

Qualitative Study

## Print Media Reports of Sexual Violence Against Women: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

Sexual violence against women has been increasing day by day and the media reporting of these incidents seems to be flawed and biased. This study has taken the initiative to look into this issue by studying the media reports on sexual violence qualitatively. The aim of the study is to find out whether there is a misrepresentation in reporting the news items related to sexual violence against women in print media. This study analyzed the differences in reporting of sexual violence against women in various newspapers in one month period after the Nirbhaya case happened. Nirbhaya case has put a bench mark in creation of various laws against sexual violence in India. It has had an impact worldwide, leading to awareness and generating studies and strategies to prevent such incidents. The data collected was analyzed using discourse analysis and content analysis. It was found out that there are differences in the way of reporting of sexual violence against women among the newspapers.

**Keywords:** *Print Media, Sexual Violence Against Women, Rape*

India is a country where dilemmas and contradictions are many. Women are held in high esteem and worshipped as a deity along with lower status in family as well as in society. They suffer oppression, physical, mental and sexual tortures, dishonor, hunger, illiteracy, diseases and general neglect. Though the Indian Constitution provides equal status for men and women, the reality is that the patriarchal society runs on male dominance in every field and hasn't left its reign over the women. Crimes against women especially sexual violence against women are increasing on an alarming rate. Sexual violence ranging from eve teasing and minor abuses to brutal aggressive behavior like rape and rape killing has been occurring in India.

Recently the reported incidents of sexual violence against women have increased tremendously. Almost every day we see the reported cases of sex crimes in mass media. When a person reads the newspaper, the news items which grab the immediate attention are those relating to sexual violence, especially on women. In fact, it must be remembered that most of the violence on women and girls goes unreported or under-reported in India. Aashish Gupta (2014), revealed in his article that it is highly evident that the percentage of under

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reporting of violence against women is tremendously high in India. The crimes against women which do get reported are just depicting a fraction of the reality.

Media, be it social media television, cinema, newspaper are powerful vehicles for entertaining and communicating ideas and images. It creates a parallel yet 'real' world for the audience. But the audience often gets confused to discriminate between the real and fantasy world. Media usually provides simple solutions for our complex problems.

### ***Print Media***

Print media is a means of mass communication in which information is disseminated through journals, newspapers, books and magazines etc. Print media is also playing its role of entertainment as well as spreading information through various magazines and newspapers. There is a high competition existing between the News agencies in order to increase the readerships. Hence, they often try to bring the news more sensationally as well as attractively.

### ***Violence Against Women (VAW)***

The term violence comes from the Latin word vis, which means force and refers to the notions of constraint and using physical superiority on the other person. In 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women defined “Violence Against Women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (Article 1).

Violence against women can also be described as gender-based violence. An analysis on gender found that one of the fundamental causes of violence against women is the hierarchical relations between men and women, which lead to discrimination. Bull (2003) thinks that one of the main causes behind the Violence against women is the conflict between patriarchy and femininity. Patriarchy is always based on a masculine ideal. It generates values such as violence, domination and control These ideas eventually get attributed to masculinity that all men are supposed to possess these values (Sheffield,1994). Women always victimized in their long-waged struggles for power. “It is not surprising that women are victims and targets in a battle for power. The politically disenfranchised are the first to be sacrificed by those in power and those hoping to obtain it” (Skilbeck, 1995).

### ***Sexual Violence Against Women***

Sexual violence against women has several manifestations. The most degrading form is rape. Rape is defined as sexual intercourse carried out against a person’s will by the use or threat of physical force. In India, there were 24,923 rape cases reported to the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2012, representing an increase of 15.8% from 2009.

The sexual violence against women in India has reached its pinnacle with the Delhi gang rape incident. This incident which was highly brutal shakes the psyche of people. People started protesting against this violence with little aid from any political party or organizations. To address the crime of rape, The Indian Penal Code (IPC) exists in the country. Many amendments have been passed since the constitution of the IPC after looking at the situation and severity. After the Delhi gang rape case, the Government of India constituted a judicial committee headed by Justice J.S. Verma to propose amendments in criminal laws and punishment to pact resolutely in sexual assault cases. Based on the recommendations of the committee a Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013 was passed. The word rape has been replaced with sexual assault and it comprises assault without penetration, and penetration to any level other than penile penetration is also a crime.

