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ARTICLE

A Study of Awareness Level of Female Teacher about Basic Legal Rights of Women

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Abstract

Women are principal providers of care and support to families. Yet every social indicator shows a fundamental social bias and inequality. In spite of women's contribution in all spheres of life and they enjoy a unique position in every society and country of the world, they suffer in silence and belong to a class which is in a disadvantaged position on account of several barriers and impediments. India, being a country of paradoxes, is no exception. Here too, women, a personification of Shakti, once given a dignified status, are in need of empowerment. Women's empowerment in legal, social, political and economic and requires to be enhanced. However, empowerment and equality are based on the gender sensitivity of society towards their problems. The intensification of women's issues and rights movement all over the world is reflected in the form of various Conventions passed by the United Nations. The Indian polity more or less has always tried to cope with the contemporary need - based development of laws for the specified purposes. It may be in the field of Human Rights, Politics, Civil Rights, Constitutional Rights or Social Transfer. Constitution is not to be construed as a mere law, but as the machinery by which laws are made. The Constitution is a living and organic thing which, of all instruments has the greatest claim to be constructed broadly and liberally.

The present study is focused on the idea to identify the awareness levels of women belonging to academics, regarding the legal rights that women possess. The study also portrays the facts that do really women realizes the significance of empowerment for their benefit. In other words, it may be considered as a measuring tool of women's empowerment through the level of awareness. Any plan and programme meant for empowering women proceeds from knowledge and awareness which ultimately results into capacity building

and skill development. Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, rights and opportunities may be considered essential towards gender equality which is the dire need of today for empowering women.

Introduction

The women folk are considered as valuable human resource which constitutes almost 50% of the world population. In most of the developing countries various strategies have been made for empowerment of women. In India also various constitutional and legal provisions have been guaranteed for enhancing the status of women. Efforts have been provided through various suitable policies and social welfare programmes for women. Despite these plans and programmes, Indian society fails to achieve the goals of equality, social justice and protection of women. Gender discrimination, maternal mortality rate, crime against women, child labour etc. have become major challenges facing by the Indian Society at present. Therefore, it is necessary to make women folk aware of their rights and empower them to raise their voices against any kind of exploitation at anywhere.

Dr. A. P. J. Kalam opined that empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately a good nation. Therefore various women empowerment programmes have been launched for the purpose of nation building activity. The women folk is considered as valuable human resource which constitutes almost 50% of the world population. In most of the developing countries various strategies have been made for empowering women which includes social empowerment, economic empowerment, political empowerment and more particularly gender equality in order to eliminate all types of discrimination against women.

Women empowerment has become a challenge of 21st century. In India also various constitutional and legal provisions have been guaranteed for enhancing the status of women. Efforts have been provided through various suitable economic policies and social welfare programmes for women. Despite of these efforts, Indian society fails to achieve the goals of equality, social justice and protection of women. Gender discrimination, high infant mortality rate and maternal mortality rate, crime against women, child labours etc. have become major challenges facing by the Indian society at present. Therefore, it is necessary to make women aware of their rights and empower them to raise their voices against any kind of exploitation at anywhere.

It is assumed that awareness building about women's right and opportunities will lead to eradicate violence against women necessary for their empowerment. This may be taken as a step towards gender equality. In this study, an attempt is made to throw light on the awareness level of women regarding their constitutional and legal rights. In other words it may be considered as a measuring tool of women's empowerment through the level of awareness. The world conference of women at Beijing in 1995 proposed various qualitative and quantitative indicators for evaluating the women's empowerment. Amongst these, increase in articulation, knowledge and awareness levels on issues affecting the community at large and women in particular such as women's health, nutrition, reproductive rights, legal rights, literacy etc. have been considered as essential indicators. Any plan and programmes meant for empowering women proceed from knowledge and awareness which ultimately results into capacity building and skill development necessary to strengthen the women folk at large. Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, rights and opportunities may be considered essential towards eradication of violence against women which is the dire need of today to bring gender equality in our society.

Review of Literature

Swati Mutalik (1991) in "Education and social awareness among women, attempts to explore the nature of influence of formal education on social awareness. It is found in her study that education had significant correlation with the acquisition of social awareness. Highly educated women belonging to high economic status had higher level of social awareness but readiness for action was absent in them. Therefore it is necessary to motivate these women for action.

Prof. Ram Ahuja conducted a study in eight villages of a district in Rajasthan among 753 women. His intention was to assess the degree of awareness and measure the level of satisfaction among women about the rights sanctioned by Constitution of India. He concluded that the level of awareness of rights by women depends upon four aspects like individual background, social environment, economic base and subjective perception of women. In Prof. Ahuja's study more than 75% of women were unaware of their rights; 20% of them did not have any awareness of their political rights; less than 1/3rd of women had the chance of inheriting their husband's property and only 0.5% of them got a share of the father's property.

Objective

To understand the awareness level of female teachers regarding the legal rights of a woman.

