

February 2021

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Recommended Citation

Mishra, Lokanath (2021). Effects of Violence against Women on Higher Education in Mizoram, India. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1), 465-472.
Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss1/27>

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Effects of Violence against Women on Higher Education in Mizoram, India

By Lokanath Mishra¹

Abstract

This study is an empirical research aimed at identifying the causes of violence against women in graduate schools in Mizoram, and its effect on higher education. The researcher adopted a mixed approach and used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze the context, dynamics and practices implemented in Mizoram Graduate Schools to minimize violence against women. Four forms of abuse, namely physical, verbal, sexual and psychological violence against women, have been seen in various Mizoram degree colleges. Youth fashion, hostile family environment, pressure of examination, peer group, disabilities of women, influence of drugs and alcohol and computer gadgets are main causes of violence against women in Mizoram severely affecting women in higher education and academic achievement. The Government of India should take initiatives to reduce violence against women to improve higher education of women in Mizoram.

Keywords: Violence, Physical, Sexual violence, College, Women, Higher education, women in higher education, Mizoram, India, violence against women

Introduction

Violence towards women is a matter of grave concern, cutting through all cultural, class, employment, income, gender, ethnic origin, and age boundaries. The General Assembly of the United Nations [15] says that there are many forms of violence that remain unreported and hidden due to fear and stigma. It further says that there are factors where social acceptance of several types of violence is not accepted as violence and is taken in context as a normative phenomenon. Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most common and widespread human rights violation. It can include physical, mental, psychological and economic violence, and cuts through age, sex, class, employment and geographical boundaries—a statement that is amply justified by everyday events in India. It takes place everywhere, in homes, on the streets, in schools, in workplaces, in parks, in refugee camps, and even in such areas as red-light zones [5] and in jails it is quite common. Recent estimates show that approximately 35 per cent of women around the world have experienced physical and/or sexual abuse from their partners or non-partners. Hence, sexual violence is one of the most prevalent forms of female violence [4].

Tackling violence against women and girls is, in itself, a crucial development goal. However, attaining those developmental outcomes is essential for individual women, their families, societies and nations. Initiatives addressing violence against Indian women have not

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come solely from the government, though. One of the most successful grassroots efforts to address domestic violence is the village-level collectives, called Nari Adalats and Mahila Panchs [15]. Studies suggest that women survivors of violence are often confronted with great difficulties in sustaining participation in investigation and court processes. This is because, in the absence of access to a number of comprehensive services, including health, livelihoods, legal and psychosocial support, and security from further abuse and repressions, it becomes impossible to uncover the real issues faced by women who endure violence [7].

Since the age of fifteen, every third woman has faced domestic violence of different forms in the country. According to National Family Health Survey (NHFS-4) 27 percent of women in India have experienced physical violence. This aspect of physical violence against women is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas. In rural areas, 29 percent of women reported physical abuse in cases of domestic violence, while in urban areas reported 23 percent. In fact, the situation for unmarried women was found to be no different. The survey report found distant relatives (27 percent) were the most frequent perpetrators of sexual assault on unmarried women. A current or former boyfriend category was found to be 18% followed by this was; their own spouse or acquaintance (17%); and a family friend (11%). It has been shown that sexual harassment is most often perpetrated by people with whom women develop an intimate relationship. Furthermore, physical or sexual assault does not occur in isolation; rather, women experience a combination of different types of violence [14].

In the Indian scenario, if we look at this period of women, we find that majority of unmarried women experience sexual harassment in one or the other form. In many instances, girl child is even married at tender age due to socio-cultural reasons, despite the fact that they have not matured physically, mentally, and morally and have not been prepared to rear children. Further, in certain cases, even forced marriages are legitimized in socio-cultural contexts. College going women, often remain at risk, due to violence relating to physical, sexual, and emotional types, in the same manner, as married adult women of reproductive age, and even older married women have similar experiences.[1]

One woman in five, experiences class sexual assault. Studies show that college students are at the greatest risk of sexual assault in the first few months of their first and second semesters. Females who are classified as lesbian, bisexual or gay are more likely to experience sexual harassment on campuses than heterosexual females. Sexual assault occurs everywhere, by individuals of all ages. But it's quite prevalent on college campuses, and usually in the college-age group of women (18–24) get sexually assaulted most often by adults. Chandra (2012) studied the fate of north-eastern Indians, identified several reasons for being targeted violently but did not specify any remedial action. Nepram (2010) conducted a detailed study of violence against women in the Northeast but based his research paper more on the crimes committed by the armed forces trying to curb insurgency.

