

A Study on Exploring the Knowledge and Attitude of College Going Students on Issues Pertaining to Women's Personal Safety, Dignity and Rights in Kollam, Kerala

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ABSTRACT:

Knowledge has always influenced the health behavior of individuals. In India awareness about rights and legal provisions owned by women are often ignored which has destroyed millions of lives in a tremendously devastating ways and traumatized many others. This lack of knowledge increases the risk of abnormal behavioral issues among young adults. It also paves ways for them to deviate from the legal provisions they hold as citizens of this nation. This study explores the knowledge and attitude of college going students on issues pertaining to women's personal safety dignity and rights in Kollam, Kerala, India. Questionnaires with a set of 20 variables were distributed to 100 college going students in the Kollam district through google forms upon which the results were interpreted and analyzed. This study provides valuable insights on the general perception and attitude of an individual towards women's personal safety and rights.

Keywords: Knowledge, Attitude, Issues, Women Safety, Women rights, Laws

INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic and evolving landscape of societal norms, knowledge plays a pivotal role in shaping health behaviors and, by extension, influencing the overall well-being of individuals. In the context of India, a country marked by its cultural diversity and rich heritage, the awareness of women's rights and legal provisions often takes a backseat. This negligence has unfortunately led to the tragic devastation of countless lives and left many others grappling with the enduring trauma resulting from the violation of their rights. The consequences of this lack of awareness extend beyond immediate harm, contributing to abnormal behavioral patterns among young adults and fostering a climate where legal obligations are unknowingly disregarded. Against this backdrop, this study sets out to explore the knowledge and attitudes of college-going students regarding issues vital to women's personal safety, dignity, and rights in Kollam, a city nestled in the verdant landscapes of Kerala, India. The significance of this research lies in its potential to uncover the prevailing gaps in awareness that expose women to vulnerabilities and hinder the realization of their legal entitlements. A structured questionnaire, comprising 20 variables, was meticulously crafted and distributed to college students in the Kollam district, utilizing the

convenience and reach of Google Forms. The subsequent analysis of the collected data aims to unravel insights into the general perceptions and attitudes of individuals toward women's personal safety and rights within this specific sociocultural context. This study is not merely an academic exercise; it is a crucial step toward understanding the intricate dynamics that contribute to the perpetuation of ignorance and its consequential impact on women's lives. By shedding light on the prevailing attitudes, it aspires to lay the foundation for informed interventions, educational initiatives, and policy changes that can empower young adults to be active advocates for women's rights and contribute to the building of a more equitable society.

THE CONTEXT OF KOLLAM

Kollam is a district located in the southern part of the Indian state of Kerala. It is known for its rich history, cultural heritage, and natural beauty. Kollam has a significant historical background and was an important trade center in ancient times. The city of Kollam, formerly known as Quilon, was a major port and trading hub for spices like pepper and other commodities. The literacy rate in Kollam district, like other districts in Kerala, is expected to be high. As of March 2023, Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India at 94%, according to the Ministry of Education. In rural areas, the literacy rate is 95.49% and in urban areas it is 96.96%. The estimated reporting rate is relatively higher for states such as Delhi, Assam, Rajasthan, Kerala, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh. Barring Rajasthan, all these states have relatively high female literacy rates. (Pramit Bhattacharya, Tadit Kundu) Yet the crime rates against women are surprisingly not in favour despite the literacy rates being high. At 4,641, the number of cases registered across the state under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (Pocso Act) in 2023 was slightly higher than the 4,582 cases registered in 2022, as per the data sourced from the State Crime Records Bureau. Young girls and women are unsafe, often violated even within their homes. What are coming across clearly are the lack of implementation and at times the lack of structures and institutions that can ensure that such anomalies get dealt with in a time efficient and sensitive manner. This is why it is necessary to find the attitude and the core value system among the young Indians regarding the dignity and safety among women, regardless of the high literary rates they possess.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

The rights enshrined in the Constitution of India for women are explained under this section (Ministry of Law and Justice Legislative Department, Government of India, 2020).

- Article 14: Equality before law: The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.
- Article 15 (1): Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste sex or place of birth: The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
- Article 15 (2): No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and palaces of public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public
- Article 15 (3): Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children. In other words, the State can make any special provision for women and child-

en without any hurdles or obligations.

