

## PORTRAYAL OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF MANIPAL RAPE REPORTAGE IN THREE LEADING ENGLISH DAILIES OF KARNATAKA

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**Abstract:** Press reporting of sexual violence is highly selective, with more exceptional cases treated more newsworthy, while others hardly get reported. The recent gang rape of a medical student in Manipal on June 20, 2013 while returning from University library around 11.30pm. got a lot of attention in print, electronic as well as the new media. This study examined the coverage in three leading English newspapers of Karnataka - The Hindu, the Times of India and The New Indian Express from 20<sup>th</sup> June to 21<sup>st</sup> July, to attenuate the amount of coverage accorded to news reports, pictures and other items that followed the incident. This paper also analyzed the type of headlines and the language used in covering the incident. It was found that the incident got a considerable coverage in terms of news reports and pictures in all the three dailies. The newspapers have restrained themselves in publishing the name and other personal details of the victim. This incident was also given prominence on the front pages of the newspapers as well. Most of the news stories were carefully worded and the news reports were confined to protests by students and various organizations, security measures, culprit's arrests, police action and about the victim.

**Key words:** victim, culprits, rape, newspapers, Reports, pictures.

**Introduction:** "Violence against Women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace." Kofi Annan, United Nations General Assembly, New York, 5-9 June, 2000.

Social scientists have studied rape as a social phenomenon and as an oppressive tool used by a specific social system to dominate over another, from time to time. Figures released by National Crime Records Bureau shows that the rape is prevalent in the country (NCRB, 2012). The Indian scenario of rape has been studied by many sociologists and has found that rape has differing dimensions and serves the purpose of gender oppression (Pandey, 1985, Vutz, 2013)

According to a survey by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), 92 percent of working women say that they feel insecure in key industries like information technology, hospitality, civil aviation, healthcare and garments, especially during the night, in all major economic hubs across the country. Among the metropolitan areas, New Delhi topped the list with 92 percent of women respondents complaining that they feel unsafe, followed by 85 percent of women in Bangalore and 82 percent in Kolkata.

Though sexual crimes against women have been always reported by the Indian mainstream media, the coverage of sexual assaults has taken a special turn with the incident of brutal assault of a girl in the national capital of Delhi in December 2012. The incident created furor in the society and created media frenzy in covering and highlighting similar issues taking place all over the country.

The impact of media reportage of sexual assaults on the perception of such assaults among individuals and society has been attracted scholarly attention (Brownmiller, 1975; Burt, 1980; Malamuth, N M, Check, J

V P, 1981) well before in western contexts, but the Indian scenario is largely understudied.

In this instance, the present study analyses the coverage of another rape case which took place after the Delhi gang-rape, in the Manipal city in Dakshina Kannada district of Karnataka. Manipal is known for its education institutions and a lot of foreign students from different part of the country come here to avail higher education. A medical student was abducted and later sexually assaulted by a gang of men while during the late hours of 20th June 2013, while she was returning from the library. The incident created a furor in the South India and on similar lines with the Delhi incident, triggered protests in the region.

Though national media gave very scant coverage to the incident, unlike the Delhi incident, the regional media widely covered the incident with importance and closely followed up the protests afterwards and the progress of the probe. The present study is an analysis of the coverage of the incident by the English press in the Dakshina Kannada district.

**Review of literature:** A brief review of the of relevant literature is provided below.

Earlier scholarly attempts which connect sex crimes and mass media include Brownmiller's (1975) work 'Against our will: Men, women and rape'. Though the major focus of the work is the social and gender perceptions of sex crimes, it indeed look into the mass media aspects also. In the study, Brownmiller finds that mass media exposures that portray violence against women as having favorable consequences contribute to greater acceptance of sexual and nonsexual violence against women.

On a similar line, Neil M Malamuth and James V P Check (1981) in their study 'The effects of Mass Media exposure on acceptance of violence against women: a field experiment' conducted an experimental study with 271 respondents to measure the impact of exposure to films containing sexual violence on their acceptance of

sexual violence and rape myths. The study found that such exposure can have an impact on the acceptance and attitude towards sexual violence, however, it differs based on gender of the respondent. According to the study, "the result indicated that exposure to the films portraying violent sexuality increased male subjects acceptance of interpersonal violence against women ..... and acceptance of rape myths" the study found that the trend was opposite in case of female participants of the study.

