

Individual, community and institutional responsibility in prevention of ragging of students in educational institutions

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Abstract

Ragging, the teasing or taunting of new entrants, has existed among India's institutions of higher learning as an historical tradition. This practice, which has continued over countless decades as an accepted norm, is now recognized as a socio-cultural crime. When inducted to a senior academic level, junior students are asked to perform a range of nuisance activities including singing, acting and performing menial jobs. Unfortunately, sexual harassment frequently occurs involving both female and male students. Some are asked to be naked in front of others. Students who fail to comply are beaten or forced to endure other methods of physical, mental or sexual abuse. As incidents have become more extreme, those who could not cope have committed suicide.

A written survey was developed to determine student exposure to ragging after admission, both as victim or offender and opinion was sought for their views regarding ways and means of prevention. Their opinion of community and institutional responsibility in ragging cases, as well as their own responsibilities are presented and explored. 89% of 144 participants disapproved the practice of ragging in educational institutions.

Keywords

Ragging, institutional responsibility, physical abuse, sexual abuse.

Introduction

The most simple definition of ragging is “*Ragging* is an act of aggression committed by an individual or a group of individuals (say A) over another individual or a group of individuals (say B) where A, by virtue of their being senior to B somehow get the authority and audacity to commit the act and B, by virtue of their being new to the institution are automatic victims¹.”

Supreme court of India has defined ragging as “ragging is any disorderly conduct, whether by words spoken or written, or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with

rudeness any student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which cause or are likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the psyche of a fresher or a junior student².”

Ragging has been exhaustively described by the University Grants commission document as “ any conduct by any student or students whether by words spoken or written or by an act which has the effect of teasing, treating or handling with rudeness a fresher or any other student; indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities by any student or students which causes or is likely to cause annoyance, hardship, physical or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in any fresher or any other student; asking any student to do any act which such student will not in the ordinary course do and which has the effect of causing or generating a sense of shame, or torment or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the physique or psyche of such fresher or any other student; any act by a senior student that prevents, disrupts or disturbs the regular academic activity of any other student or a fresher; exploiting the services of a fresher or any other student for completing the academic tasks assigned to an individual or a group of students; any act of financial extortion or forceful expenditure burden put on a fresher or any other student by students; any act of physical abuse including all variants of it: sexual abuse, homosexual assaults, stripping, forcing obscene and lewd acts, gestures, causing bodily harm or any other danger to health or person; any act or abuse by spoken words, emails, post, public insults which would also include deriving perverted pleasure, vicarious or sadistic thrill from actively or passively participating in the discomfiture to fresher or any other student ; any act that affects the mental health and self-confidence of a fresher or any other student with or without an intent to derive a sadistic

pleasure or showing off power, authority or superiority by a student over any fresher or any other student³.”

Form of ragging varies depending upon place and time of ragging in institution and location of institution. Severity and type of ragging varies upon composition of gender of raggers and students being ragged. In a group where students belong to both genders usually sexual abuse is limited but if raggers and victims are of same gender sexual abuse and exploitation may cross all limits.

Chopra (2009) is of the view that ragging may vary from dress code to formal introduction or it may exceed to, verbal abuse and playing of fool. In the hostels sexual abuse may exceed other forms. Drug abuse is though not common but has been reported by Chopra. She described the psyche behind the ragging may simply be peer pressure or just a fashion statement. It may be resorted to satisfy sadistic pleasure or a means of retaliation or just to show authority².

It may be resorted to simply as harmless fun or to break the ice between juniors and seniors or to get a feeling of oneness or to make fresher bold⁴.

As per the observation of the Supreme Court of India and according to the Raghavan committee report corporal punishment in schools is also a contributory factor in development of bullying tactics and ragging tendencies in students⁵. In the meeting ‘beyond Raghavan committee report’ cast and rural background also emerged as factors for incidents of ragging⁶.

According to CURE press release CR 2007/08-22, September 22, 2007 release of Raghavan committee report did not deter the raggers but reporting the cases became better with this report. In the period between May 21, 2007 and September 22, 2007 52 cases were reported in the online editions of newspapers which included 9 attempted or committed suicides and 17 cases of physical abuse along with many cases of verbal, sexual and drug abuse⁷.

Ragging did not stop even in the year 2008 and 2009 even after implementation of Raghavan committee report and with the Supreme Court instructions. In 2009 one medical student AmanKachroo died due to ragging in Himachal Pradesh in one of the medical colleges of the state⁸ and In September 2009 in Haryana also in one incident one student was slapped and stripped and beaten for disobeying their senior commands⁹. Similarly in ITI Delhi another student was stripped and made to dance¹⁰. In Tamil Nadu also one student almost lost his vision after fresher did not obey command of undressing and licking their shoes and was beaten up¹¹. These incidences are just the tip of the iceberg.