Methodology

A sample consisting of 50 female teachers from a private group of colleges were taken for the study. In order to collect the data questionnaire and interview schedules were used. On the basis of few below mentioned legal rights assigned by the constitution for women the questionnaire was framed and it was tried to find out how many female teachers were actually aware of them. *Based on the responses of 50 teachers, the results have been drawn.*

Having laws doesn't suffice when they are broken. Most people are unaware of their legal rights until they hire a legal firm for their problems. Merely a handful of them would say, 'Yes, we know' to this and most of them are not women. So, to help women know their rights and to help them fight back, here are 10 legal rights that they should know.

Right to Free Aid

When a woman goes to the police station without being accompanied by a lawyer she is quoted wrong, ignored or humiliated for her statements. She should be aware of the fact that she has a right to get the legal aid and that she should demand for it.

Right to privacy

A woman who has been raped has a right to record her statement in private, in front of the magistrate without being overheard by anyone else. She also has a freedom to record her statement with a lady constable or a police officer in personal. Under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code, the cops will have to give the privacy to the victim without stressing her in front of masses.

Right to untimely registration

There are many reasons as to why a woman would postpone going to the police to lodge a complaint. She considers her reputation, dignity of the family and threats from the culprit to take her life away. Police in any way cannot say no to register her complaint, no matter if it's too late to register. The self-respect of women comes before anything else. She cannot be denied of anything.

Right to virtual complaints

According to the guidelines issued by the Delhi Police, a woman has the privilege of lodging a complaint via email or registered post. If, for some reason, a woman can't go to the police station, she can send a written complaint through an email or registered post addressed to a senior police officer of the level of Deputy Commissioner or Commissioner of Police. The

officer then directs the SHO of the police station, of the area where the incident occurred, to conduct proper verification of the complainant and lodge an FIR. The police can then come over to the residence of the victim to take her statement.

Right to Zero FIR

A rape victim can register her police complaint from any police station under the Zero FIR ruling by Supreme Court. "Sometimes, the police station under which the incident occurs refuses to register the victim's complaint in order to keep clear of responsibility, and tries sending the victim to another police station. In such cases, she has the right to lodge an FIR at any police station in the city under the Zero FIR ruling. The senior officer will then direct the SHO of the concerned police station to lodge the FIR.

Right to No Arrest

According to a Supreme Court ruling, a woman cannot be arrested after sunset and before sunrise. There are many cases of women being harassed by the police at odd hours, but all this can be avoided if you exercise the right of being present in the police station only during daytime. Even if there is a woman constable accompanying the officers, the police can't arrest a woman at night. In case the woman has committed a serious crime, the police requires to get it in writing from the magistrate explaining why the arrest is necessary during the night.

Right to not being called to the Police Station

Women cannot be called to the police station for interrogation under Section 160 of the Criminal Procedure Code. This law provides Indian women the right of not being physically present at the police station for interrogation. The police can interrogate a woman at her residence in the presence of a woman constable and family members or friends.

Right to Confidentiality

Under no circumstances can the identity of a rape victim be revealed. Neither the police nor media can make known the name of the victim in public. Section 228-A of the Indian Penal Code makes the disclosure of a victim's identity a punishable offense. Printing or publishing the name or any matter which may make known the identity of a woman against whom an offense has been committed is punishable. This is done to prevent social victimization or ostracism of the victim of a sexual offense. Even while a judgment is in progress at the high court or a lower court, the name of the victim is not indicated, she is only described as 'victim' in the judgment.

Right towards Crime and not a Medical Condition

A case of rape can't be dismissed even if the doctor says that rape has not taken place. A victim of rape needs to be medically examined as per Section 164 A of the Criminal Procedure Code, and only the report can act as proof. A woman has the right to have a copy of the medical report from the doctor. Rape is a crime and not a medical condition. It is a legal term and not a diagnosis to be made by the medical officer treating the victim. The only statement that can be made by the medical officer is that there is evidence of recent sexual activity. Whether the rape has occurred or not is a legal conclusion and the doctor can't decide on this.

Right to no Sexual Harassment

It is the duty of every employer to create a Sexual Harassment Complaints Committee within the organization for complaints. According to a guideline issued by the Supreme Court, it is mandatory for all firms, public and private, to set up these committees to resolve matters of sexual harassment. It is also necessary that the committee be headed by a woman and comprise of 50% women, as members. Also, one of the members should be from a women's welfare group.

Results

From the data collected the following results were drawn:

