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## ROLE OF MEDIA IN ADDRESSING THE SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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### INTRODUCTION

"There remains what seems like an impenetrable wall of silence around violence and we must all play a role in breaking this silence" - Reese Witherspoon

By this quote, Reese Witherspoon is expressing that even though violence occurs frequently, it tends to go undetected, overlooked, not reported, stigma, or even the social norms that dissuade or don't enable victims to open up.<sup>2</sup> It is not only the duty of the victims to disclose but also the individuals need to prepare a conducive environment where the survivors are comfortable to narrate what occurred to them and how to fight against the sexual violence. Violence is tackled by shattering the silence, aiding survivors, and eliminating further harm. Sexual Violence is an ordinary modality, which needs to be tackled by every individual.

### MEDIA AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The term sexual violence is not narrow to just the physical aspect of the issue but also includes other forms such as bullying, intimidation, threats, deception, manipulation, rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, abuse, pressure, excessive harm and exploitation of children or women, sexual exploitation and trafficking, unbelievable force, coercion, intimate partner sexual violence, (no permission by the partner may also lead to sexual violence) Non-consensual posting of intimate images, sexual torture or Humiliation, forced contraception or sterilization.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> P Curtis, 'Secret – P' (Wattpad, 2017) <https://www.wattpad.com/650360858-%E2%9C%93-secret-%E2%88%92-p-curtis-eighteen> accessed 10 May 2025.

<sup>3</sup> "What is sexual violence?" *Rape Crisis*, <https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-informed/about-sexual-violence/what-is-sexual-violence/>. Accessed 10 May 2025.

In the modern world, due to the widespread popularity of internet and means of communication, media has gained a vital role in shaping the society's attitudes and behaviour towards sexual violence. It plays an important role in creating a positive change by creating awareness and promoting justice by revealing the face of the perpetrators and influencing the judicial system to hold them responsible for their illegal acts. Successful media coverage and Strict punishments to sexual violence can hugely result in positive and beneficial changes among people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, Foster respectful and egalitarian social norms, raise in public knowledge of the likelihood of receiving sexual violence disclosures, shape public policy and law on gender inequality issues as well as gender and sexual violence. Above all, the media presents the discourse in such a manner so that emphasis on the perpetrators' responsibility rather than victim blaming is given.<sup>4</sup>

In the history of the planet, the media has played a vital role in mustering voices against injustices such as racial discrimination, sexual violence, domestic violence, dowry violence and suicide, caste discrimination, etc. The power of the media in the fight against such unjust practices can be seen in popular instances such as “The Jessica Lal case and The Nirbhaya case.”<sup>5</sup> The common factor in both cases is the role of the media in creating awareness which in turn made the people come forward to stand against the injustice happening in their society. Media, apart from being a mode of mass communication, has also acted as a uniting factor for people all over the world since the beginning of the industrial era. This era saw the founding of mass communication and due to industrialization, sources of media became cheaper. Newspapers and radio entered every house in the continents as they were mass-produced at a cheaper price.

This newly found cheaper means of communication facilitated for the even most depressed class of people to convey their suffering and pain to everyone which in deed attended to their sympathies and helped change the minds of the people who caused those sufferings. The freedom of India is one of the best examples of media being part of the upliftment of the country.

## **RAISING AWARENESS AND EDUCATION**

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<sup>4</sup> Fuentes, L., A. S. Saxena et J. Bitterly (2022). Mapping the nexus between reporting of violence against girls: The normalization of violence, and the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. UN Women  
<sup>5</sup> 'What is the Nirbhaya case? | What is the full story? | India News - The Times of India' (Times of India, 19 August 2024) <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-is-nirbhaya-case/articleshow/72868430.cms> accessed 10 May 2025.

“Only through education and media, the voice of the unheard can be heard”

Media being a catalyst for social change and upliftment of the affected, has also helped in the spread of education, especially after the 1900's, all over the world. This has helped in engulfing the children, in the knowledge of sexual education, and gender equality. Only through literacy, the heinous acts of sexual violence can be rooted out from society. Especially in third world countries, where such practices are prevalent, only education can change the minds of the people who have been nurtured under a society with antisocial practices. The major cause of sexual crimes has always been the age-old mindset of describing women as weaker than men. This can only be changed by creating awareness and the only way to make such awareness is through literacy. Anti-social habits are neither hereditary nor pathological but rather taught and the contrary habits of being a responsible human can also be taught, replacing the age-old practices. This process of teaching can only take place in a social environment such as school and other educational institutions, where children can interact with one another. Such interaction does half the job of developing positive traits such as gender equality, abstaining from violence, defending oneself, self-confidence, courage to overcome hurdles in life, etc.

### **THE CURE FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

No child is born with antisocial traits but rather taught in their developmental years. The only practical solution for issues such as sexual violence is responsible parenting and sexual education, which are essential to nurturing a responsible future citizen. In the age of depleting humanity, education is the only beacon of hope and literacy must be delivered to every corner of the world. India even though being called a country of peace, still women are scared to walk in the streets in the middle of the night. This is not peace but only the cloud blurring the issue at hand.<sup>6</sup> As Mahatma Gandhi said: “The day women can walk freely on the roads at night, that day we can say that India has achieved independence”

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<sup>6</sup> Carol DerSarkissian, ‘Sexual Assault Treatment: First Aid Information for Sexual Assault’ (WebMD, 16 September 2024) <https://www.webmd.com/first-aid/sexual-assault-treatment> accessed 10 May 2025.

This quote is not just suitable for India but for a country where sexual violence is rampant. In countries like India, still, there is sexual violence happens in the name of caste, religion, and other reasons, every other day.<sup>7</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Strengthening the legal framework for sexual violence is a very important and critical need in India. After a long lasting struggle and bearing the crimes against humanity, finally there has been some progress in legislation in the legal system of the country to prevent further crimes from taking place. Some of these amendments include legislations like the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (the Nirbhaya Act), which has widened the definition of rape and has further proposed extended punishment. Legislations such as Indian Penal Code(IPC), Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act,2012, POSH guidelines from vishaka case and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace have provided a foundation on which the fight against such a heinous crime can finally be fought. Ultimately, judicial system delays need to be tackled along with judicious media intervention to determine justice in a timely fashion, secure the integrity of the process, and actually enhance the dignity and rights of sexual violence survivors.

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<sup>7</sup> Roshni Shukla, 'The Day a Woman Can Walk Freely at Midnight without the Fear of Being Sexually Assaulted: An Analysis of the Nirbhaya Case' (2017) 17(1) *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: F Political Science* <https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/1611/2-The-Day-a-Woman.html> accessed 10 May 2025.