Deaths in the process of ragging are not uncommon. A first-year medical student was beaten in the name of ragging. He died in the hospital due to injuries. Four students were rusticated from the college for ragging. His parents alleged that their son along with his classmates were tortured for the last six months in the name of ragging and college authorities did not do anything but remained mute spectators.

Understanding the plight of ragged students Tamil Nadu took the initiative and was the first state in India to ban ragging in 1997. Kerala followed suit in 1998 and was followed by Gujarat and Maharashtra in 1999. Taking the cue Karnataka also issued a circular banning the ragging in 2000 and in the same year West Bengal also banned the ragging. Supreme Court in 2001 also depreciated ragging and in a judgment wrote that ragging in an institution may cost loss of affiliation of the institution and in 2007 announced that college authorities will be held responsible if they failed to stop ragging. Raghavan committee report was released in July 2007¹².

UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions, 2009” were released in 2009 which were to be followed by all the colleges and universities³. This has been released to cover the loopholes and bringing all the rules and procedures in black and white removing ambiguities in thinking and practice.

Cabinet minister KapilSibale emphasized that previously; the mindset was glossing over the issue and only trying to persuade children not to do ragging and assured that this will change into implementing the regulations to stop ragging¹³.

Material and Methods

To understand the views of students on the role of individual, community and institutions on a crucial issue of ragging a survey was done in a medical college where students from different years participated to give their views on the complex topic of ragging, a type of socio-cultural crime which was an accepted norm for many decades in India. This study was done in the year 2009. The results of this survey were studied and analyzed

Results

144 students participated in this survey. 75 students from senior batch and 69 students from a junior batch participated in this study. They were the students from a professional college and were from the same college.

89% of the participants did not like ragging while 11% were in favour of ragging tradition.34% of students faced ragging. 31% faced the ragging just once while 3% faced the

ragging multiple times. 94% of participants never ragged their juniors while 6% of participants admitted ragging of their juniors.

10% of students faced minor injuries, 2% students faced major injuries while 18% students went through the mental agony where as 4% of participants did not feel any problem with ragging. Mental agony was comparatively acceptable to 94% but 6% did not accept even mental agony in the process of ragging.

Majority of students (97%) did not favour physical punishment under any circumstances where as 3% favoured some sort of physical punishment for not obeying the commands of seniors.

To reduce the menace of ragging 70% of favoured that awareness education to students should be given regarding ill effects of ragging on new comers. While 17% students were of the view that awareness education to the management persons should be given while 8% wished that awareness education to teachers is also required. 10% of students said that without severe punishment this menace could not be controlled.

If punishment for ragging was to given 35% were of the opinion that for the first offence students should be warned while 19% responded that students should be suspended from the college and 9% favoured rustication of such students. Only 3% of students favoured lodging of FIR with the police.

24% favoured that ragers should be counselled by teachers while 3% favoured counselling by psychiatrist as a means to stop ragging while 7% favoured that this matter should be brought to parent teacher meeting.

Cause of ragging according to 27% of the participants was due to institutional trend. 6% of participants believed that ragging was due to carelessness of authorities to stop ragging while 2% of participants believed that it was due to lack of helpline for the students when they were in need of it.

Conclusions

In spite of these strict orders by the highest court in the country the practice of ragging is still rampant and cases cited in 2009 are just the tip of the iceberg. These cases just highlight the weakness of the system and the indifference of the society and the institutions resulting in harassment, morbidity and mortality of the brilliant students due to lack of collective and individual responsibility. These episodes reflect the need to rethink about the Individual, community and institutional responsibility in prevention of ragging of students.

In spite of the guidelines and acts, such incidents go on happening as is clear from a protest by nursing students in Jalandhar city and they blame this on senior students and the inaction of the management¹⁴. Authorities always deny this which is also highlighted by one interesting suggestion from one of the participant that- as per the rules set by supreme court, ragging is same as rape as both are liable to allegation and accused has to suffer even if innocent, so juniors should also be observed. This will also have to be kept in mind when such cases of ragging are being investigated and tried in courts.

Ragging severely demoralizes the victims and they may react to it depending upon their upbringing and mental strength. It takes away all the happiness and enthusiasm of joining a new course. They may feel very frustrated and simply submit to all the commands of seniors and suffer from mental agony, physical abuse and sexual abuse. They may feel like running away from institution or simply may go into depression which may even lead to attempts to suicide. Some students feel helpless as they have no options except to continue bearing this trauma for the fear of agony to their parents as their parents may have spent a lot to money. In this process they may face physical injuries or mental torture which may go on haunting them throughout their life. But this should not mean that there should be no healthy interaction amongst the seniors and juniors as it will create a barrier for the overall development of personalities and may ultimately lead to group identifications which may create their own problems.

From this study it is abundantly clear that creating awareness amongst students, management and faculty can play a very crucial role in mitigating the bane of ragging in the colleges. Punishment can play small part in ridding ragging but this option has big disadvantage of ruining the career of misguided students. Students, faculty and management have to work together to resolve this problem

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