

RAPE MYTH AVOIDANCE OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS -SELF ESTEEM AND SAFETY PREPAREDNESS AS POTENTIAL SKILLS

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Abstract: This study is undertaken to assess the role of self-esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance of adolescent girls in Kerala. To assess these the study was conducted among 3781 adolescent girls in the age group of 13-19 years. For data collection Self Esteem /Body Esteem Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016), Safety Preparedness Assessment Scale (Asha & Jayan, 2016) and Rape Myth Avoidance Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016) were used. Two way ANOVA was used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that self esteem and safety preparedness are determinants of rape myth avoidance among adolescent girls.

Index Terms - Rape Myth Avoidance, Self Esteem, Safety Preparedness.

INTRODUCTION

Believing involve ascertaining something true without justification of evidences. Belief systems constitute a set of personal philosophical principles that dictate behavioral patterns. It is detrimental to one's self satisfaction, capacity to dare obstacles, failure tolerance and resilience. This paper attempts to identify how personal believes of adolescent girls regarding rape shape their safety skills, self-esteem and safety preparedness.

Rape or sexual abuse is recognized as an undesired and coarsed sexual activity on a victim. Anderson, Mangles and Langsam (2007) identified sexual abuse as a public health issue. Kerala, despite its remarkable socio economic development has witnessed countless shaming scandals on sexual abuse. The alarming increase in the magnitude of the problem warrant an immediate need to identify the underlying factors behind the scene. Authorized records from media, Police Crime Records and other official information substantiates this contention. According to The Hindustan Times (2017) 2,568 cases of rape were reported in Kerala during the year of 2016. In a self report survey conducted among by Krishnakumar, Satheesan, Geeta&Sureshkumar (2014) among 1614 adolescents (688 boys and 926 girls) revealed that 36 % of boys and 35 % of girls) had experienced sexual abuse at some point during their lifetime.

This highlights the necessity to identify whether our girls are equipped enough to tackle the crisis of sexual abuse. Are they adequately aware of the sexual abuse? How they understand the phenomena of sexual abuse? Do they consciously attempt to protect themselves from sexual abuse? Do their awareness affect self esteem and their preparedness against sexual abuse?.These are important issues of concern when considering planning for prevention of sexual abuse. This study explores how rape myth acceptance or avoidance relate to adolescent girls' two potential safety skills for sexual abuse prevention- self esteem and safety preparedness.

Myths are traditionally or culturally scripted legendary stories which do not possess a factual explanation. Rape myths are culture specific, broadly accepted false or deviant believes about sexual abuse. Acceptance of rape myths mirror negative perceptions of sexual abuse, its antecedents and correlates. Realistic perception of sexual abuse is important for preparing oneself against sexual abuse. Receiving misinformation regarding sexual abuse from unauthorized sources can lead to acceptance of rape myth. Rape myth can be widely differentiated as myths related to rape in romantic relationships, circumstances in which rape occur, perpetrator - victim relationship.

Traditional norms assume an Indian adolescent girl to be submissive. Sexual scripts prevailing in the country tend to blame victim in the case of sexual abuse occurrence. The girl herself may justify that the violence directed to her occurred because of her fault. If she herself take up the responsibility, guilt and helplessness will be heightened making her more vulnerable for further victimization. Several studies substantiated that men possess more rape myth acceptance than women. This may increase rape incidence. Hence knowledge regarding sexual abuse need to be viewed positively.

Several empirical studies support the observation that rape myth is common among adolescents. Stephens, Kamimura, Yamawaki, Bhattacharya, Wenjing Mo, Birkholz, Makomenawa and Olson (2016) conducted a study to compare rape myth acceptance among college Students in the United States, Japan, and India. Both male and female college students ($N = 637$, 206 students from US; 215 students from Japan and 216 students from India) participated in the study. The first 11 items of the original Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980) was used for data collection. The findings revealed that Indian students had higher myth acceptance than US and Japanese adolescents.

Thomas (2016) examined the existence of rape myths among 438 recruit police trainees and the gender differences of rape myths among police trainees in Thrissur Kerala. Census method with an updated version of rape myth acceptance applicable to Indian context was used for data collection. The 5-point scale consisted of 22 common rape myths that existed in the society. Results revealed that 68.49 % had very low rape myth acceptance, 29.45% of them had acceptance low myth acceptance and 2.51% had high myth acceptance. Female recruits (77.43%) rejected rape myths compared to male recruits (61.31%).

Safri (2015) studied the extent of rape myth acceptance among 100 samples (50 male and 50 female aging from 18 -35 years in Lucknow. A structured interview schedule with fifteen common rape myths were utilized for data collection. The study found out that the sample possessed high rape myth acceptance.

Chudasama, Kadri, Zalavadiya, Joshi and Bhola (2013) studied rape myth acceptance among 346 medical students aging 17 to 23 years of age in Rajkot Gujrat. A previously validated 21 item self-administered questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings of the study revealed that 50.6% male and 56.3% females had low rape myth acceptance. Higher myth acceptance was reported among 23.8% urban resident students and 26.8% rural urban resident students.