### Print Media And Sexual Violence Against Women

Sexual crimes attract special attention. Sexual violence against women is committed by large number of men. The social and cultural aspects on male sexual aggression have therefore received greater attention lately. According to Srivastava and Agarwal (2004), repeated exposure of sexual violence against women in media leads to increase in the incidence of crime, violence, adultery, sexual perversity and atrocities on women.

There are gender biases in reporting the news of sexual violence against women. Wetschanow (2003) analyzed media reporting on sexual violence against women and rape cases in Austrian print media and TV. By a mixed model of quantitative content analysis with qualitative critical discourse analyses of media texts, she demonstrated how the media purposefully categorized victims & perpetrators, men & women. O'Connor (2002) revealed that the print media depicted officials, cops and bureaucrats benevolently while women victims were depicted as vulnerable and being non-compliant.

With regards to the reports about sexual violence against women it is possible to argue that the manner of writing and reporting styles of the new paper will reveal a lot, especially, the motivation behind the reporter as well as the newspaper agency, whether it is encouraging a particular style of reporting or not. Media sensitization refers to "an attempt to create conditions whereby information about a fear stimulus is encoded in the absence of fear responses" (Foa & Kozak, 1986). The question here is whether it is necessary to sensationalize the content while reporting sexual abuse? What purpose does it serve by giving such detail?

Thus, this study discusses the rising sexual violence against women in today's world and its relation with the reporting of media especially print media. Now the question is whether the media is reporting the news rationally or emotionally? Does the reporting style of print media create a negative impact on readers? Does it generate a fear of psychosis among the readers? And whether it reinforces the sexual violence in society?

## METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

The data was collected by analyzing the news reported in the print media for a period of one month from 15 December 2012 to 15 January 2013. The reports of rape (forced sex without the consent of the woman) were included in the study. The news in two leading Malayalam dailies and two English national newspapers were selected.

The regular readerships of these newspapers are as follows (Indian Readership Survey, 2012: Hansa Research) -

1. Malayala Manorama 9.76 million
2. Mathrubhumi 6.33million
3. The Times of India 7.6 million
4. The Hindu 2.25 million

### *Instruments*

Four newspapers were used in this study,

1. **Malayala Manorama**
2. **Mathrubhumi**
3. **The Times of India**
4. **The Hindu**

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### ***Procedure***

The study was conducted using discourse analysis and content analysis as it is most suitable for the study of media.

1. Content Analysis is used in order to have an objective understanding about the reporting of sexual violence against women.
2. Discourse analysis is used in order to have a deeper understanding about the titles of newspaper reports. The paper reports are exhaustively analyzed, verbatim and words that are used to sensationalize the report were identified.

### ***Content Analysis***

It is one of the methods used in summarizing any form of content only after having a deep study of the actual content. This enables the researcher to more objectively evaluate and understand the situations. Content analysis, tries to analyze written words. The results of content analysis are in numbers. It starts with the process of selecting content for analysis, then preparing the content for counting and weighing. This study uses the source as print media of one month.

The content analysis therefore serves two basic purposes:

1. It helps in removing much of the subjectivity from summaries.
  2. It also helps in detection of trends in an easier and simpler manner.
- Intra-media Analyses: This type of study analyses the content within individual newspapers. It is primarily focused on initial exploratory studies on the four individual newspapers selected for this research. For intra- media analysis, exhaustive study of all the four Newspapers during the period of 15 December 2012 to 15 January 2013 was analyzed. The study is focused on four different aspects of the news. They are -
- a) The total number of reported cases of sexual violence (only rape) against women in each Newspaper.
  - b) Total number of reporting of rape as front-page News
  - c) Total number of reporting of rape as editorials
  - d) Total number of reported cases of crimes other than the sexual violence against the women

### ***Discourse Analysis***

Discourse Analysis is a study of the way versions of the world, society, events and psyche are shaped in the practice of language and discourse. The Semiotics, deconstruction and narrative analysis are different forms of discourse analysis.

As this study used discourse analysis merely getting the number of reported cases is not enough. A thorough study of the News reporting is done. As the time is a factor, this study cannot go in depth of the whole news content word by word. Hence, the study focused on the headings of the reports in order to find out the sensationalizing in reporting. The manner in which headings are presented, words and phrases used are studied. And found out the words in the headings which are commonly used and are emotionally loaded.