Northeast India is connected to Eastern India via a narrow corridor between independent Bhutan and Bangladesh. It comprises the contiguous Seven Sister States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) and the Himalayan territories of northeastern Sikkim. India is generally considered as one of the most complicated regions of government in the world. This consists of about 8% of India's 40 million population (2011 census), 3.1% of India's total North-East India population has more than 220 ethnic groups and the same number of dialects. Mizoram's northeastern state has the largest number of cases of child sexual abuse with 568 cases of child sexual abuse took place in the last five years. It shows a growing trend in child sexual abuse in the state, Mizoram's Child Welfare Committee brought the findings

of the abuse to the fore through a report prepared last week. The problem in the northeast is serious because of the cohesion of an extremely modern community (here many tribal societies allow free mixing of boys and women when they are adults) with an extremely old one, full of rituals and superstition [16].

Table: 1 Crime Against Children for the Last Three Years (2016-18)

Year	Child Rape Under POSCO Act	Child Rape Under IPC	Sexual Assault	Pornography	Other	Total
2016	99	0	62	1	5	167
2017	129	0	74	1	10	214
2018	66	27	40	0	12	145

Source-Statistical cell, CID, Aizawl

According to the Statistical cell, CID, Mizoram, Aizawl [16], 99 children were raped and registered in Mizoram in 2016 under the protection of children from sexual offences (POCSO) Act whereas there were 129 in 2017 and 66 in 2018. Similarly, in 2018 27 cases of child rape were identified under IPC. Sexually assault is very high in Mizoram, 74 cases registered in 2017, 40 cases in 2018 and 62 cases in 2016 [16].

Despite various awareness-raising programs and policies, women in schools and colleges are still targeted by male students or teachers for inappropriate behavior. Nevertheless, physical abuse has been accepted for so long that it became a practice that is resistant to change.

Table: 2 Crime Against Women for the Last Three Years (2016-18)

Year	Rape	Kid napping	Cruelty by husband	Mol estation	Other	Total
2016	23	3	19	71	4	120
2017	46	1	17	115	5	184
2018	24	0	05	64	3	96

Source- Statistical cell, CID, Aizawl

From the above table it is seen that 23 women were raped in 2016, 46 in 2017 and 24 in 2018 in Mizoram. Kidnapping is negligible in Mizoram. Husband abuse is a female crime in Mizoram, nineteen cases are registered in 2016 and 17 cases in 2017. Molestation has also been seen in Mizoram. One hundred fifteen cases are registered in 2017 whereas it is 71 in 2016 and 64 in 2018. Other cases of crime and violence against women and women are very negligible. It is compounded by shame, remorse and anxiety that actively prevent one from thinking about it. Unfortunately, colleges have found a place to recognize and perpetrate different kinds of violence by teachers as well as peer students.

The gross enrolment ratio of Mizoram is 21.6 and also for women gross enrolment ratio (GER) is 21.1. So, the researcher wanted to identify the causes of low GER in Mizoram children.

Mishra L (2018) conducted a study on child abuse in Mizoram high schools sponsored by the Government of India's Ministry of Women and Child Development and reported various forms of violence in Mizoram schools. A significant drop out of women is triggered by one or the other form of violence that has a negative impact on the enrolment of women in colleges. In the light of the above discussion in the field of violence against women and its impact on women education in Mizoram colleges, need to conduct a study was strongly felt. The researcher formulated two research questions; what are the causes of girl violence at Mizoram degree colleges? And is the abuse impacting women' education anyway?

Methodology

This research is an empirical research, and a mixed methods approach was employed.

Population

Of the 28 different colleges in Mizoram, the study's target population was 22-degree Colleges Out of all the 22-degree colleges in 8 districts, twelve-degree colleges, i.e., five-degree colleges from Aizawl district, out of 10 colleges and 1 college from the rest of each seven districts i.e., Lunglei, Lawngtlai, Champhai, Serchhip, Kolasib, Saiha and Mamit district (because in these districts only one-degree college is available) are selected as population of the study.

Sample

Twenty students from each department of five colleges who are offering B.Sc. In Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Botany, Zoology and ten students from each department of all the 12-degree colleges who are offering English, History, Political science, Mizo, Health and Economics are randomly selected, being available as a sample of the analysis on the data collection day. So, a total of 500 science students and 720 Arts students are initially randomly selected as the study sample. Three teachers from each subject i.e., $5 \times 5 \times 3 = 75$, science and $12 \times 6 \times 3 = 216$ Arts teacher selected for study with a total of 291 teachers. For the present study, twenty parents from each class, i.e., 240 parents were also included for data collection.