Kuruvilla and Anu (2012) conducted a study on perceptions about sexual harassment among postgraduate girl students and women employees in a university campus revealed that 100 percent of the student sample exhibited proper awareness about the definition of sexual harassment whereas the women employee sample possessed several misconceptions regarding what all behaviors amount to sexual harassment. About 66 percent of women employees considered dressing style of women as a major cause for sexual harassment while only 20 percent of student sample agreed with this. While 68 percent of employee sample and 40 percentage student sample considered misuse of mobile as a factor leading to sexual harassment. Differences between the employee and student samples were found with regard to their perceptions about various reasons for the increasing incidents of sexual harassment but total agreement between the two groups was found in the case of lack of respect towards women and lack of strict punishment as factors responsible for the prevalence of sexual abuse offending.

Knowledge regarding sexual abuse help to reduce culpability directed towards the victim. This will improve disclosure rate among victims. Rehabilitation of victims will be easier. Revictimization can be successfully reduced by weaving a safety net for the victims. Therefore, knowledge regarding sexual abuse becomes a safety skill and rape myth acceptance will dampen the safety skill of adolescent girls.

Being prepared against a danger occurrence is a positive adaptive behavior exhibited by animal kingdom eg: Poison Dart frog with poison darts scattered on its body, butterflies camouflaging with natural colours. Possessing realistic perception of danger vulnerability, early identification of danger cues, escaping from danger scene before catastrophes occur, defending for life when cannot and awareness of strategies to survive if attacked are recognized as important safety preparedness skills that every adolescent girl should possess.

Unfortunately little research had focused on safety preparedness of adolescent girls. Bercklin and Ullman(2005) conducted a study on effectiveness of self-defense or assertiveness training and women's

responses to sexual attacks. The study was conducted among thousand six hundred and twenty-three women. The findings of the study revealed that women in experimental group and previously abused were able to behave assertively to further abusive attempts. These women were less angry and scared compared to previous attacks. Moreover they found perpetrators to be less aggressive. The study suggested need for further research on the topic.

A person's self-regard about oneself is reflected in his/her self-esteem. Self-esteem assimilates the personal, interpersonal and physical spheres of self of adolescent girls. It includes physical (body esteem) as well as psychological constructs. One's thoughts, feelings and attitudes are detrimental in shaping self-esteem. Self-esteem shapes the formal structure about oneself which is initiated from childhood.

Andersen, Cyranowski (1999) opined that developing a healthy sexual self-concept is an important developmental mile stone during adolescence. Adolescence is marked by attempts to understand their sexual behavior and "underlying motivations" behind it (Andersen, Cyranowski 1999) which aid in "organizing their past experiences" and developing insight regarding current behavior and formulate future sexual thoughts and experiences. Sexual self-concept affects sexual behavior as well as development of sexual relationship with others. (Hensel, Fortenberry, Donald 2011).

Body esteem influences an adolescent girl's self-regard because girls are frequently moulded to believe that their physical appearance is an important aspect of how they are accepted by others. Adolescent girls construct models for their physical image from media, advertisements, films etc which is increasingly unattainable (Richins, Marsha 1991). Inclined to puberty several body changes (appearance of acne, secondary sexual characteristics, accumulation of adipose tissues, occur during middle adolescence) which make adolescents to develop poor body esteem. This is of particular concern as for adolescent girls.

Previous research studies indicate that Indian adolescent girls possess low self esteem. The current study examined the relationship between self esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance among adolescent girls in Kerala.

OBJECTIVES

- 1 To examine the role of self esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance among adolescent girls.
- 2 To examine the interaction of self esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance among adolescent girls.

HYPOTHESE

- 1 There will be significant difference between the low, moderate and high self esteem groups on rape myth avoidance.
- 2 There will be significant difference between the low, moderate and high safety preparedness groups on rape myth avoidance.
- 3 There will be significant difference between the low, moderate and high self esteem groups and the low, moderate and high safety preparedness groups on rape myth avoidance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample: Participants composed of 3781 adolescent girls from all over Kerala whose age ranged from 13-19 years of age

Table I- Between subjects factors

Variable	Groups	N
Self esteem	Low	284
	Medium	3008
	High	489
Safety preparedness	Low	793
	Medium	2543
	High	445

TOOLS USED

1. Self Esteem /Body Esteem Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016)

To assess self esteem of adolescent girls Self Esteem /Body Esteem Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016) was used. The tool possessed fifteen items with five response alternatives-strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree. The items 2,4,6,8,10,14,15 were negatively scored. The items 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,9,10,12 represented self esteem related to personal factors, items 8,11,13 represented self esteem related to interpersonal factors and items 7 and 15 represented physical esteem. The tool was standardized with item analysis. On item analysis 't' values obtained were greater than 2.58 indicating that items were able to discriminate adolescents with high and low self esteem. The total score of the scale ranged from 15-75.