Inter-media Analyses: This type of study analyses the news across different newspapers. This study focused on comparative analyses between the national and local newspapers. The study compared the reporting of sexual violence against women in -

- a) National daily Vs Regional dailies
- b) Between national dailies
- c) Between regional dailies

## RESULTS

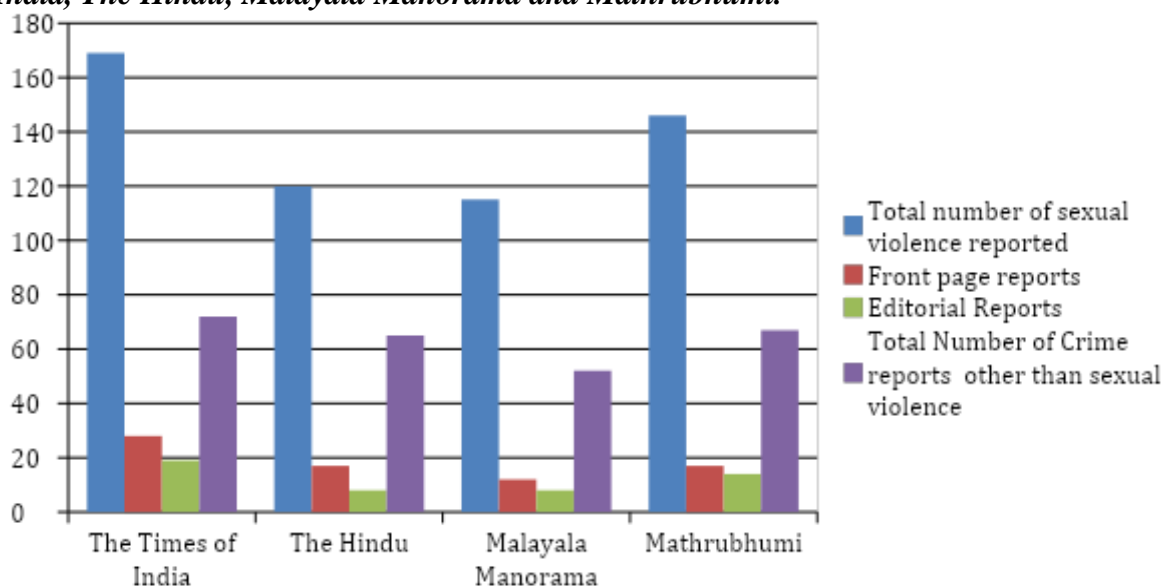
*Table No. 1 show the number of total sexual violence cases reported, front page reports, editorial reports and crime reports other than sexual violence in newspapers such as The Times of India, The Hindu, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi.*

News paper	The times of India	The Hindu	Malayala Manorama	Mathrubhumi
Total number of sexual violence reported	169	120	115	146
Front page reports	28	17	12	17
Editorial Reports	19	8	8	14
Total number of crime reports other than sexual violence	72	65	52	67

The Times of India reported sexual violence 169 times within a month and in the meantime Mathrubhumi, The Hindu and Malayala Manorama reported 146, 120 and 115 times respectively. When Times of India reported sexual violence as front-page news items 28 times and editorial 19 times, Malayala Manorama reported it 12 front page news items and 8 editorial reports. Among the 146 reported sexual violence 17 was front page news items and 14 were editorials for Mathrubhumi and for The Hindu among 120 cases reported 17 were front page reports and 8 were editorials.

Total number of crimes reported other than sexual violence in national newspapers such as Times of India and The Hindu are 72 and 65 respectively. Whereas the crimes reported in regional newspapers like Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi are 52 and 67.

*Graph 1 show the total number of sexual violence reported, front page reports, editorial reports and crime reports other than sexual violence in one month period by The Times of India, The Hindu, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi.*



### ***Comparison Between National Dailies***

This study has chosen The Times of India and The Hindu under National daily categories as these papers have highest regular readership in whole India. While looking at the number of cases reported in Newspapers, there are strict variations between the two newspapers. The Times of India has reported 169 news items related to sexual violence against women. At the same time The Hindu only reported 120 news items related to sexual violence against women. The Times of India has given exhaustive and colourful coverage on the front pages of the newspaper throughout the month. This paper has given 28 news items related to sexual violence in comparison to 17 reports given by The Hindu. The Times of India has also widely used its editorial spaces for giving article related to sexual violence against women in comparison to 8 news items given by The Hindu.

