Knowledge on Practice Regarding Self-defense against Sexual Harassment among Females in Mangalore with a View to Providing an Informational Pamphlet

Sir,

Women experiencing sexual harassment in day-to-day life are not new. According to the data from the National Crime Records Bureau, the cases of violent abuse of women have steadily increased since 2009. By 2013, the number of such cases has increased by over 50%. As per recent statistics 2016, 93 rapes are reported every single day in India, and 27% accused are convicted. Bengaluru tops in Karnataka in rape and sexual assault cases.[1] Karnataka accounts for 4.24% of the total incidence in the country. Out of this, 1621 cases were of rape found in the age group of 18–30 years.[2]

The importance of addressing sexual harassment is becoming more acute given the increasing number of cases, mainly because women lack the awareness and techniques to deal with the attacker, thus keeping herself at the least gain. Thus, self-defense training and prevention are essential for the protection of women.[1] The present study was designed to give a comprehensive amount of groundwork research which led to the development of effective training on self-defense against sexual harassment.

To determine the awareness of females on self-defense against sexual harassment, a cross-sectional study design was carried out within the Municipal Corporation limits of Mangalore, a coastal city in Karnataka state. The literacy rate of 83% was reported in the study area (male = 86%, female = 79%), with gender-related development index score of 0.714 and a favorable sex ratio of 1022.[3] Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional ethical clearance committee. Informed consent was obtained from the study participants. The researcher briefly introduced the survey, explained that the survey responses were voluntary and confidential, answered inquiries, and distributed the surveys. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained. Each respondent was given a unique code. All the data were protected using a password and were accessible to the investigator and other research staff working on the project. A sample size of 100 females of 13–60 years of age was arrived to estimate based on the expected proportion of harassment faced by women as 29%, absolute precision of 7% and a confidence interval of 95%, and 10% nonresponse error. Participants who met this criterion were consecutively recruited using simple random sampling technique over 3 months (May 2016 to July 2016). The sample size was calculated. The baseline pro forma and the self-designed structured knowledge questionnaire designed in local language (Kannada) consisting of 23 items on the concept of sexual harassment, concept and methods of self-defense against sexual harassment, and the prevention of sexual harassment was administered among the participants before the commencement of the training program to access their baseline data and knowledge on self-defense against sexual harassment. Then, customized training was conducted, and tailored training materials were distributed by the team. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 23 statistical software (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Chi-square test was used for the analysis, and $P < 0.05$ was considered to be statistically significant.

The present study involved two orientations. The academic orientation emphasized transmitting the knowledge through PowerPoint presentations on self-defense against sexual harassment, and the factual orientation demonstrated the concept on self-defense from direct experience which began with being aware of one’s surroundings and using the element of surprise as an advantage and striking quickly. Tips on targeting sensitive areas such as eyes, nose, neck, and groin of the attacker using simple techniques were taught which could be used by women of all age groups. Do’s and Don’ts list along with pamphlets on self-defense against sexual harassment was distributed to all the participants for reinforcement of the knowledge transferred through the training modalities. Thus, females were able to learn through information, observation, and return demonstration.

Results from the data collected revealed the mean age of females as 26 ± 2.8 years. Among the participants, 4% reported the previous encounter with sexual harassment, and 78% had no previous information on self-defense against sexual harassment. Most single or divorced women were reported as a vulnerable category to become the victim of sexual harassment. Ninety percent of women did not receive any training in their education to manage sexual harassment.[3,4] None of the participants reported to have used self-defense methods in the past. Fifty-eight percent of participants reported to have good knowledge with mean ± standard deviation (SD) of 15.88 ± 5.12. Among the respondents who were harassed, none of them had complained due to fear of being ashamed and stigmatized. Association was found between age and knowledge on self-defense against sexual harassment ($P = 0.04$). This could be because younger women are more vulnerable due to a lack of awareness of self-defense techniques.

Table 1 shows that the highest mean ± SD was obtained in the parameter of meaning, concept, and methods used against
sexual harassment. Although the participants reported some awareness on a few self-defense techniques, none of them reported using them. Forty-seven percent of females reported that they traveled for an average of 1.6 h, and all of them had a feeling of insecurity and fear of being harassed during their travel.

Our study gives insights into sexual harassment and self-defense methods used by women to protect themselves. Further, it also strengthens women by giving them hands-on skill training and pamphlet on self-defense against sexual harassment which can help to manage situations when being harassed. Harassment has become a serious problem and needs to be addressed both by the government by formulating policies and laws, as well as individually by getting trained in self-defense techniques. Thus, our research has shown that information on self-defense techniques and developing customized tailored training for women with a participatory approach can be a very effective medium for bringing about sustainable behavioral change in the community, thereby reducing the risk of sexual harassment against women.

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Table 1: Parameter wise mean and standard deviation of knowledge on self-defense against sexual harassment among females (n=100)

| Parameter                                      | Scores obtained | Mean±SD  | Mean % |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|
| Concept, impact of sexual harassment           | 6               | 4.69±0.92| 78.17  |
| Defense-meaning concept and methods against sexual harassment | 10              | 6.69±1.58| 66.9   |
| Prevention of sexual harassment                | 7               | 4.52±1.07| 64.57  |

Maximum score=23. SD: Standard deviation

Conflicts of interest
There are no conflicts of interest.

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