2. Safety Preparedness Assessment Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016) was used.

Safety Preparedness Assessment Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016) was utilized to collect data for the study. Since no tool could be identified with review of literature to measure safety preparedness of adolescent girls against sexual abuse, tool was developed with items representing latent variables on situation specific preparedness based on cognitive awareness and physical safety preparedness based on physical defence and specific safety preparedness based on legal aspects. The tool had eighteen items with four forced choice options for each. The items 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8 represented situation specific safety preparedness based on cognitive awareness and items 9,10,11,12,13 represented situation specific physical safety preparedness based on physical defence and 14,15,16,17,18 represented specific safety preparedness based on legal aspects. The total scores ranged between 0-18.

3. Rape Myth Avoidance Scale (Asha & Jayan,2016)

Updated Illinois rape myth acceptance scale and Attitude Toward Rape Feild (1978) were the two scales were referred for developing the tool for the study. To make tool culturally competent and to include selected latent variables- Myth associated with rape in romantic relationships, circumstances in which rape occur.perpetrator and victim related rape myth new tool was developed. The tool had fifteen items with five response alternatives-strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree. On item analysis't' values obtained were greater than 2.58 except one item indicating that fourteen items were able to discriminate high and low rape myth avoidance among adolescent girls. The final tool had fourteen items. The items 1,4,5,6,11 represented victim related rape myths, items 2,3 were perpetrator related rape myth, items 10,12,14 were situation related rape myth and items 7,8,9,13 represented rape myth associated with romantic relationship. All items except item 8 were negatively scored. The total scores ranged from 14-70.

Procedure and administration

The participants of the present study were contacted in school or college settings. Before the administration of the questionnaire they were briefed about the purpose of the study and their task. After getting their consent the tool were administered as per the standard instruction for each questionnaire. All participants are requested to ensure that they responded to each item of every questionnaire.

The investigator has made an attempt to divide the whole sample into three groups on the basis of their self esteem and safety preparedness. For this the self esteem and safety preparedness were calculated, mean and SD was tested at the cutoff points and the scores below the mean minus / SD constitute the low group and mean above on/ SD constitute the high groups and in between as moderate group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results of Twoway ANOVA of levels of self-esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance.

Table 2. Main and interaction effect of self-esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance

Variable	Main effect		Interaction effect
	Self esteem	Safety preparedness	Self esteem x Safety preparedness
	F-value	F- value	F-value
Rape myth Avoidance	13.35**	8.56*	9.8*

*significant at 0.01 level

In order to examine the role of self-esteem and safety preparedness on rape myth avoidance the respondents in different categories were tested by the Analysis of Variance (two way ANOVA).

Table 3. Mean and Standard Deviation of Low, Moderate and High self esteem and Safety Preparedness Groups On Rape Myth Avoidance

Self esteem Safety preparedness	Low Safety preparedness			Moderate Safety preparedness			High Safety Preparedness			Total		
	mean	SD	N	mean	SD	n	mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Low self esteem	33.19	6.86	150	33.17	7.27	124	38.00	5.77	10	33.35	7.04	284
Moderate self esteem	38.02	6.74	612	41.45	5.71	2133	43.10	5.83	263	40.89	6.13	3008
High self esteem	38.58	8.94	31	47.37	7.96	286	48.84	9.14	172	47.33	8.76	489
Total	37.13	7.09	793	41.71	6.65	2543	45.20	7.86	445	41.16	7.29	3781

Based on Self-esteem the adolescent girls are categorized into three groups-high, moderate and low and was tested for their mean values for rape myth avoidance. Results indicated that the three groups of adolescent girls based on self-esteem significantly differed for rape myth avoidance scores of 13.35 at 0.01 level which means difference in self-esteem level confirm with difference in rape myth avoidance based on self-esteem. The group with high self-esteem showed high rape myth avoidance.

Based on safety preparedness, the adolescent girls are categorized into three groups high, average and low. The groups were tested for their mean values of safety preparedness. Results indicated that the three groups of adolescent girls differed based on safety preparedness of 8.56 at 0.01 level which means that mean difference in safety preparedness confirm difference in rape myth avoidance based on safety preparedness. The group with high safety preparedness showed high rape myth avoidance.

Based on three levels of self-esteem and three levels of safety preparedness nine groups were formed. The interaction between these groups showed significant difference in their f value 9.8 at 0.01 level which show mean difference between the groups in which the group belongs high self-concept and high safety preparedness shows high mean among the groups ie; 4.484. Hence it is clear that self-esteem and safety preparedness have a role in rape myth avoidance.

The findings of the study elucidate the role of rape myth avoidance on self-esteem and safety preparedness of adolescent girls. The study explicates that the higher the rape myth avoidance, the higher will be the self-esteem of adolescent girls. The findings of Bohner and Lampiridis (2004) in their study among 82 female students found out that rape salience mediate self-esteem of adolescent girls. The study depicted that rape myth acceptance hamper readiness preparation against sexual abuse.

Noll, Trickket and Putnam (2003) elucidated that acceptance of rape myths and stigmas “may result in an inability to glean nonsexual or emotional rewards from relationships, therefore placing victims in potentially risky or exploitative sexual situations”. This clearly transcribe how rape myth acceptance haze safety preparedness in an adolescent girl.

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