### ***Discourse analysis***

#### **Headings appeared on reported cases of sexual violence against women**

In order to do comparative analysis (discourse) of the Headings of the newspaper reports, this study randomly selected six news items from two of the newspapers (The Times of India and The Hindu), related to the sexual violence against women.

Again, this study has taken similar reports from two of the newspapers to understand the style of reporting in two newspapers.

1. The Times of India used the word “Grandpa” whereas The Hindu used “72-year-old man” to represent the same person in a reported case of sexual violence. The word “grandpa” which is more emotional loaded than the word “72-year-old man”
2. Here the report is regarding the statement Delhi gang-rape victim's friend. The Hindu reasonably says that the friend testifies before the court. On the contrary The Times of India gives a more direct statement about the incident from the victim's friend which is more sensational. Also look at the name “NIRBHAYA”- an imaginary name given by the paper in order to give more emotion in news rather than writing the word “victim” which is unknown and rational.
3. Look at this report carefully, The Hindu reported the news in a more rational way whereas The Times of India used different adjectives which are more emotionally charged and sensational. The words such as “beats, beaten, unleash nightmare; unsuspecting couple, false promise” etc are used only to make the sentence more dramatic and sensational.
4. The Hindu has given a statistical report of the number of reported cases of sexual violence in Kerala, at the same time The Times of India reported that in Kerala danger begins from home itself. The Times of India uses the word “Kerala rapists” which is controversial too.
5. While Hindu reported that a girl died with strangulation marks, The Times of India added one more thing that Police suspecting that there is a rape behind the death.
6. This report is regarding the chemical castration; The Times of India reported for the chemical castration – that too women against their husbands. But here Hindu takes a different stand. They have opposed the chemical castration through one of the editorials.

### ***Comparison Between Regional Dailies***

Under the regional daily category, this study chooses the Malayalam papers such as Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi. They are the two widely read newspapers in Kerala. Within the regional dailies there are variations between the reported cases of sexual violence against women. Here Mathrubhumi has given a total of 146 reported cases of sexual violence against women. But at the same time the most widely read Newspaper in Kerala, Malayala

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Manorama has given only 115 cases of total reports. News items on the front page of the newspaper is again high in Mathrubhumi as they reported 17 news items on the front pages while Malayala Manorama only gave 12 news items. When Mathrubhumi has included 14 news items in their editorial, Malayala Manorama has only given 8 news items related to the sexual violence against women.

### *Discourse analysis*

#### **Headings appeared on Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi:**

1. In the first report Malayala Manorama used the word “Gang -sexual assault” instead of “Gang rape” used by the Mathrubhumi, which is comparably less sensational than the word gang-rape.
2. Here Malayala Manorama gave a fine detail on the Heading of the report – those parents are arrested for the rape of their daughter. But the Mathrubhumi did not refer to the involvement of the parents-which reduces the emotional content in the report.
3. Again, on the third report, the Heading written by Malayala Manorama is more sensational than Mathrubhumi. Malayala Manorama reported that “rape again in Delhi; Housewife is raped by 3 persons”. Specifying the persons -housewife here – in the headings is likely to add more sensation in the news items. Here Mathrubhumi reported rationally.
4. Editorials written by both the papers are compared here. Malayala Manorama gave a lesser sensational heading for the editorial on the day after the death of Delhi rape case victim. They have written that “girl who wished to live”. Whereas Mathrubhumi wrote an article whose heading is much emotionally provoking - “those who are not born from mother”.

### *Comparison between National daily and Regional daily*

Here we have taken Times of India and Mathrubhumi for the comparison between National daily and regional daily as both these dailies have reported a greater number of cases regarding the sexual violence against women respectively. Compared to Mathrubhumi, Times of India reported the highest number of cases as well as wrote more editorials and given the highest number of front-pagecoverages.

### *Discourse analysis*

This study does not analyse the discourse between National daily and Regional daily due to the different languages used in both the dailies. It is not appropriate to study the discourse in two different languages within a short span of time. There are high chances that errors can occur in this analysis which can affect the validity of the study.