Tools Used

A self-made questionnaire for teachers, students and parents comprising of 32 items that were developed through a workshop in the department of education, Mizoram University was used for the study. The Director of Higher and Technical Education, Mizoram and NGO personnel also used an interview schedule to collect data.

Procedure of Data Collection

The researcher carried out a pilot study to validate the instruments. The questionnaire's validity and reliability were calculated by means of test-retest method. The r value is extremely reliable 0.83. Together with the project fellows, the researcher frequently visited the colleges to collect data from respondents composed of 727 students (496 Arts and 231 Science), 176 parents and 131 teachers. The investigator went through various journals, research papers, biography,

history, government records and books for the creation of the resources for secondary data collection that are linked to violence against college women. With regard to Primary data collection, the investigator along with three junior project fellows, visited the different fields as a Pilot Study to have some idea about the samples. After this, they framed the tools and techniques to be employed for collecting the primary data.

Findings

Violence is a troubling issue today around the world. In households, educational institutions, offices, social sites and rural and urban areas, it is a subject of great concern. Numerous types of crimes occur including physical, emotional or sexual abuse, robbery, vandalism, etc. Educational institutions cannot neglect the need to create a safe environment by planning, prevention and awareness, by organizing against violence to deterrents. Therefore, schools alone cannot eliminate the abuse problem, students also need to actively work with educators to create an atmosphere that encourages learning. [10,12,13-14]. The study includes a section, in which, types of violence can be seen in Degree colleges of Mizoram.

The percentage of women being affected from different types of violence viz. a viz. physical, verbal, sexual and psychological, the study shows that different districts face different percentages in the above category of violence. The truth is, however, that no district is devoid of any such kind of violence, and contains, less, or higher number of such cases of violence. At 25.5 percent, the highest percentage of physical violence cases were in Aizawl, while in Kolasib cases found were of 0 percent physical violence. Similarly, verbal violence was found to be highest in Lunglei with 28% and lowest in Champhai with 2.5%. The sexual and psychological violence cases found to be highest in Lunglei (24%) and Lawnglai (41.08%) respectively.

The data collected were analysed qualitatively via focussed group discussions (FGD). There were cases of women students getting addicted to smoking, drinking and drugs. Due to such habits, and not able to meet the constant demand of money from parents to purchase it, many such addicted women try to satiate their habit of addiction by initially borrowing money or material (drugs, alcohol, cigarette) from their male friends. And, when they don't return the money to their male friends in time, the male friends, in effect, continue to demand sexual participation, which is mostly obtained due to their failure to return the money and satisfy their addiction. This further pushed them to remain habituated to addiction on the one hand, and, on the other, they get involved with more than one male friend at the same time, leading to spur violence. Thus, it is actually, the exam pressure and peer group interference and is one of the root causes of such violence.

Many district parents agreed that cell phones and computers are the sources of abuse against women in college degrees.

This is because the desire to own expensive devices (smart mobile phones and computers) with lesser economic means to purchase these gadgets, push these women to 'procure' such devices and meet their desire illegitimately. During FGDs most of the parents agreed that women make intimate friendships with multiple male friends to meet their unending desires. They also claimed that cheap internet services with unregulated pornography sites have opened up space for them to make quick money by involving them in illicit sexual activity, which is reported several times by several 'clients'- known as well as unknown, so that such women can be blackmailed. This does not let them get out of their situation, as; they are constantly threatened, and blackmailed. This increases violence against them if they refuse to comply with the demand from their friends or clients.

Most teachers agreed with the statement that various causes of violence against college women in Mizoram are: youth fashion, hostile family culture, exam stress, peer group, women disability, and use of drug and alcohol and computer gadgets. In reality, college-going women's body exposure in Mizoram is quite high and can be widely noticed. Even with meagre income, women spend more on fashion and their hairstyle, wear costly and branded dresses, and in maintaining their outlook. On the other hand, the mind sets of parents are traditional and contrary to the present-day generations and styling of the youth is seen as provocative. Such a mind-set makes them suspicious about women who have merged income and costly styling. They conclude that the above factors ultimately lead to violence because they think that spending on clothing comes from illicit sexual interaction with multiple partners.

