A Small Study On Impact Of Crime Against Women News Stories On Indian Urban Women

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Abstract: The research paper is an attempt to gauge the impact of crime news stories related to women on urban women based in urban areas of India. The paper tries to analyse the crime news consumption habits in urban women and what impact does these news stories create in the mind of women.

1. Introduction

It is true that we live in the 21st century, but even to this date, social malice and malpractices are still very much prevalent which are reminiscent of the past. One of such social atrocities is Violence Against Women. It is an accepted fact that this is a malevolent that world we live in, and despite liberalization and modernization of woman in the West and urban locales within our country, women at large still face social brutality, torture, limited opportunities in the public sphere, etc.1

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. Women in India continue to face atrocities such as rape, acid attacks, dowry deaths, and forced prostitution of young girls etc.

According to a global poll conducted by Thomson Reuters, India is the “fourth most dangerous country” in the world for women, and the worst country for women among the G20 countries. Expressing concern over the rising number of crimes against women, the Supreme Court also agreed that women are not safe and even subjected to molestation while travelling in buses. (Oct 30, 2013).

2. Objective and Scope of study

The main objectives of research were based on two parameters. Firstly, to analyse the effect of crime against women news stories on urban women. Secondly, to analyse the crime news consumption habits in urban women. In terms of scope, the research approach was exploratory in nature. And the sample design was based on non-probability sampling. The survey was conducted online by using ‘Google Docs.’ Based on the inputs from ‘Google Docs’ the analysis was done and the result was interpreted. The time frame of the research was one month and the survey was conducted in June-July 2014. The age group of the female respondents were set 18 years and above.


2 Ibid.
3. Review of Literature

Various studies have been undertaken in past to analyse the relationship between various media, different dimensions of violence and its effect of masses in general and women in particular. In 1981 a study titled, "The effects of mass media exposure on acceptance of violence against women: A field experiment," was undertaken by Neil M Malamuth and James V.P Check where two hundred seventy-one male and female students served as subjects in an experiment on the effects of exposure to films that portray sexual violence as having positive consequences. The findings revealed that, “exposure to the films portraying violent sexuality increased male subjects' acceptance of interpersonal violence against women. A similar non-significant trend was found on acceptance of rape myths. For females, there were non-significant tendencies in the opposite direction, with women exposed to the violent-sexual films tending to be less accepting of interpersonal violence and of rape myths than control subjects.”

According to another study titled, “Sexual Violence in the Media: Indirect Effects on Aggression Against Women,” by Neil M. Malamuth and John Briere in 1986, the study presented a model hypothesizing indirect effects of media sexual violence on aggression against women. It suggested that certain cultural factors (including mass media) and individual variables interact to affect some people's thought patterns and other responses that may lead to antisocial behavior, including aggression. Two streams of current research were relevant to the model. The first showed connections between exposure to sexually violent media and the development of thought patterns that support violence against women. The second revealed links between such patterns and various forms of antisocial behavior in the laboratory and in naturalistic settings.

In December 2012, the End Violence Against Women Coalition, Eaves, Object and Equality Now made submissions to the Leveson Inquiry and called on the Inquiry to look at the way the media in Britain reports on violence against women, including victim-blaming and the perpetuation of myths about abuse, and how the press objectifies and degrades women. The Leveson Inquiry is a judicial public inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the British press following the News International phone hacking scandal, chaired by Lord Justice Leveson, who was appointed in July 2011. In view of coalition of women's groups, “Lord Justice Leveson should widen his investigation into the practices and ethics of the British press, and tackle the sexual objectification and damaging representation of women in the media.” On the working of media, especially news media, the coalition of women's groups asserted, “Women make up 50% of that public but too often in the tabloid press are portrayed as sexualised objects or victims who are somehow to blame for the violence committed against them. When older women are pushed out of the media, when they are not used as expert commentators, when women are not seen as equal partners – this has a negative effect all the way through society.”

