Social relationship between the victims and the accused of sexual offence reported in a tertiary care setting of a metro city in India

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Abstract : *The incidence of sexual offence against women are increasing all over the world. The factors which predispose a woman to become a victim of these incidences are multiple. Understanding these risk factors is essential to prevent these offences. Among those risk factors, failure to suspect or identify potential perpetrator increase the chance of a woman to become a victim. The social relationship, shared between the victim and the perpetrator before the act of sexual offence are at times misleading and may bar the victim to suspect or identify potential perpetrator. In this background, an Observational Descriptive study was conducted at the Upgraded Department of Forensic and State Medicine, Medical College, Kolkata, for a period of one year to find out the social relationship shared between the accused and the victims prior to the incidence of sexual offence. It has been found in this study that 89% of the victims knew the accused prior to the incidence of sexual offence and in 35% incidences accused were well known to the victim i.e. either they were in the family tree or friend or neighbour. In most of the incidences of sexual offence the accused are not stranger but known to the victims.*
Keywords - *Sexual offence, victim, accused, social relationship.*

I. Introduction

Sexual violence is common. 1 in 3 women experienced sexual violence involving physical contact; about 1 in 5 women have experienced completed or attempted rape in their lifetime. Sexual violence starts early. 1 in 3 female rape victims experienced it for the first time between 11-17 years old and 1 in 9 reported that it occurred before age 10. (**1**). Factors increasing women's vulnerability are individual factors, relationship factors, community factors and societal factors. The identification of risk factors is critically important for informing strategies and programmes to ameliorate or buffer against risk – and ultimately to guide prevention policy. Over 50 risk factors were identified for intimate partner violence and/or sexual violence – most at the individual and family/relationship levels (**2**). Ability of a woman to suspect or identify potential perpetrator can be crucial protective factor in preventing sexual violence. The social relationship a woman shares with an individual may influence her to identify or suspect a potential perpetrator. It may appear to her that some social relationship is protective and some are not. This preconceived idea can make her more vulnerable. This may be particularly so if the victim is in early stage of her life course. This observational descriptive study was conducted to find out the social relationship shared between the accused and the victims prior to the incidence of sexual offence.
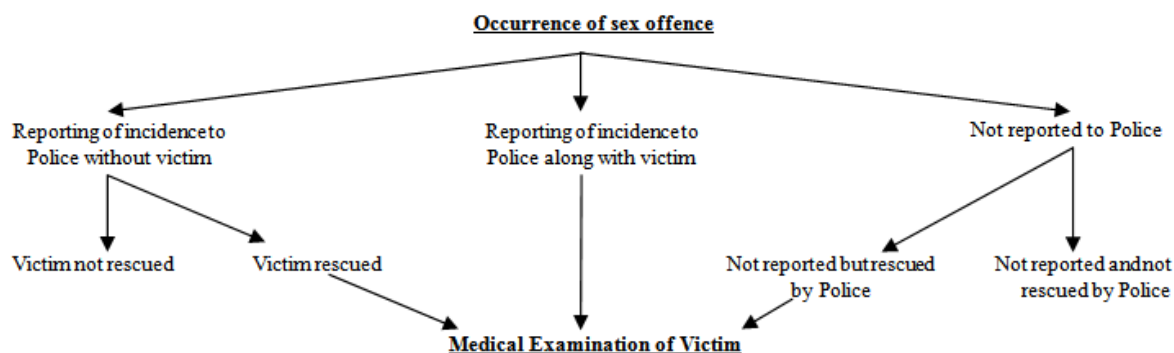
II. Material And Methods

This was an observational descriptive study, with institution based data collection. The study was conducted at the Upgraded Department of Forensic and State Medicine, in a premier medical teaching institute, Kolkata, West Bengal, for a period of one year (1st January 2013 to 31st December 2013), on the victims of sexual offence brought for medical examination. The research activity included obtaining permission, structuring and pretesting of schedule, anonymous data collection, compilation, analysis and write up. Sample Size: Complete enumeration i.e. all the victims of sexual offence brought for medical examination during the study period. Ethical clearance was obtained from the competent authority after ensuring that the data collection would be anonymous, no photographs taken or any data procured which could reveal the identity of the victim.

