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Sexualizing the Body and the Victimization of Teenage Girls: A Sociological Analysis of Teenage Dating Violence in India

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Abstract

Dating abuse and violence among teenage girls in India is a complex issue that requires a nuanced understanding and a multifaceted response. This paper critically examines the phenomenon of dating abuse and violence among teenage girls in India, highlighting the psycho-social elements and complexities involved. Despite its prevalence, dating violence remains underreported, with girls facing emotional and physical abuse, psychological trauma, and social pressure. Studies indicate that females are disproportionately affected, with many experiencing violence at the hands of their partners. Lack of experience in navigating relationships and combating unworthy situations is a significant contributing factor. The fear of stigma and traditional notions of virginity exacerbate the issue. Several contextual factors contribute to dating violence among teenage girls in India. Exposure to violence in the media, ethnic diversity, and gender dynamics all play a role. The socialization of victims and perpetrators also influences the prevalence of dating violence. This paper advocates for a socio-legal intervention policy and social support to empower teenage girls to combat dating violence. A comprehensive approach, incorporating education, awareness, and community engagement, is necessary to address this pressing issue.

Keywords: Sexualizing, Dating violence, Abuse

1. Introduction

Teenage dating violence is a multifaceted phenomenon, and scholars continue to inspect a wide range of contributing factors (Prospero, 2006). It is related to insulting, abusive, and antagonistic behavior in a romantic relationship. It can happen in "straight" as well as "same-sex" relationships which include emotional, verbal, physical or sexual manipulation or a combination of all (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2000). While a considerable number of sociological investigations observed the roots and background of teenage dating violence, this paper focuses primarily on teenage girls in abusive situations. Teenage is the age between childhood to adulthoods. There is far less critical argument of teenage dating violence, despite the fact that teenage and young girls between the ages of 16 and 24 are the most vulnerable age group for dating violence (Rennison and Welchans, 2000; Taqutte and Monterio, 2019). Now-a-days, multiple "blind dating" through geo-social dating apps is also increasing their vulnerability towards

dating abuse. It is true that teenage girls are facing various psycho-social problems in dating violence because of their limited experience and gender stereotypy in the societal set-up which placed teenage victims in an isolated situation (Wilson and Maloney, 2019). Dating violence of teenage girls remains an understudy phenomenon in Indian academia. Sometimes, it relates to domestic violence in India. Dating abuse and dating violence among teenage girls has a noteworthy social effect on millions of women's lives in India and the world.

2. Dating Violence among Teenage Girls in Romantic Affairs

The unequal position of women in society and normative use of coercion in conflict is the main reason for teenage girls dating violence (Jewkes, 2002). National Crime Bureau (NCB) recognized that the person who is abusing is committing a crime. According to the NCB, force to get intimate with girls, stalking a person online or offline, control over dress up, keep checking her phones and messages without her permission, etc. will be treated as crime under dating violence. However, teenage dating violence is not a new social phenomenon, but it is reported very less in India compared to western countries. Carlson (2003: 369) believes that prominent myths lessen society's response to the issue, such as the thought that girls' teen dating violence does not exist or is not as severe as adult intimate partner violence, or that teen relationships are nothing more than "puppy love". She points to a number of reasons why this could occur, including exaggerated gender stereotypes that youths conform to, belief that boyfriends should "control" their girlfriends, a teen girls' lack of understanding or awareness, and her lack of experience. Teenagers use different words to indicate the intensity or seriousness of a relationship, and they share in an understanding of these words' connotations. They do essentially know what constitutes a healthy relationship and despite this knowledge, teenagers' own relationships do not meet the 'healthy relationship' guidelines that they themselves described. Teens and youths also see their relationships as the same as matured adults (Guzman *et al.*, 2009).

Legal Service India (LSI) found that 60 per cent teens girls reported psychological violence, 18 per cent reported physical violence and 18 per cent reported sexual violence in India. The current literature on correlates of teenage girls dating violence perpetration identifies several risk factors associated with teenage and their families, schools, and neighborhoods. Specifically, teenage risk factors for dating violence perpetration include: drug and alcohol use (O'Donnell *et al*., 2006), mental health problems (Hilton and Harris, 2005), and externalizing behaviors (O'Donnell *et al*., 2006). Risk factors associated with adolescent families include: parental domestic violence (Wolf and Foshee, 2003), mother-adolescent hostility (O'Keefe, 1994), father-adolescent hostility (Shek and Ma, 2001), and low parental monitoring (La Voie *et al*., 2002). School risk factors that are positively associated with teen dating violence perpetration include: academic difficulties (Cleveland *et al.*, 2003), low involvement in school activities (Thomas and Smith, 2004), and involvement with antisocial peers (Schnurr and Lohman, 2008). Finally, teenagers who live in neighborhoods characterized by residential instability, concentrated economic disadvantage and racial segregation (Tylor, Calkins, Xia and Dalla, 2021) as well as neighborhood crime are at increased risk for perpetrating violence.

