proper legislation to curb eve-teasing is of extreme importance and effective mechanism to monitor and follow up such acts is of utmost importance. Non-government organizations should organize different programs related to raise awareness about eve teasing, like seminars, symposium, training, counselling etc. Additional safety measures in public transport such as recruitment of women drivers, conductors, close cameras in public transport becomes the need of the hour.

Conclusion

Women's mental health cannot be considered in isolation from social, political and economic issues. There are sufficient reasons for in current social arrangements today in India which causes enormous stress and surfeit of depression experienced by women and the stress caused by eve teasing is no less or less in magnitude than other horrendous crimes against women. It is the worst form of trespass to person possible. It

is done intentionally to hurt a woman physically, emotionally and spiritually. It is also done to wrongfully gain the attention of the woman. According to Justice Verma's Report – A Respite for Indian Women, "If a man wishes to talk to a woman, he can do so in a graceful and dignified manner without offending the sensibilities of the woman. He does not need to stalk a woman, behave in an uncouth and uncivilized manner to get attention. Moreover, if a woman has rejected his advances, he should accept that gracefully. It is more torturous for small girls and adolescents."

Women's multifaceted life as a mother, daughter, wife, employee and other roles in society produces unique potential of stress related effects. Although there are certain laws dealing with eve teasing, namely, Section 294 -IPC, Section 354 -IPC, Section 509 – IPC, there are no stringent laws to deal with the offence. Further, the various categories of the offence doesn't give women the confidence that she would be given remedy if she approaches the police authorities, or that she would not face further social stigma.

The punishment for eve teasing has to be seen in terms of the effect that it has upon women and how it impacts them physically, psychologically and socially. The concept of community policing can work wonders by associating NGO's, University and general public from different walks of life for collaboration with the law and order and police for prevention of crime against women and their safety. As such it is the utmost responsibility of the society, parents, community stakeholders, local officials and opinion makers — teachers, political leaders and public officials to step up community vigilance and bring about positive social norms in respect to establishing the dignity and respect of girls and women in society in particular and create a safe place for women so that she can live and breathe free without any inhibitions. Thereby, the society will be taintless, the women will be independent and secure and the real national development will be confirmed by equal participation of men and women.

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