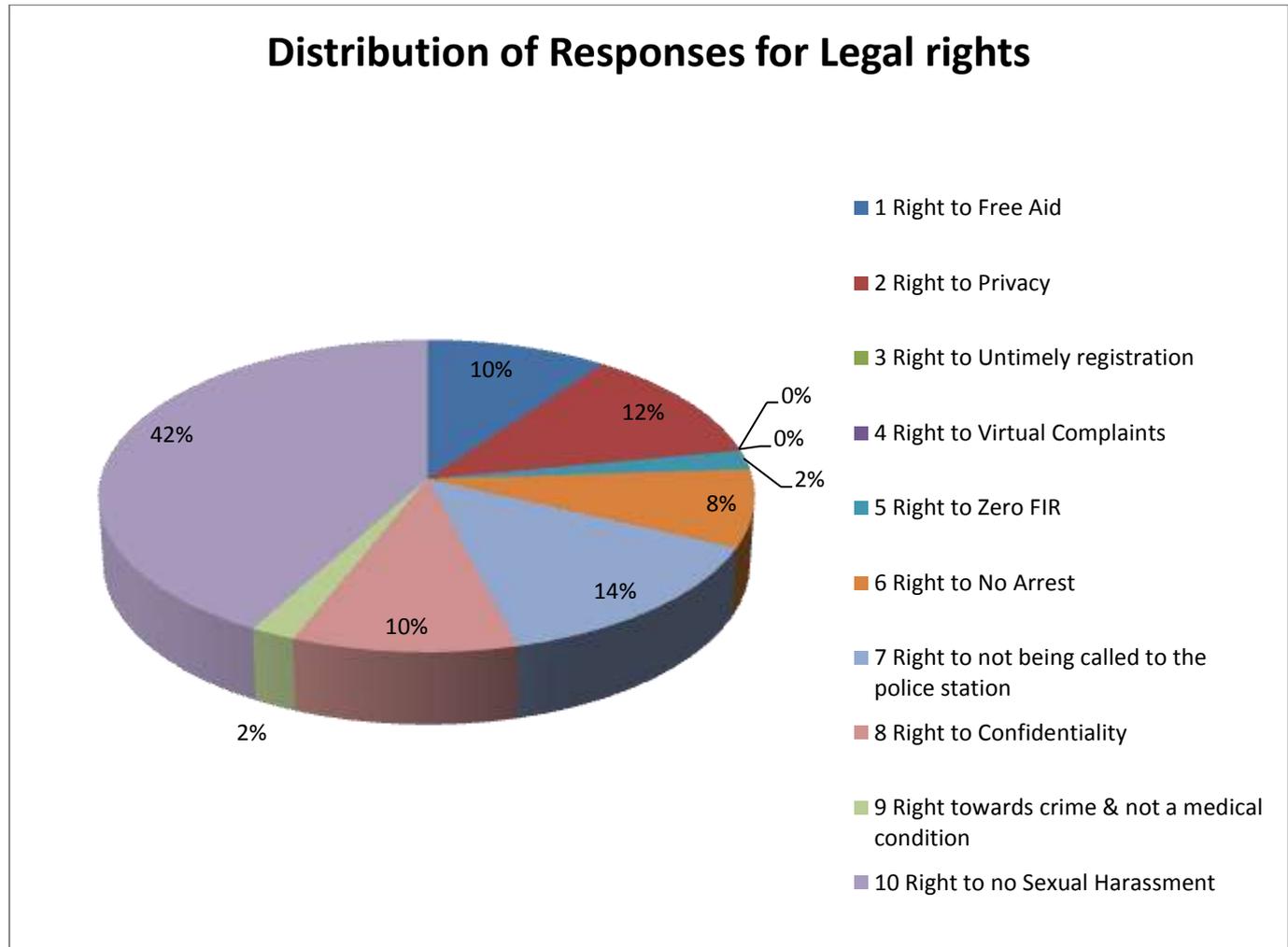
Table A: Responses of female faculties regarding legal rights

S.NO	List of Legal Rights	Response
1	Right to Free Aid	5
2	Right to Privacy	6
3	Right to Untimely registration	0
4	Right to Virtual Complaints	0
5	Right to Zero FIR	1
6	Right to No Arrest	4
7	Right to not being called to the police station	7
8	Right to Confidentiality	5

9	Right towards crime & not a medical condition	1
10	Right to no Sexual Harassment	21

The above result can be depicted in the form of a pie-chart distribution as in Fig A below:

Fig A: Distribution of responses for awareness levels of legal rights.



Discussions on the Results

From the results we came to know about the exact level of awareness regarding some common and basic legal rights of women. As the sample comprised of female teachers that means they were working women, they understood better about the basic right that is 'Right to no Sexual Harassment at workplace'. Maximum female teachers responded to this right i.e. 21 out of 50 showed awareness for the same. For the 'Right towards crime & not a medical condition' and 'Right to Zero FIR had minimum level of awareness'. Also for the 'Right to Untimely registration' and 'Right to Virtual Complaints' there was no understanding and awareness.

Conclusion

In nutshell it was found with the help of the study that despite the fact that the women were from literate background, but still they were not much aware of basic legal right. In such a situation where awareness is very less we can't think of empowering women and improving status of women in the society. There is need to work more on the awareness enhancement factor if we are expecting better results.

Women empowerment can be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components among which awareness building is a basic one. Education is mainly responsible for making the women folk aware of their rights and opportunities. Educated women can recognize the importance of these facilities and know how to seek it for themselves. In order to promote gender equality, education can be used as one of the important means of empowering women. For proper dissemination of knowledge and information of women's right, both education and media should be used effectively. Moreover legislations alone cannot improve the status of women, unless the women themselves grow conscious of their dignity and needs. It is necessary to motivate women so that they can raise their voices against any kind of exploitation. Therefore, the best slogan for it will be "*Aware woman empowered woman*".

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