In 2014, the study titled, "TV Violence Linked to 'Mean World Syndrome" conducted by the Annenberg Public Policy Center researchers found evidence that "TV drama may transport viewers emotionally into the imagined world of TV shows in a way that creates fear of crime beyond the influence of the national violent crime rate.” The amount of fictional crime depicted on television has increased since the late 1990s and so has the level of real-life fear among those who have been watching, even though the actual crime rate has fallen.

“"There is a litany of theory about the connection between cities and crime. Indeed some of the most important of the ideas on crime and cities has been discussed at early stages of modern Sociology by Emile Durkheim, George Simmel and Max weber. Wirth (1938) claims that urban crime reflects the more anonymous and unstable nature of urban life. Jacob (1961) focuses on the emptiness of urban streets, and argue that cities only abet crimes when urban neighborhood lose (as they often do) their

8 Study: TV Violence Linked to 'Mean World Syndrome' (2014, January 1). The Hollywood Reporter. Annenberg Public Policy Center
traditional social structure.” In comparison to the small cities, the crime rate cases have been registered much more higher in the cities.  

Newsworthiness is a term that sums up the wisdom of the craft of journalism, and it has been fully described in the newsman literature (Chibnall, 1977; Fushman, 1980; Schudson, 2003). In deciding among potentially newsworthy incident, journalist select those they think are the most likely to appear in the paper to on local or national newscasts. The list of potentially newsworthy characteristics complied by Chibnall (1977) applies specifically to crime news. Immediacy, drama, authoritative source, novelty, titillation, conventionalism, personification, and simplification make the difference between an ordinary event and a news worthy incident.  

"Hard News’ sell and so does violence, which is considered primarily as a hard news-value. In today’s globalizing world, information (such as news) is heavily commoditized, far exceeding the thresholds set in the earlier half of the last century. News business is rapidly driven by hard news-values, such as the nature, cause and the brutality of violence (but certainly not limited to these). More so, the journalistic code of ethics, media’s responsibility toward societies etc., are becoming volatile, passé constructs to many media practitioners.  

The similar views were reinforced by the study conducted by International Communication Association in 2004, titled, Gender in crime news: A case study test of the chivalry hypothesis. The study stated, “Due to the deviance, drama and human consequences inherent in law-breaking activities, crime has potential for mythmaking and sensationalism unlike most other news topics. It is not surprising that for as long as mass media have existed, crime news has been a staple feature of print and broadcast content both in local and national markets. Media scholars show similar levels of interest in crime coverage and have studied crime reporting from many different angles.” Moreover, in media reporting, the media is often driven by the ‘dramatic value’ of a crime.  

Indian Perspective:  

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) crime against women report 2011, "A total of 2,28,650 incidents of crime against women (both under IPC and SLL) were reported in the country during the year 2011 as compared to 2,13,585 incidences in the year 2010 recording an increase of 7.1% during the year 2011. These crimes have continuously increased during 2007 -2011 with 1,85,312 cases in the year 2007, 1,95,856 cases in the year 2008, 2,03,804 cases in the year 2009 and 2,13,585 cases in the year 2010 and 2,28,650 cases in the year 2011.”  

The Crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC):  

(i) Rape (Sec. 376 IPC)  
(ii) Kidnapping & Abduction for specified purposes (Sec. 363-373 IPC)  
(iii) Homicide for Dowry, Dowry Deaths or their attempts (Sec. 302/304-B IPC)  
(iv) Torture - both mental and physical (Sec. 498-A IPC)  
(v) Molestation (Sec. 354 IPC)  
(vi) Sexual Harassment (Eve Teasing) (Sec. 509 IPC)  
(vii) Importation of girls (up to 21 years of age) (Sec. 366-B)  

Released in December 2011, a NAVTEQ and TNS Market Research study found that more than 50% of women living in the capital fear for their safety while in public. Highlighting some interesting findings, the study showed that 51% of Indian women surveyed feel unsafe travelling on Indian roads, and an overwhelming 73% of the women surveyed expressed fear for their physical safety when travelling at night. To find their way somewhere, most women prefer to seek directions from friends and family before setting out while en-route in unfamiliar areas, a similar number will seek directions from strangers in an aim to overcome the fear of losing their way. This figure is almost  