The victim of sexual offence is brought by the police with a requisition and /or order from the legal authority for conduction of a medical examination. The victim is identified by the police personnel following which informed consent for medical examination is taken from the victim or her legal guardian (if she is minor, mentally unsound or unable to give consent for any other reason).The victim is then interviewed using the pre

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designed, pre tested and semi-structured questionnaire. The data was compiled in Microsoft Excel and analyzed by using simple table.

Sexual offence may be reported to the police or may not be reported. Those which are reported to the police may be reported in presence of the victims or in their absence (some of these victims are later rescued by the police during the course of investigation). Victims of sexual offences which are not reported to the police may be rescued by the police during their routine raids and conducting raids on obtaining information on human trafficking in the red light areas. All the victims of sexual offence either reported or rescued by the police are subjected to medical examination with their consent or consent of their legal guardian (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

For the purpose of understanding and preventing intimate partner and sexual violence, the life course is divided into: infancy (0–4 years), childhood and early adolescence (5–14 years); adolescence and young adulthood (15–25 years); adulthood (26 years and over); and all ages. (**2**). This age division is also followed in this study.

B G Prasad's Scale modified for 2013 was used in this study to determine Socio Economic Status of the victims (**3**). They are grouped as Upper Class – I, Upper Middle and Middle Middle Class – II & III and Lower Middle and Lower Class – IV & V.

A person is deemed as literate if he or she can read and write with understanding in any language. It was decided in the 1991 census to use the term literacy rate for the population relating to 7 years age and above (**4**). This is also followed in this study. In this study, victims who are literate but not passed class X examination was considered having primary education, those who have passed class X examination were considered having secondary above level of education.

In this study the victims were classified as ever married (include widowed, divorced / separated), never married and currently married to determine their marital status.

Social relationship shared between the accused and the victims prior to the incidence was broadly classified as known and unknown. In the known group, social relationship between the accused and the victims was further classified as well known and known accomplice. If the victim is in the family tree, friend or neighbour of the accused then the relationship is considered as well known. If the victim otherwise know the accused then the relationship is considered as known accomplice.

Victims who refused to divulge relationship they share with accused are not included in this study.

III. Results And Analysis
Total number of study subjects in this period was 63. 63% of the victims are in their life course of adolescence and young adulthood (15-25 years) and 22% are in childhood and early adolescence (5-14 years) (Table 1).

Table: 1 Distribution of the study population according to their age in years (n=63)

Age of the respondent (in years)	Frequency	Percent
Infancy (0—4 years)	1	2
Childhood and early adolescence (5---14 years)	14	22
Adolescence and young adulthood (15---25 years)	40	63
Adulthood (26 years and above)	8	13
Total	63	100

4% of the victims belong to upper class while 54% belong to upper middle and middle middle class and 42 % are in lower and lower middle class socio-economic status as per Prasad's Scale, modified for 2013 (Table 2).

Table: 2 Distribution of the study population according to their Socio-Economic Status (n=50)

SES - Per capita monthly income in Rs. (Prasad's Scale, modified for 2013)	Frequency	Percent
5156 & above (Upper Class) - I	2	4%
2578 - 5155 (Upper Middle Class) – II & 1547 - 2577 (Middle Middle Class) - III	27	54%
773 - 1547 (Lower Middle Class) – IV & Below 773 (Lower Class) - V	21	42%
Total	50	100%

Note: 13 respondents could not state their family income

29% victims are illiterate, 49% have primary education and 22% of then have secondary and higher level of education (Table 3).

Table: 3 Distribution of study population according to their level of education (n= 63)

Level of education	Frequency	Percent
Illiterate	18	29
Primary	31	49
Secondary and above	14	22
Total	63	100

60% of the victims are never married, 22% are currently married and 18% are ever married (Table 4).