3. Objectification of Body in Social Media and Geosocial Dating Apps

Social media have profoundly altered the way in which individuals interact with one another. These venues have replaced personal, face-to-face communication and have also been a place where teenagers

have been awarded the opportunities to construct and explore their identities (Hinduja and Patchin, 2008). They have aided in their social development, through allowing them to develop and maintain meaningful relationships (Valkenburg and Peter, 2011), gain empowerment through expressing personal opinions, and take calculated risks (Alvarez, 2012). By the same token, however, electronic media has also enabled the perpetration of deviant behavior, as it has served as an easily accessible means of expression that has opened the door for cyberbullying. The most common methods of cyberbullying include, posting damaging information on websites, sending unwanted text messages or instant messages, sexting, posting inappropriate photos or videos online and excluding an individual through social networking sites (Alvarez, 2012). Cyberstalking is another way of teen dating violence through the use of media. It has been used to describe behaviors that involve repeated threats and/or harassment through the use of computer-based technology, which would cause reasonable fear or concern for safety. Examples of these include, monitoring an individual's email communication, sending threatening, insulting and/or harassing emails, posting inappropriate content about the individual on the internet, flooding an individual's email box, falsely using an individual's email identity, and using the internet to find personal information on the victim that can then be used to harass them (Alexy *et al.*, 2005). According to a report, 53 percent teens girls faced abuse while dating in India. Among them 42 per cent reported date rape, sexual abuse, unwanted forced to sexual acts like forced to send naked photos or money (Rao, 2018).

There are many commonalities between online and offline forms of bullying. Both of these involve repetitive behaviors and psychological violence (Valkenburg et. al., 2011). The primary way through which online aggression differs from offline harassment is through the rapid speed and ease at which it can be perpetrated, as well as the ability for private information to become public. In order for an individual to aggress against an intimate partner offline, they must be in the same geographical location at the same time, whereas through the use of electronic communication, they are able to send threatening and harassing messages instantaneously from any location (Melander, 2010). Teenagers who are victimized online are also more likely to be victimized offline and this victimization is more likely to higher among girls' teens. In one study, half of the victims of sexual and non-sexual online dating violence were also abused by physical violence, especially in case of females and a majority also experienced other forms of psychological abuse. A majority also experienced online sexual coercion, and were seven times more likely to have been victims of it than individuals who had not experienced online sexual violence (Zweig *et al.*, 2013). Both victims and perpetrators of online violence were approximately three and four times as likely as non-victims and non-perpetrators to also report having experienced or perpetrated these types of behaviors against an intimate partner (Zweig *et al.*, 2013). Most of the time, it is found that maintaining a casual friendship on a social networking sites and geo-social dating apps (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Tinder, Happn, etc.) can aid in initiating an intimate relationship through the mediated environment that is provided by such a site. Teens typically showcase their affection towards one another on these networks and passwords to each other's accounts may be shared. When relationships are terminated, adolescents may remove pictures they have online, de-friend their partners, and change their passwords if they were shared, similar to the traditional ways of ridding one's life of physical memorabilia of the relationship (Barroso-Corroto, Cobo-Cuenca, *et al.*, 2023). Teenage girls consider that they are less likely than peers to become victims of violence by a boyfriend or girlfriend, despite some first-hand experience.

Certain archetypes can be identified in portrayals of romance in popular media. There is the "Seeker", which is searching for true love or "enjoying the sexual infatuation of early relationships" (Griffin, 2006: iii). "Fairy tale" love occurs when couples overcome obstacles to find each other or be together. "Mature love" occurs in long-term companions, when partners are comfortable in their relationship. Griffin (2006) also points to two cultural ideals for long term love, one being "romantic" and based on emotional and physical responses, and the second "companionate", built on closeness and friendship. The media's exploration of love must be understood in relation to the exploration of domestic violence against women. While the difference between news media and social media must be considered, it is the gaps in news media reporting that allow for social media to present inaccurate representations of violence, and have people accept it as the truth (Rao, 2019). An overall trend noted in media coverage that incidents of dating violence seem isolated and as though they were happening to the 'other'. It is also evidenced that police officers aligned with a "just the facts" description, which tend to overlook the nature of the relationship (Bullock and Cubert, 2002: 490). Bullock and Cubert (2002) refer to past research on the subject matter, which consistently finds bias on the part of journalists and officers influencing the descriptions of intimate partner violence in media.