- Article 16 (2): Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment: No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect or, any employment or office under the State
- Article 19: Freedom of speech and expression: The citizens (which include women, men and third gender) the Right to Freedom, which among other things guarantees freedom of speech and expression of practicing trade and profession etc.
- Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty: No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law is to prevent encroachment on and loss of life. Anyone including women can seek protection under this.
- Article 23 (1): Prohibition of traffic in human beings and forced labour: Traffic in human beings and beggar and other similar forms of forced labour are prohibited and any contravention of this provision shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.
- Article 23 (2): Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from imposing compulsory service for public purpose, and in imposing such service the State shall not make any discrimination on grounds only of religion, race, caste or class or any of them.
- Article 23-24: The Right against exploitation enshrined in Article 23 and 24 of the Indian Constitution guarantees human dignity and protects people from any such exploitation. Thus, upholding the principles of human dignity and liberty upon which the Indian Constitution is based.
- Article 39 (a): The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing the citizens; men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means to livelihood.
- Article 39 (d): The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 39 (e): The state is required to ensure that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength.
- Article 42: Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief: The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.
- Article 51A (e): It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
- Article 243 D (3): Not less than one third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat.
- Article 243 D (4) - One third of the total number of offices of chairperson in the panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women. The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act passed by the parliament in 1992 ensures one third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas.
- Article 243 T (3) - One third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every municipality shall be reserved for women.
- Article 243 T (4) - Offices of chairpersons in the municipalities shall be reserved for women in such manner as the State legislature may provide. to reserve 1/3rd of all seats in the Lower house of

Parliament of India, the Lok Sabha, and in all state legislative assemblies for women. The seats were proposed to be reserved in rotation and would have been determined by draw of lots in such a way that a seat would be reserved only once in three consecutive general elections. The Rajya Sabha passed the bill on 9 March 2010. However, the Lok Sabha never voted on the bill. The bill is still pending as it never went to the Lok Sabha. Legal Safeguards for Women in India Women related legislations in India are explained under this section (Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2020; Digital Repository of All Central and State Acts, India Code, 2021).

- The Indian Divorce Act/ Divorce Act (1869) – The Divorce Act applies to the whole country except the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Furthermore, it applies only to those people who profess the Christian religion and the parties must also reside in India to apply for any remedy under the Act. Some sections were amended in Indian Divorce (Amendment) Act of 2001.
- The Act dissolution of marriage on the petition by the husband or the wife, and dissolution of marriage on mutual consent. On a petition for dissolution of marriage presented by a husband or wife on the ground of adultery, the petitioner shall make the alleged adulterer or adulteress a co-respondent, unless the petitioner is excused by the Court from so doing on any of the following grounds, namely: (a) that the wife, being the respondent is leading the life of a prostitute or the husband, being respondent is leading an immoral life and that the petitioner knows of no person with whom the adultery has been committed; (b) that the name of the alleged adulterer or adulteress is unknown to the petitioner although the petitioner has made due efforts to discover it; (c) that the alleged adulterer or adulteress is dead.
- The Legal Practitioners (Women) Act (1923): An Act for the removal of doubts regarding the right of women to be enrolled and to practice as legal practitioners. It is expedient to remove certain doubts which have arisen as to the right of women to be enrolled and to practice as legal practitioners. Notwithstanding anything contained in any enactment in force or in the letters patent of any High Court or in any rule or order made under or in pursuance of any such enactment or letters patent, no woman shall, by reason only of her sex, be disqualified from being admitted or enrolled as a legal practitioner or from practicing as such; and any such rule or order which is repugnant to the provisions of this Act shall, to the extent of such repugnance, be void.

FACTORS LEADING TO CRIME AGAINST WOMEN

Though the constitution has set out many rights to safeguard the women in India, there still remains a lot to be done in bringing down the crime rates against women in Kerala. This can be due to many reasons

1. Socioeconomic Factors:

2. High levels of poverty, unemployment, and income inequality can contribute to crime rates. Individuals facing economic hardship may resort to criminal activities as a means of survival.

3. Population Density:

High population density in urban areas can lead to increased competition for resources, opportunities, and space, potentially contributing to crime.

4. Education and Awareness:

Limited access to quality education and awareness programs may contribute to a lack of understanding of legal and ethical norms, potentially leading to criminal behavior.

5. Cultural and Social Factors:

Cultural norms and societal attitudes towards certain behaviors may influence crime rates. Gender-based

violence, for example, can be influenced by cultural factors.