Most respondents were unanimous in thinking that women are more vulnerable to aggressive behaviour, particularly in their adolescence and are suffering significantly as a result. Conclusively, it was found that the impact of violence on women lead them to experience distress resulting from exposure to multiple types of violence reducing their focus on studies, decrease in their self-esteem and interest in learning. This further leads them to drop out or deliberate withdrawal from colleges. The evoking of non-conformist attitude on the part of the establishment, on the other hand and the development of fear among women altogether have long lasting consequences [6,7-14].

Effects of Violence on Women's Dropout Rates in Higher Education

Most respondents also supported the view that there is a direct impact of abuse on the dropout of women in higher education; violence has a direct negative impact on women attending college; on concentrating, excelling in the classroom and doing full homework, all of which are closely related to their educational commitment. One of the immediate effects of abuse on college women is their ability to attend school is declining. A girl whose teacher verbally abused or sexually harassed her is more likely to skip that teacher's class to escape her harassment or bullying. A sexually assaulted girl is prevented from going to school, even on going to and from the class [1,2, 8-14].

The presence of sexual or physical violence inside or on the way to and from the college's classroom focus has a strict impact on school going women [7]. Female teachers who participated in focus group discussions reported that abused women are often absent-minded in the classroom and do not follow the lessons carefully, most of the time remain silent when asked questions or stumbling -a sign of lack of focus. Teachers discovered that some are trying to hide their heads (not to be identified) and immerse themselves in deep thinking about what happened at home or on the way to college [17].

Any kind of girl abuse has a negative impact on her ability to complete her homework [7]. A girl who has been verbally abused or sexually harassed will probably fail to concentrate in her on-time study and how to complete her homework. Women respondents were asked about the impact of violence and about their incapacity to complete homework and educational participation. A good proportion of the respondents who attempted the question indicated that due to violence or suffering from some form of abuse, they could not complete their homework. There was a gap in responses between teachers and student respondents, with a relatively high proportion of students consenting to the strong association between violence perpetrated against them and their inability to complete homework, leading to a decrease in women's participation in education. Abuse in college and harassment of women has a highly destabilizing effect on the education of women.

In schools, women who are victims of violence are more likely to perform poorly, have problems focusing on their academic work, and lose interest in reading together, leading to lower academic performance. Adolescence is a time of stress and strain, which marks a historically critical period with its own implications for the future. Mental illness, low attendance and academic achievement and dropout from college can have a crippling impact on a student's future career prospects, and especially more for a girl child.

More than 80 per cent of parents and over 70 per cent of teachers and students thought that violence had a significant impact on women' future lives. In one of the FGD participants, it was pointed out that teenage women who were victims tend to leave their area and move to nearby towns, some of whom end up becoming sex workers [9]. Female teachers and key informants have frequently reported that victim women are often met with rejection by family members [11], family relations and society as a whole. They are deemed inappropriate, unable to handle their homes adequately or conduct household duties. It was also noticed that the majority of rural women overburdened by too much homework tend to run away from neighboring cities or city centers [7]. Most of those who ran away end up as prostitutes or commercial sex workers at SPAs. Sexual violence has noxious consequences for the health of children. It particularly exposes women to sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS [10].

In general, it is found that the various forms of violence and abuses against women in degree colleges have had a negative impact in various interrelated aspects on their education. The prevalence of violence and abuse affects women' access to education in classrooms, on the way to and from college and home, partly because of parental fear and women' concern for health safety. Establishing more health centers to address violent behaviour, supplying women with basic needs, sports and other recreational activities, games, meetings, excursions, and group activities, the establishment of the Peace Education Program Guidance and Counseling Units included in the school curriculum, the training of teachers for peace education establishing peace clubs and the restriction of mobile phones are some of the strategies suggested for solving women' behaviour in college violence.

Conclusion

Women witnessing physical, mental, sexual and psychological violence in degree colleges in Mizoram attempted to address issues related to on-campus use of insulting language, intimidation, brutal sex harassment, scolding, and forced intimate relationships. Types include dating, kissing, sexual advances, touching, attempting rape, exchanging obscene messages and powerful nude photographs. The main multiple causes of violence that emerged from the results were peer group control, computer and mobile use inappropriately, lack of awareness and menstrual period. The women suffer more and are vulnerable to aggressive behavior particularly in their adolescent age group. All colleges must educate their students and staff about the rules on sexual harassment, highlight college guidelines, conduct student and staff workshops and seminars, and publicly declare a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment. A National Gender-based Violence Action Plan can be enforced by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in degree colleges. Quick and effective disciplinary action including due process rights for persons found to have committed the crime.

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