Geo-social dating apps like Tinder, Bumble, Happn, etc. are the smarter way for dating, even most of the time "blind dating" in India (Quora, 2022). The main objective of these dating apps is to promote a free space for dating where many teenage and youths choose those apps because it is easy to find partners within their locality. But many times, teenage girls faced emotional as well as physical abuse because of their lack of experience and over excitement to meet new and multiple partners. The fear of stigma creates a marginal space for victims where teen girls failed not share their experiences to others. The marginal space for women in society and the traditional concept of virginity of females is the main reason to suppress their voice. For this reason, they wait for the worst (Centelles, Powers, and Moule, 2021). In India, the gender binary and antagonistic heteronormativity confined them to a cage where cope-up with the situation can be a difficult task for many teen girls.

4. Experiences of Dating Victimization among Teenage Girls' and Substance Use

A number of studies show the positive correlation between substance uses e.g., alcohol in dating violence among teenage girls. The prevalence of dating violence among teen girls is high, with the majority of teen experiencing psycho-social aggression in their dating relationships. Psycho-social aggression is related to increased mental and physical health among victims and is one of the best-known predictors of physical aggression of teen girls (Taqutte and Monterio, 2019). In an effort to reduce the chances of future occurrences of physical aggression and the devastating health impact of sustained psycho-social aggression, research is needed that examines under what circumstances psycho-social aggression is most likely to occur. In India, Alcohol use precedes and increases the risk of experiencing physical and sexual aggression among teen girls (Nayak, Patel, Bond, and Greenfield, 2010).

Additionally, alcohol use is associated with increased rates of perpetrating physical and sexual aggression against a dating partner, especially harmful results for women and adult intimate partners (Nayak, Patel, Bond, and Greenfield, 2010). Heavy alcohol use is associated with increased odds of psycho-social aggression perpetration (not physical aggression), although negative affect increased the

odds of aggression perpetration (psychological and physical). Nevertheless, once these independent predictors are allowed to interact, alcohol use was associated with aggression, although not always positively; it was associated with *decreased* levels of aggression in some contexts (Elkins *et al.*, 2013). For psychological aggression, any and heavy alcohol use, as well as negative effect, increased the odds of aggression. For physical aggression, any alcohol use, but not heavy, and negative affect increased the odds of victimization. The alcohol findings are consistent with prior research that has demonstrated the odds of victimization increase with alcohol use (Parks *et al.*, 2008). It is also likely that both partners engaged in aggression during the same conflict, as dating violence is often bi-directional (Shorey *et al.*, 2008).

However, mindfulness interventions attempt to increase psycho-social health by focusing on present moment experiences, increasing self-awareness, and learning that all experiences (e.g., emotions) naturally come and go, which helps to decrease reactive and impulsive behavior (Bell, 2007). Theoretically, one of the mechanisms through which mindfulness-based interventions are believed to promote psychological health is through decreases in negative effect, which is achieved through the enhancement of adaptive emotion regulation strategies (Harned, 2001). Indeed, a number of researches indicate that mindfulness interventions do effectively decrease negative effect in general (Bell, 2007). Thus, mindfulness-based interventions may help participants reduce the general experience of negative affect for teenage girls and/or learn more effective and adaptive ways to cope with negative affect when it occurs. Having reduced levels of general negative affect may, in turn, make it more likely that, when alcohol is consumed, affect will remain neutral or positive. It can be found that the odds of aggression would be considerably increased if both partners are drinking and experiencing negative effect, whereas the odds might be drastically decreased if both partners are drinking but experiencing low negative effect (Matud, 2007). Understanding the interplay of alcohol use and negative effect of both partners will further advance our understanding of alcohol-related aggression (Bjorkqvist et al., 2000). In a study on Mumbai, likewise, given that empathy tends to inhibit aggression, levels of empathy may moderate the effects of alcohol on violence such that alcohol increases the risk of aggression among people who experience little empathy but decreases the risk of aggression among people who experience more empathy (Wagman, *et. al.*, 2016).

5. Gender Roles and Dating Violence Experiences among Teenage Girls

Dating violence is clearly an important problem for teenage girls, no consensus has emerged about the prevalence and gender distribution of violence between dating partners, and two major sources of data produce widely divergent estimates. Few studies have evaluated programs for teens designed to prevent dating violence, and the results of the existing studies do not present conclusive evidence about the efficacy of these programs. There are a number of challenges that face researchers interested in investigating adolescents dating violence and this may explain the dearth of research in this area. Two studies have examined the relationship of dating violence and experience of maltreatment in the home. Roscoe and Callahan (1985) found that 59 per cent of the 17 teenage who reported experiencing dating violence also reported experiencing physical violence at the hands of a family member. No other findings including this variable were reported. In India, gender role is divided into masculinity and femininity where females are subjugated and they are the subject to male dominance. Their socialization towards traditional womanhood (“Satitwa” or virginity) is confined them to move for any kind of

harassments where dating before marriage with unknown persons is an obscenity. For this reason, they prefer not to share their bitter experience to anyone in the family (Hindrise, 2022). The experience of maltreatment in the family of origin may be related to dating violence among teenage girls and that this relationship warrants further study.