In another study on 'The Coverage of Rape in the Israeli Popular Press', Korn and Efrat (2004) analyses the coverage of two rape cases in the daily popular newspaper in Israel. The study found that the newspaper coverage of the rape incidents was stereotyping the victims into the bad girl concept. "The reports tended to focus on the victims' behavior before the rape, emphasizing that they were not sexually innocent" finds the study. The study also found that the coverage largely sustained and supported the prevailing rape myths in the society.

Another study, which analysed the content of mass media messages in the form film to study the depiction of sex and rape in them - Images of Sex and Rape: A Content Analysis of Popular Film (Bufkin, J. & Eschholz, S., 2000)- found that popular movies which were analysed during the study present a 'rather patriarchal vision of sex and rape.' According to the study, rapes are depicted in the films in such a way that it is being performed by sadistic disturbed lower class individuals who prey on children and vulnerable. The study finds that such a one-dimensional portrayal of rape is ignoring the reality of the real life rapes.

To understand the nature of media portrayal of rape cases, Brooker, J. A. & MacDonald, S. C. (2002) analysed ten mostly debated rape cases and their coverage on national magazines by looking into the pattern of attribution of blame and sympathy in 'Media Attributions of Blame and Sympathy in Ten Rape Cases'. The study found that the rape myths are still prevailing in the media reportage of the rape incidents. They found that the attribution of blame was often associated with nontraditional gender role behaviors of the victims like going out with someone or drinking at the bar. It also finds that the pattern of media coverage shows that the double victimization of the victim (first from assaulters and then from the social narrative that follow). Calling out for greater attention to media coverage of sex crimes, the study points out that it is important since 'the media exert a tremendous influence on our attitudes about what rape is, who the victim is, and who is to blame in rape cases.'

Mucchielli (2005) in his research in the gang rape case counted the number of times the words 'gangrape' was mentioned in the headlines of Agency Presse Press dispatches. The word was only mentioned in 1-7 headlines between 1001 and 2000 with an annual average of 4.

Using Content Analysis Method, supplemented by

interviews and discussions, Pothan (2008) made a brief study of the problem of rape. Fifty representative samples were taken especially from the rape cases in Central India. The finding reveals that the incidence of rape is increasing in comparison with the past decades, majority of the minors especially girls who are below 16 years of age are involved in rape, very few cases of rapes are reported to the police due to the delicacy of the matter, death of victims is reported in a large number of cases, at least ten percent.

Overall, the studies on media coverage of sex crimes reveal that the issue is dealt from different angles

**Statement of the problem:** The purpose of the study is to show how incident of the Manipal medical student rape case was reported in the three English leading dailies between June 20<sup>th</sup> to July 21<sup>st</sup> 2013

#### General Objectives

To study the coverage given to the Manipal gang rape incident in three leading English dailies in Karnataka

Specific Objectives:

1. Placement of the news reports on Manipal gang rape (front/innerpages).
1. To analyse the headlines related to the rape incident
2. To assess the type of news reports of the rape incident in categories relating to -victim, culprits, police, security and protesters
3. To analyse the photographs related to the incident
4. To study the measures taken to prevent the recurrence of such an incident

#### Profile of the newspapers

**The Hindu:** The Hindu, started in 1878 as a weekly, became a daily in 1889 and from then on has been steadily growing to the circulation of 15,58,379 copies and a readership of about 22.58 lakhs. The Hindu's independent editorial stand and its reliable and balanced presentation of the news have over the years, won for it the serious attention and regard of the people who matter in India and abroad.

**Times of India:** The Times of India was founded on 3 November 1838. According to the Indian Readership Survey (IRS) 2012, the Times of India is the most widely read English newspaper in India with a readership of 76.43 lakhs (7.643 million). This ranks the Times of India as the top English daily in India by readership.[6] It is owned and published by Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd.

**The New Indian Express:** The New Indian Express is a prestigious English language newspaper. It is published from 22 major cities in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Orissa. The New Indian Express has a net paid circulation of 435,618 copies. It incorporates both national and international themes and sections on developmental issues, society, politics, literature, arts, cinema, travel, lifestyle, sports, new-age living, self-development and entertainment.

**Methodology:** This study is based on content analysis. Content Analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications" as defined by Bernard Berelson.