9 Bruce Sacerdote, Harvard University, 1996, “Why is there more crimes in cities”, NBER working paper 5430  
13 Ibid  
14 NAVTEQ is an American Chicago-based provider of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data and a major provider of base electronic navigable maps.  
15 Taylor Nelson Sofres a leading market research and market information group  
16 Over 50% of Women Feel Unsafe on Indian Roads: NAVTEQ-TNS Survey. (2011, December 9).
encouraging given that a 2010 report by the Delhi government’s women and child development department; Jagori, a nongovernmental organization; and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) put the estimate closer to four out of every five women.\textsuperscript{17}

According to the report of the Baseline Survey Delhi 2010, titled “Safe Cities Free of Violence against Women and Girls Initiative,” a joint initiative of Jagori, Department of Women and Child Development, Government of Delhi, UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office and UN Habitat, Nairobi, "Women of all classes have to contend with harassment as part of their daily lives. School and college students in the 15-19 age group and women workers in the unorganized sectors are particularly vulnerable. Harassment occurs during day and night and in all kinds of public spaces, both secluded and crowded. Public transport, buses and roadsides are reported as spaces where women and girls face high levels of sexual harassment.”\textsuperscript{18}

Statistics from National Crime Records Bureau’s Crime in India 2012 report plotted on a graph to highlight which Indian cities have the highest rate of reported crime against women. Amongst India's big cities, Chennai is the safest. Delhi, which is generally considered to be the unsafe city for women in India, ranks at No 16 when population of women is taken into account.\textsuperscript{19}

4. Research Problem

The continuous coverage of crime against women by media although have brought many cases of violence against women in light but also at the same time has instilled the fear in minds of woman in general and urban women in particular. Media is often selective in their news coverage. They are more interested on the stories with dramatic element. As the news channels keep on beaming crime stories somewhere they are exaggerating the “Mean world syndrome.” This research was based on this problem.

5. Hypothesis

“The continuous coverage of crime against women news stories makes urban women more insecure and unsafe.”

6. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is an essential component to understand and analyze the research problem of the research with use of theory. The research used one of theory from media effect theory.

\textit{Media Effect theory:}

The main theory identified for this research is \textbf{media effect theory}. One of the most popular theories used in the media research scholarship. We start with the notion of “media effects.” It represents one of the core ideas of communication research since its inception. Elihu Katz (2001b) characteristically puts it most directly in positing simply that communication research “is about the effect. It could have been otherwise—consider the study of art, for example—but it is not” (p. 9472). Some trace the intellectual origins of communication scholarship back hundreds or even thousands of years (Peters, 1999). But the modern field of scholarship defined by scholarly associations, key journals, and academic departments are roughly a half-century old. The field has grown dramatically.\textsuperscript{20}

In order to understand the growth of the media effect theory, the communication scholars have broadly divided it into three stages. The dominant historical narrative of communication effects research posits three stages pivoting on alternative notions of significant versus minimal effects:\textsuperscript{21}

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ibid. (Neuman, W., & Guggenheim, L.), p.172. See,e.g., Berger & Chaffee, 1987; Bryant & Thompson, 2002a; Chaffee & Hochheimer,1982; Delia, 1987; Katz, 1980, 1987; Keppinger, 2008; Noelle-Neumann,
\end{itemize}
Stage 1-Inception: This stage is the backdrop of the 'awe' effect of the media during world wars. The prominent theories associated during this era were, “magic bullet theory” or “hypodermic effects theory.” According to this simplistic paradigm, like a bullet or a needle, if the message reached its target its "effects," typically persuasive effects, would be immediate and evident. The notion was frequently attributed to Harold Lasswell, whose work on propaganda and psychopathology posited an all-powerful government propagandist manipulating passive and atomized audience members who lacked independent sources of information (Lasswell, 1930, 1935). 22

Stage 2- Emergence of minimal-effects: Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates at Columbia University "opened a new era of thinking" by rejecting "the old hypothesis that the media have great power" (De Fleur & Dennis, 1981). 23

Stage 3- Present stage: The present scholars demonstrate various "not so minimal effects" (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982) or demonstrate that if the media could not tell you what to think they were "stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). 24

In past, media studies focused on the use of mass media in the propaganda and persuasion. However, journalists and researchers soon looked to behavioral sciences to help figure out the possible effect of mass media and communications on society. Scholars have developed many different approaches and theories to figure this out. 25 And this gave birth to various theories like cultivation, user and gratification theory, agenda setting theory etc.