6. Law Enforcement and Judiciary:

The effectiveness of law enforcement agencies and the judicial system in preventing and addressing crime plays a significant role. Weak law enforcement, corruption, and delays in the judicial process can hinder crime prevention efforts.

7. Drug and Substance Abuse:

Substance abuse issues, including the use of drugs and alcohol, can contribute to criminal activities. Drug trafficking and substance abuse can create a conducive environment for other crimes.

8. Political Instability:

Political instability and governance issues can impact law and order. Weak governance and political instability may lead to an increase in criminal activities.

9. Technological Advancements:

The use of technology in criminal activities, such as cybercrime, is a growing concern globally. As technology advances, so do the methods criminals use.

10. Social and Economic Inequalities:

Disparities in wealth and social status can contribute to feelings of injustice and frustration, leading to criminal behavior.

Addressing crime requires a holistic approach involving social, economic, and political measures. Effective law enforcement, community engagement, education, and social welfare programs are essential components of any strategy to reduce crime rates

Methodology:

This study employs a quantitative research design to explore the knowledge and attitudes of college-going students in Kollam, Kerala, regarding women's personal safety, dignity, and rights. The cross-sectional design allows for a snapshot analysis of the subject at a specific point in time. A stratified random sampling technique is utilized to ensure representation from different colleges and academic disciplines. The sample size is set at 100 participants to obtain a diverse and comprehensive understanding of the population. A structured questionnaire is developed, consisting of 20 variables related to knowledge and attitudes towards women's personal safety, dignity, and rights. The questionnaire is designed to be comprehensive, covering aspects such as awareness of legal provisions, understanding of women's rights, and attitudes towards gender equality. The questionnaire is distributed electronically using Google Forms to reach a wider audience efficiently. Participants are informed about the purpose and ethical considerations of the study. Informed consent is obtained before participants engage in the survey.

RESULTS

From the data collected, 83% among the college going students are from 17 to 20 years old, rest 16% are from 21 to 24 years old, 1% is from 25 -28 years old. No student has been identified from the category of 28 and above. Among the 100 college going students, 32% are male and 67% are female, 1% falls under others. 37.4% are pursuing health care, 11.1% are studying law, 33.3 % falls under engineering and 13.1% under arts and sciences, 5% falls under others. 87.8% are aware that child marriage is illegal even if both the parties agree while 11.1% answered wrong. When asked on if a

woman finds difficulty in reaching to a police station, she can file a virtual complaint letter via a mail or post, 24% wasn't sure, 8% disagreed and 68% said yes.

52.5% answered right to the statement women cannot be arrested after sunset and before sunrise and 28.3% wasn't sure while 19.2% disagreed. On to the statement equal salary should be paid to both men and women workers for the same work or work of similar nature, 85% agreed while 9% wasn't sure and 6% disagreed. 74% are aware that women should be given a one-third (33%) of the seats in state legislative assemblies and the parliament while the rest 26% were not aware of the law. 57% agreed to the statement it is illegal to marry a 20 year old female in India, 28% disagreed and 15% wasn't sure. In case of sexual assault, if a victim is a minor, the victim can file the case once they are 18, 44% disagreed, 28% wasn't sure and 28% agreed. 69% are aware that police can only interrogate an women at her residence in the presence of a women constable and family members or friends, and the rest 31% are not aware.

Based on the attitude related, when the respondents were asked about their perspective towards the crime raise against women, 77% of respondents feel that the crime rates are increasing, 6% of them feels that the crime rates are decreasing and 17% of respondents feels that crime rates are still the same. From the respondents who feels the crime rates were increasing against women, 54.7% of the respondents said that the reason is no fear of law; 24.2% of respondents felt it was due to women being increasingly viewed as sex objects; 2.1% of respondents blamed it on the skinny clothes worn by women; 2.1% of respondents thinks it is because of easy access to pornography; 6.3% of respondents blamed it for the unsafe and inadequate transport services; 4.2% of the respondents claimed the reason to be lack of police patrolling on the streets; 6.3% of respondents chose the option any others reasons apart from the given reasons. On the effective punishment in curbing crimes against women, 49.5% of respondents chose the option harsher punishment, 37.4% of respondents chose the option better parenting with sons being taught to respect women, 3% of respondents suggested better patrolling, 5.1% of respondents agreed to the option fast track courts and 5.1% of respondents chose the option any other. The women respondents were asked about the experience of the situations like lewd comments, groping, stalking and molestation where, 30.5% of respondents said they have gone through lewd comments and song from group of men, 14.6% of respondents said that they have experienced stalking, 9.8% of respondents said they have faced other situations and 40.2% of respondents haven't faced any such situations. When asked on the punishment deserved by the criminals majority of them stated death and capital punishment. Others stated castration, shoot at site, imprisonment for a very long time. 63.6% disagreed if imprisonment and penalty was a fair punishment for people committing crime towards women and 36.4% agreed.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, majority of the college going students were female. The dominating fields being pursued by the college going students were healthcare and engineering. Among the knowledge based questions, we could draw out a conclusion that majority of them are aware of the rights except in few questions were the questions like if a victim could file a case once they are 18, in case if sexual assault in the past, 44% said no while 28% said yes and the rest 28% was not sure. This implies less than half of the students alone are aware that in case of sexual assault in the past, one can file a case once they are 18. Only 57% was sure on whether it's legal for a 20 year old to be married in India and the rest 28% and the 15% disapproved and was not sure respectively. On the question if a women