Dating abuse is related to lower self-confidence and depression. For girls, dating violence contributed significantly to posttraumatic stress and dissociation. Boys experienced less dating violence overall than girls, those boys who did experience dating violence differed little from girls who experienced dating violence (Molidor and Tolman, 1998). During teenage, individuals undergo significant emotional, social, and physical growth and experience many significant events that will help to determine their future paths. Foshee (1996) found several dichotomy among males and females dating violence experience, (a) female perpetrate more mild, moderate and severe violence than males towards partners even when controlling for violence perpetrated in self-defense; (b) females perpetrate more violence than males out of self-defense; (c) males perpetrate more sexual dating violence than females; (d) males and females sustain equal amounts of mild, moderate and severe dating violence; (e) females sustain more sexual dating violence than males; (f) females sustain more psychological abuse than males from their partners; and (g) females receive more injuries than males from dating violence.

Despite the clear indication that dating violence is present among teenagers, researchers have focused far more attention on partner violence among school and college students. A number of factors can be divided into definitional issues, human participants' protection issues, and general legal issues relating to minors. First, defining who is a dating partner is difficult for any age group but particularly so among teen girls. For example, a teenage dating partner can represent the traditional concept of a long-term boyfriend or girlfriend who may or may not be sexually active, however "dates" may also take the form of a partner for single, planned events (e.g., school dance), a sexual partner in a casual unplanned encounter, a sexual partner in a series of casual encounters, or members of a group who regularly socialize together. In addition, teens tend to use specific terms to describe categories of dating relationships (e.g., terms reported recently in a study by Los Angeles Latino teens were "hanging out," "hooking up," "being sprung," "being friends with privileges," and "crushing on someone"), and these terms undoubtedly vary by region and ethnicity. Second, requirements for human participants' protection in studies involving minors are more stringent in general when they involve teens relative to adults; even more so for studies that focus on violence. These requirements restrict potential research designs and may reduce researcher interest in examining teen dating violence. When studies are undertaken, active parental consent is often required for adolescent participation. This may result in a reduced response rate and the exclusion of the most vulnerable teenage girls in particular. Participation in intervention programs may also require parental consent, potentially reducing access for teens that are in need of services. However, simple empirical description is needed to inform theoretical and program development. For example, some research indicates that female teens use violence against a partner for different reasons (O'Keefe, 1997). In Indian scenario, all the factors influenced on dating violence of teenage girls. Furthermore, the traditional gender stereotypy and gender binary mingled with heteronormative perception of womanhood (Choudhury and Deb, 2018). This issue needs to be carefully studied to determine the extent to which it is consistently empirically supported and if so whether it might suggest differing approaches to prevention and intervention programs for teenage girls.

6. Conclusion

This paper provides a critical assessment of our understanding of dating abuse and violence among teenage girls with special reference to India. Initially, an overview is provided on various methodological issues in this area, examining how these dominant trends have influenced perceptions of this problem. In contrast, a more encompassing approach, incorporating gendered power relations and teenagers' own experiences in various researches are assessed. The importance of understanding the context in which such violence occurs, and the meaning it holds for teens, are also significant. In an effort to better understand and prevent teenage dating violence, this paper examined the risk factors associated with teenage girls dating violence as well as methods of intervention and prevention. Six important social aspects relate teenage girls dating violence as a delinquent behavior: (a) the prevalence of teenage dating violence in India, (b) the risk factors linked to teenage girls dating violence within her locality, (c) reasons behind victims stay in abusive relationships, (d) the negative effects of teenage girls dating violence, (e) support systems for teenage girls in case of dating abuse in Indian legal system, and (f) socially accredited methods of prevention and intervention policy. However, a number of contextual factors to this issue are also significant which include exposure to violence in the media, ethnic diversity, gender dynamics and socialization of victims and perpetrators of teenage girls in dating violence. Never-the-less, teenage girls dating violence is at a level of concern that warrants enhanced research attention in Indian academia, as well as a renewed interest in testing interventions. As a relatively new area of inquiry and intervention, teenage girls dating violence is benefited from a co-consideration of epidemiological and social research. It is imperative that teenage dating violence be accorded due status as a socio-legal issue.

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