Cultivation theory:

The research relied on the Cultivation theory (aka cultivation hypothesis, cultivation analysis) was a theory composed originally by G. Gerbner and later expanded upon by Gerbner & Gross (1976 – Living with television: The violence profile. Journal of Communication, 26, 76), they began research in the mid-1960s endeavoring to study media effects, specifically whether watching television influences the audiences idea and perception of everyday life, and if so, how. 26 Gerbner’s cultivation theory says that television has become the main source of storytelling in today's society. The cultivation theory is a scientific theory. 27

Cultivation theory states that high frequency viewers of television are more susceptible to media messages and the belief that they are real and valid. Heavy viewers are exposed to more violence and therefore are affected by the Mean World Syndrome, the belief that the world is a far worse and dangerous place then it actually is. 28

Mean World Syndrome is a phenomenon where the violence-related content of mass media convinces viewers that the world is more dangerous than it actually is, and prompts a desire for more protection than is warranted by any actual threat. Mean World Syndrome is one of the main conclusions of cultivation theory. 29

7. Research Methodology

Research methods include all those techniques / methods that are adopted for conducting research. Thus, research techniques or methods are the methods the research adopts for conducting the research operations. On the other hand, research methodology is the way of systematically solving the problem. It is a science of studying how research is conducted scientifically. Under it, the research acquires himself/ herself with the various steps generally adopted to study the research problem, along with the underlying logic behind them. 30

The research methods in the social sciences can be divided into two main types: quantitative and qualitative methods. The research method adopted in

28 Ibid
30 Research notes of K L University distance learning material.
this paper was quantitative. Quantitative research method refers to the systematic empirical investigation of social phenomena via statistical, mathematical or numerical data or computational techniques. According to Aliaga and Gunderson (2000), “Quantitative research is ‘Explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)’.

Where as Qualitative research method as defined by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), is considered by many an authoritative contribution on qualitative research methodologies. They define qualitative research as multi method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. It involves the studied use and collection of variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interviews, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts- that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning on individuals lives. (Denzin and Lincoln 1994). 

Non-Random sampling method was undertaken. Nonprobability sampling is a common technique in qualitative research where researchers use their judgment to select a sample. Unlike probability sampling, where each participant has the same chance of being selected, participants selected using the nonprobability sampling technique are chosen because they meet pre-established criteria. Some of the more common types of nonprobability sampling techniques are convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and purposive sampling.

In this sampling technique the samples are gathered in a process that does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. Furthermore, in Non-Probability Sampling, the convenience sampling was opted. With convenience sampling, the samples were selected because they were accessible to the researcher. Subjects are chosen simply because they are easy to recruit.

To collect the data and to gather information survey method was used. The surveys can broadly conducted by applying two major tools, which are the questionnaire and the interview. However, this research used and the tool of online questionnaire. Oxford dictionary defines questionnaire as "A set of printed or written questions with a choice of answers, devised for the purposes of a survey or statistical study."

**Convenience sampling:**

The online questionnaire was made with the help of software ‘Google documents’ and was shared by the researcher on social media platforms Facebook, LinkedIn and also emailed to the respondents. Forty-Three (43) woman above 18 years old from urban areas responded to the survey.

8. Findings

The findings in form of percentage and graphs were generated by the ‘Google Docs online survey tool,’ and have been incorporated in the paper. Following are the findings of the research:

8.1) Age of respondents:

53% of the respondents were between the age of 18-30 Years.
44% of the respondents were between the age of 30-50 years.
2% of the respondents were above 50 years.

8.2) Monthly income of respondents:

23% of the respondents earned below 25,000 INR.
26% of the respondents earned between 25-50,000 INR.
14% of the respondents earned between 50-1,00,000 INR.
5% of the respondents earned above 1 lakh INR.
28% of the respondents were dependent on the family income.