Table: 4 Distribution of study population according to their marital status (n=63)

Marital status	Frequency	Percent
Ever married	11	18
Never married	38	60
Currently married	14	22
Total	63	100

It has been found in this study that 89% of the victims knew the accused prior to the incidence of sexual offence. It has also been found that in 35% incidences accused were well known to the victim i.e. either they were in the family tree or friend or neighbour and other 54% incidences accused were known accomplice of the victims. In 11% incidences accused were unknown to the victims (Table 5). Accused were well known in 79% victims of childhood and early adolescence age group, where as among the victims of adolescence and young adult age group, in 70% incidences accused were known accomplice of the victims (Table 5). In upper middle class and middle middle class socio economic status group 93% of victims knew the accused. So also, among the victims of lower and lower middle class socio economic status group 90% of victims knew the accused (Table 5). Accused are known accomplice of 56% of the illiterate victims and 58% of victims having primary level of education. Accused are known to the 95%, 87% and 84% of the illiterate victims, victims having primary level of education and victims having secondary and higher level of education respectively (Table 5). Accused are known to the 91%, 89% and 86% of ever married, never married and currently married victims respectively. 50% of currently married victims disclosed that accused were well known to them i.e. in the family tree or friend or neighbour (Table 5).

Table: 5 Distribution of study population according relationship of victims with accused (n=63)

Relationship of victims with accused		Overall		Age of victim (in years)								Socio-Economic Status of victim						Level of education of victim						Marital status of victim					
				0—4		5—14		15—25		26 & above		I		II & III		IV & V		Illiterate		Primary		Secondary & above		Ever married		Never married		Currently married	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Known	WK¹	22	35	0	0	11	79	8	20	3	37.5	0	0	12	45	8	38	7	39	9	29	6	43	1	9	14	37	7	50
	KA²	34	54	0	0	2	14	28	70	4	50	1	50	13	48	11	52	10	55.5	18	58	6	43	9	82	20	53	5	36
Unknown		7	11	1	100	1	7	4	10	1	12.5	1	50	2	7	2	10	1	5.5	4	13	2	16	1	9	4	10	2	14
Total		63	100	1	100	14	100	40	100	8	100	2	100	27	100	21	100	18	100	31	100	14	100	11	100	38	100	14	100

¹WK; Well known i.e. accused are in the family tree or friend or neighbour of the victims, ²KA: Known accomplice

Age of victim: Infancy (0—4 years), Childhood and early adolescence (5---14 years), Adolescence and young adulthood (15---25 years), Adulthood (26 years and above).

Socio-Economic Status of victim: 5156 & above (Upper Class) – I, 2578 - 5155 (Upper Middle Class) – II, 1547 - 2577 (Middle Middle Class) – III, 773 - 1547 (Lower Middle Class) – IV,

Below 773 (Lower Class) – V

IV. Discussion

Information from the United States National Violence Against Women Survey shows that most rape victims in the United States know their rapist. Among all female victims identified by the survey, 16.7% were raped by a stranger, and 43% of all female victims were raped by a current or former intimate partner (**5**). In another study it has been found that strangers accounted for 16.06% of the accused in cases of female victims (**6**). This study shows, in 11% incidences of alleged sexual offence, accused were unknown to the victims and in 35% incidences accused were well known to the victim i.e. either they were in the family tree or friend or neighbour. In this study it has also been found that irrespective of age, socio-economic status, level of education and marital status in most of the incidences the accused of sexual offence are known to the victims.   Accused were well known i.e. in the family tree or friend or neighbour among 79% victims of childhood and early adolescence age group and 50% among the currently married victims.

V. Conclusion

In most of the incidences of sexual offence the accused are not stranger but known to the victims. This is true irrespective of age, socio-economic status, level of education and marital status of the victim. Most of the victims of childhood and early adolescence age group as well as most of the currently married victims alleged that the accused are not only known but well known to them i.e. accused are in the family tree or friend or neighbour of the victims. Findings of this study may be useful for informing strategies and programmes to ameliorate or buffer against risk – and ultimately to guide prevention policy against sexual violence.

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