Three leading English dailies The Hindu, Times of India and The New Indian Express from June 20, 2013 to July 20, 2013 were selected for the study. The classification was made on the basis of treatment of the story, headlines, number of news reports, pictures and sources

### Quantitative Analysis

Newspaper	Front page reports	Inner page reports	Total
The Hindu	5	56	61
Times of India	13	42	55
The New Indian Express	10	22	32

Table No1 depicts that the Manipal rape incident was covered in the front pages of all the three newspapers. THE FRONT PAGE IS A NEWSPAPER'S front door. It's the first thing a reader sees. The stories that appear there are ones that will be talked about all day. The Times of India had 13 reports on the front page followed by 10 news reports in new Indian Express and the Hindu carried only five reports of the incident.

As far as the inner page reports were concerned, The Hindu had the highest number i.e. 56 reports, followed by The Times 42 reports and only 22 reports in the New Indian Express.

Overall the study shows that maximum reports appeared in the The Hindu, next Times of India and lastly by the new Indian Express

It is surprising to note that there were no editorial, articles, features and letters to the editor relating to the incident.

Newspaper	Photographs
The Hindu	23
Times of India	30
The New Indian Express	9

Table No.2 reveals that pictures relating to the incident were also given importance. Times of India carried the highest number of pictures i.e. 30, followed by The Hindu 23 and The New Indian Express gave very little importance to pictures by publishing only nine photographs.

Overall the study shows that The New Indian Express gave little coverage as far as reports and photographs are concerned compared to the The Hindu and Time of India

**Framing of news-** treatment of news stories

#### Headlines

Headlines grab the attention of the readers and provide a short gist of the story. It creates the first impression of

a topic for the reader Headlines and lead paragraphs play an important role in setting the agenda for how the public perceives a particular issue. Words such as rape, gang rape, rape victim, abducted, security, protest and arrest were used in the headlines of the newspapers.

Some of the headlines related to the incident that has left a lasting impression on the reader include-

Medical student raped in Manipal

Manipal medical student abducted and gang-raped

Manipal varsity to beef up security on its campus

Anger spills on to manipal streets

Students protest in front of varsity building

Arrest the guilty at once, demands MLA

Police yet to record manipal sex attack victim's statement: SP

Without rape victim's statement, case can become weak, legal experts

Manipal rape victim gives statement

Medical report confirms sexual assault on victim

Manipal rape accused to undergo DNA test

Gang rape: judicial custody extended

**News reports:** The news reports were classified under the categories related to the victim, reaction of the incident, security measures, police action, measures to be taken, politicization of the incident, information about the culprits and about the auto rickshaw drivers.

**Victim-** is a person harmed, injured, or sexually assaulted. In this incident the victim was a medical student of Manipal Varsity

In this study there were reports about the victim, a medical student who was abducted and later sexually assaulted by a gang of men while during the late hours of 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013, while returning from the library, medical report confirming rape, the victim's statement and the discharge of the victim from the hospital. There has never been a mention of the name and other personal details of the victims anywhere.

**Protesters-** A group of people get together and complain and show disliking to something. The incident triggered protests in the region. Students, activists, religious leaders and the public expressed shock and disbelief and publicly demonstrated against the incident. Students boycotted classes and college bundh was called in Udupi district.

**Security** - the state of being protected from harm. There were reports regarding inadequate security arrangements in the Manipal campus to protect the students from harm or danger .

**Culprit-** The persons responsible for the crime. In this instance three auto rickshaw drivers who were the prime suspects were arrested and remanded to judicial custody. There were also reports about the accused to undergo DNA test

**Police** - Whose duty is to maintain law and order in or at (an area or event). In this incident there were reports about police inaction as the arrests were not immediate. Police released sketches of the gang rape accused and later arrested all the three rape suspects.

**Measures-** a plan or course of action taken to achieve a particular purpose. This incident led to a number of reports relating to measures taken by the government, institutions and other organizations. There were reports highlighting the need to install CCTV cameras, street lamps besides security guards taking down the numbers of vehicles entering the campus. This finding is very much in agreement to the ASSOCHAM survey which reveals that the key issues that contribute to women feeling “unsafe or uncomfortable” are poor lighting, no access to emergency assistance and inadequate police security. There were plans to make hostel stay compulsory to students in Manipal campus, to set up fast track courts to try the gang rape suspects,. There was also a report on the introduction of sex education in schools and a demand for a women’s Police station in Manipal. Self defence -Karate classes for girl students was suggested in the reports