can be arrested before and after sunset, only 52% i.e., half of the students answered right. To this we can conclude that the basic rights related to the safety of women are known by a larger part by the ongoing college students who has participated in the study, though many are yet to understand the legal rights supported by the government of India for the safety and security of women. This is contradicting to the study done in Kerala where the knowledge in laws and rights related to women were assessed among the college going students which resulted only in 29.26%. In the second section in assessing the attitude among the college going students, 77% which is more than half of the sample feels that crimes against women are only increasing. In spite of many legal rights and laws being put forth by the government, only 6% sees it decreasing and the rest 17% finds it remaining constant. Humans are a large, heterogeneous social group and perform different functional roles as the members of a society. Clothing serves an important socializing influence and acts as a symbol of social status and identity (Kaiser et al., 2001). In the present study around 24.2% of respondents felt the increase rate in crime was due to women being increasingly viewed as sex objects and 2.1% of respondents blamed it on the skinny clothes worn by women. Victimization might emerge, not only through prescriptive norms, with agents telling us *what not to wear* but also from those that cajole us *to wear* attire of certain kinds. Examining the narratives of clothing practices prevalent in the mass media, Jackson et al. (2012) highlight the contradictory discourses directed at pre-teen and teens, confusing, demeaning and repressing young women. Harsher punishments and better parenting are the majorly suggested steps in curbing crimes against women. When asked on why the initiative in registering a complaint to the police was not taken, majority felt that it would not serve the purpose. Harsher punishments and better implication of the law is very much necessary in safeguarding the rights and dignity if women in our country. This paper shows that college students are aware of the basic rights and legal aspects but steps can be taken by the government in raising more awareness. It also shows the dis satisfactory effect the legal punishment has, and a vast majority still feels a great many changes are to be done in the legal punishment imposed on to the criminal act.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the knowledge and attitudes of college-going students in Kollam, Kerala, regarding women's personal safety, dignity, and rights. While a significant portion of the participants demonstrated awareness of basic legal provisions and women's rights, there were notable gaps in understanding specific aspects. The majority of the respondents were aware of fundamental constitutional rights and provisions for women in India, However, areas such as the legal age for marriage, restrictions on the arrest of women, and specific rights related to sexual assault revealed some confusion and lack of clarity among the participants. Attitude-related questions indicated that a substantial proportion of students perceive an increase in crime against women. The reasons cited for this increase ranged from a lack of fear of the law to societal perceptions of women as sex objects. The study also highlighted concerns about clothing choices influencing crime rates, emphasizing the need for addressing cultural and societal attitudes that contribute to victim-blaming. Responses regarding effective punishments for crimes against women varied, with a significant number advocating for harsher punishments. The importance of better parenting, education, and improved law enforcement emerged as additional strategies suggested by the respondents. The study underscores the need for ongoing awareness campaigns, educational initiatives, and policy changes to bridge the knowledge gaps and foster a more informed and

empathetic society. While legal safeguards exist, their effectiveness depends on widespread awareness, understanding, and active advocacy. The findings can guide future interventions, educational programs, and policy measures aimed at empowering young adults to champion women's rights and contribute to the creation of a safer and more equitable society. To conclude, this research contributes to the broader discourse on women's rights and safety, offering valuable insights into the perceptions and attitudes of college-going students in Kollam, Kerala. It lays the foundation for further studies and interventions to address the identified knowledge gaps and promote a culture of respect, equality, and justice for women in the region.

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