8.3) Media Consumption habits of respondents:

98% of the respondent read crime against women stories in newspapers while only 2% didn’t read the newspaper.
79% of the respondent watched crime against women news stories on TV, while 19% didn't watch.

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53% of the respondent accessed crime against women news stories on the Internet, while 47% didn’t access Internet. 45.2% of respondent very often came across crime stories against women in day, while 38.1% have often, 16.7% sometimes came across these news stories. 8.7) 56% of the respondent felt insecure after watching crime against women news, 21% felt scared, 8% became aware after watching or reading crime against women stories. 8.8) In response to the question if the respondents ever bought any self defence equipment after watching or reading crime against women stories, following was the response: 51.9% bought pepper spray. 33% bought pocketknife. 11% bought chili powder. 3.7% bought some other self defence equipment. 8.9) Following were the sources, which gave the respondents the impression that crime against women has risen in your society: 77% opted for News stories on TV/radio/newspapers/online. 11.9% opted for word of mouth/information from other people. 4.8% opted for relatives' and/or friends' experiences. 4.8% opted for personal experiences. 8.10) 51% of the respondents felt bit unsafe walking alone in dark after watching news on the crime against women news, 38.1 felt very unsafe, 9.5% felt fairly safe and no respondent felt very safe. 8.11) 44% of the respondents were fairly worried about being physically attacked by strangers after watching news on the crime against women news, 35.7% not very worried, 19% very worried. 8.12) 63% responded were fairly worried that they will become victims of crime after watching these news stories, followed by only 19% who were very worried and 16.7% not very worried and 7% not very worried. 9. Interpretation of Data

The purpose of the data analysis and interpretation phase is to transform the data collected into credible evidence about the development of the intervention and its performance. One of the most important issues in interpreting research findings understands how outcomes relate to the intervention that is being evaluated. This involves making the distinction between association and causation and the role that can be played by confounding factors in skewing the evidence. The main objective of data analysis and interpretation is to acquire usable & useful information. Based on the above observations, it is observed that respondents between the age group of 18-30 years with income up to Rs. 50,000/- who read the newspapers, watched TV or accessed the internet for crime against women news stories feel insecure and carry safety kits for their safety while walking alone in dark that they may be physically attacked by strangers or become the victims of crime and developed the impression that they are very much unsafe and will come across crimes of such type on a day. Thus, the crime against women news stories have an impact of about 70% on the urban working women in the age group of 18 to 30 years with an income of up to Rs. 50,000/-. An association exists when one event is more likely to occur because another event has taken place. However, although the two events may be associated, one does not necessarily cause the other; the second event can still occur independently of the first. The finding revealed that the continuous exposure to the crime news does affect the respondents’ hearts and trigger fear and insecurity in their minds. One can also identify the association between the crime news against women, trigger of fear and insecurities and also resulting into certain actions like buying self defence products like paper knife, pepper sprays or chili powder. The findings also revealed that one of the chief concern in the minds of majority of respondents were that they can also be subjected to the same violence as represented in the news stories. And more over it was also ascertained that the news media, be it print, electronic and online is working more as source of creating those insecurities and fears and less in helping the respondents to deal with those fears. 10. Conclusion

The research was exploratory in nature, as the name states, intends merely to explore the research questions and does not intend to offer final and conclusive solutions to existing problems. Conducted in order to determine the nature of the problem, exploratory research is not intended to provide conclusive evidence, but helps us to have a better understanding of the problem and its context.
understanding of the problem. In order to collect data the research relied on the Non Probability sampling method and the convenience sampling was opted. The data was collected through the survey method by using the online questionnaire using ‘Google Doc survey tool’. Around forty-three (43) woman from urban areas like Delhi, Bangalore, Bhopal etc. responded to the survey. It was thus ascertained that the news media, be it print, electronic and online is working more as source of creating these insecurities, fears and less in helping the respondents to deal with these fears. Therefore, based on the hypothesis, it is concluded that the continuous coverage of crime against women news stories makes urban women more insecure and unsafe.

11. References