**Photographs** There is an old saying in English that "one picture is worth a thousand words". Most newspapers use a combination of words and pictures to tell the news. Not all stories will be ideal for pictures. Some will be told more easily in words than in pictures, while other stories may be told with one picture more easily and more clearly than in many words. Pictures can

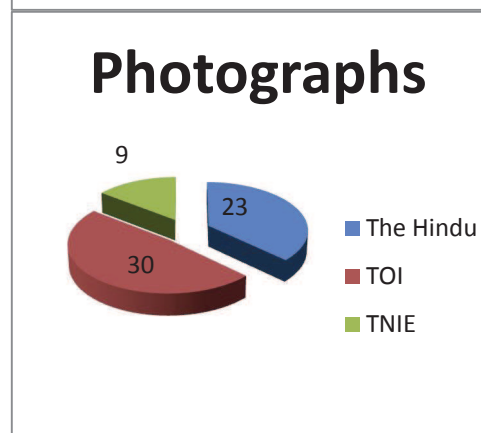
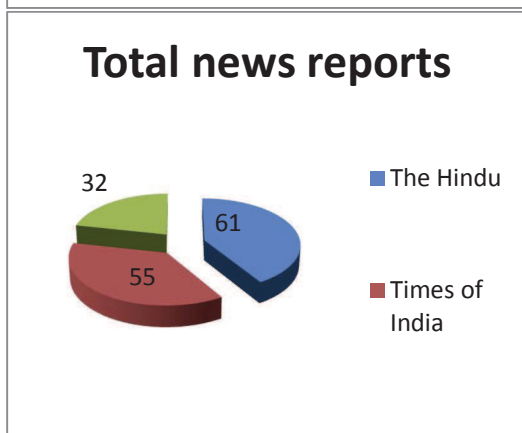
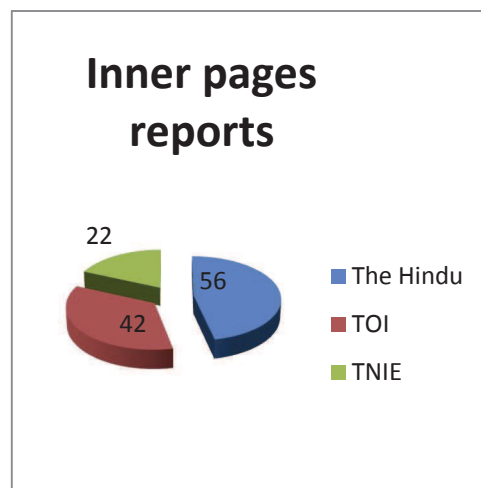
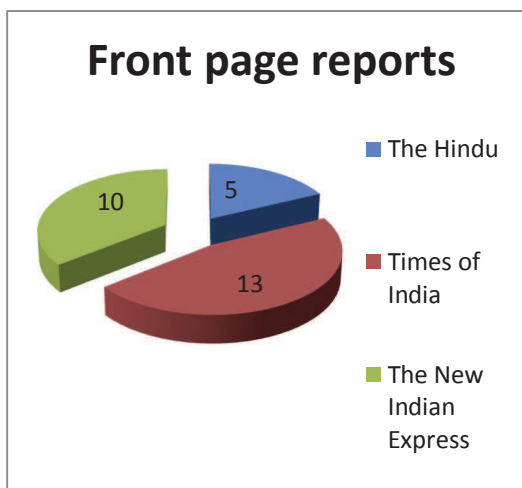
sometimes tell the news just by themselves, with a caption to say who the people are and where the event is taking place. A picture can let the reader see what a person, or a place, or a building, or an event looks like. Most of the pictures in the manipal rape case were to do with protests and rallies by students and various organizations. Sketches of the suspects and police taking the culprits to the court were also covered. Besides there were pictures of the Home Minister KJ George giving his opinion on the issue.

**Sources**

Most of the news reports were filed by the staff and special correspondents with a very few bylines.

**Conclusion:** Press reporting of sexual violence is highly selective, with more exceptional cases treated more newsworthy, while others hardly get reported. Though national media gave very scant coverage to the incident, unlike the Delhi incident, the regional media widely covered the incident with importance and closely followed up the protests afterwards and the progress of the probe.

Media is not just a watchdog but can play an influential role in generating public opinion on important issues and events in the society and can even make the government take appropriate and speedy action.



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