## **DISCUSSION**

In the analysis above, I try to demonstrate the way newspapers are reporting the issue such as sexual violence against women. This study conducted on print media aftermath of infamous Delhi rape case incident now known as Nirbhaya case.

### *Sexual violence in media and Desensitization*

After the Nirbhaya case, reports of sexual violence against women in newspaper increased drastically. The average reported cases of sexual violence against women in four Newspapers for a month is 137, which is higher than usual.

The number of reported cases of sexual violence and other crime reports is highest by The Times of India and lowest is by Malayala Manorama. After examining the reports of

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traditional print media, Egen et.al. (2020) found that there is a regional as well as temporal differences in types of sexual violence's covered and media language used. DeFleur and Dennis (1981) claim that due to the repeated exposure of violence in media, there are direct as well as indirect influences on the behaviour of the individual.

Media also cannot escape from the blame that, repeated exposure of sexual violence in media would desensitize the individuals. After the initial shocks of the violence in the news, intensity of emotion will slowly fade away with the repeated depictions of the same news. And the mind will no longer evoke any strong feeling towards the same extreme incidents like sexual violence against women.

Viewers become more desensitized with repeated exposure to mediated aggression and sexual images. Media desensitization may have real-life impacts and lead to harmful societal consequences.

### ***Reporting style***

One of the key themes that emerged from this study was the reporting style of violence against women were sensationalized newspapers. Sensationalism in the news is often defined as its capacity to provoke attention or arouse certain emotional responses in viewers (Grabe, Zhou, & Barnett, 2001). Several researchers found that the way language is used to sensationalize stories is commonly used in media reports of violence against women (Ahmed, 2014; Alat, 2006; Jackson, 2013; Mason & Monckton-Smith, 2008; O'Hara, 2012).

While doing discourse analysis of the headings of the reports in the National dailies such as The Times of India and The Hindu, this study found out that the reporting style of The Hindu is more rational than the Times of India. The Hindu reported the sexual violence against women without using emotional loaded words in their headings. The reporting style or the way of reporting the incidents like sexual violence against women and usage of phrases in the headings of the Times of India is more emotionally provocative and sensational than The Hindu. After doing the discourse analysis for the comparison between the Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi , this study found that both the dailies are lavishly used the emotional loaded words in their reporting of sexual violence against women. Moreover, there is no such heavy difference between the dailies in reporting style of the Heading on the news items.

Print media has become highly active in reporting sexual violence incidents. At the same time, it seems that the media is exaggerating and sensationalizing these incidents. Morgan and Politoff (2012) found that, while 40 percent of the newspaper articles incorporated some elements of sensationalism, there was a general decreasing trend over time in the Australian press. They severely used highly emotionally loaded words to report the incidents like sexual violence against women. The reporting style of news will reveal the motivations and intentions of the editorial policies. Sensationalism in journalism on violence against women is used to increase the article' readerships and make reports more alluring to audiences (Benedict 1993; Greer 2003). The news agencies might have a hidden agenda like to increase their readership or to increase the TRP ratings. Thus, it concluded that the way they are handling and reporting these cases is highly questionable. When we are observing the media, reports related to sexual crime against women we see that they are often highly sensationalized and are over reported. Sutherland et al, 2015 revealed that sexual violence against women in the media is more provocative rather than representative. As regards to the reports about sexual violence against women it is possible to argue that the manner of writing



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and reporting styles of the newspaper will reveal a lot, especially, the motivation behind the reporter as well as the newspaper agency, whether it is encouraging a particular style of reporting or not. These kinds of reporting in the media may further reinforce the violent behavior of viewers and readers against women.

### CONCLUSION

Sexual violence in newspapers shows that women are always at the receiving end of this crime. This paper has demonstrated that there is a lot can be done for improvement in mainstream newspapers' reporting on violence against women. Exposure to repeated violence may generate indirect effects in individuals. It can alter the attitude, beliefs and perceptions of the individuals. Media also depicts that woman are vulnerable and need to be protected. Hence repeated exposure of sexual violence against women strengthens the idea of "masculinity" in society. Thus, it became the responsibility of media to ensure sensible reporting without exaggeration and over sensationalizing.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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