



## AN ORIGINAL ARTICLE ON THE VIEWS OF MEDICAL STUDENTS ABOUT RAGGING

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### ABSTRACT

Ragging has been a severe menace in the various medical colleges of our country for many years. Ragging of first year students by seniors was considered a tradition. As per the law of our country ragging is a punishable offence. A cross-sectional study was conducted to assess the attitude and views of undergraduate medical students in a tertiary medical institute in India towards the sensitive issue of ragging. Data was analysed using SPSS version 21. Out of all the participating medical students, 97% were aware that ragging is an offence punishable by law. 80% said that ragging adversely affected studies and promoted tobacco/alcohol/drug taking behaviour. However, significant numbers of students were of the opinion that mild ragging was fun and acceptable and made juniors bold and strong. They considered ragging as an acceptable part of their culture. Although the students were aware of the pitfalls of ragging, they also thought that ragging is enjoyable, improves 'interaction' between seniors and juniors and prepares them for the stressful medical life ahead.

**KEYWORDS :** Ragging; Medical students; Offence

### INTRODUCTION

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has given a comprehensive definition of ragging – 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 to any student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which cause or 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 student.<sup>1</sup>

In 2007, based on the recommendations of Dr R.K. Raghavan Committee, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India makes it obligatory for academic institutions to file official F.I.R with the police in any instance of a complaint of ragging. This would ensure that all cases would be formally investigated under criminal justice system, and not by the academic institutions own ad-hoc bodies.<sup>2</sup>

Under the guidelines issued by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India, the University Grants Commission formulated the UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions, 2009 under Section 26 of University Grants Commission Act, 1956 to be implemented in all the universities and colleges that are recognized by it.<sup>3</sup>

The All India Council for Technical Education [AICTE] and the Medical Council of India have also made their own regulations against under their respective acts which are strictly implemented in various technical and medical colleges of the country.<sup>4,5</sup>

In view of the legal status of ragging and the current changing social scenario of the country, this study was conducted to assess the attitude and perception of undergraduate medical students in a tertiary medical institute in India towards this sensitive issue of ragging.

### METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted on the undergraduate medical students of Indira Gandhi Medical College, Shimla affiliated to Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, Himachal Pradesh. All students were asked to anonymously fill out a self-reported, structured questionnaire about ragging. The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions with 3 options as answers- Yes/No/Not sure. The questionnaire was administered to the consenting students after obtaining the requisite permission from the head of

the institution. The forms were given out and collected at the end of session.

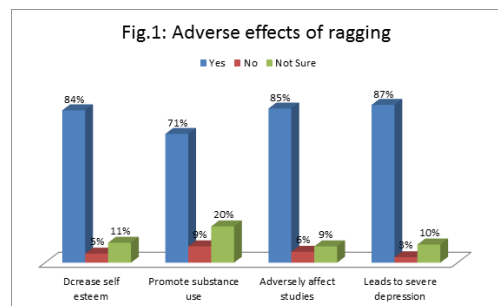
Data was analyzed using by using SPSS version 21.

### RESULTS

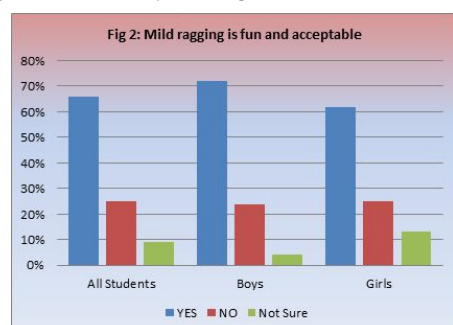
Out of the total strength of 500 undergraduate medical students, 322 students [males = 142 (44%), females = 180 (56%)] participated in the study generating a response rate of 64%. The mean age of participants was 19.4 years.

Nearly all the students (97%) were aware that ragging is an offence punishable by law.

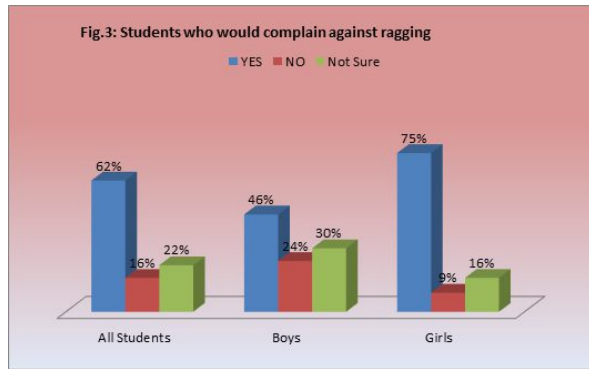
The students were also aware of the ill-effects of ragging [Fig.1]. 85% students said that ragging can decrease self-esteem and adversely affect studies, 71% said that ragging can promote substance use while 87% students said that ragging could lead to severe depression.



However, both males (71%) and females (62%) said that mild ragging was fun and acceptable [Fig.2].



Students were also asked whether they would complain if they or any of their classmates were ragged [Fig.3]. 75% females said that they would complain to college authorities if ragged. However, 45% boys said they would complain, 30% said they would complain only if there was severe ragging while 23% said they would never complain.



## DISCUSSION

The results of our study gave rise to some interesting findings regarding the perception of medical students. Our study had a response rate of 64% with 19.4 years as the mean age of participants. On inquiring about student's knowledge about legal status of ragging, 97% students were aware that ragging is a punishable offence and that there were strict legal provisions against ragging. Majority of the students said that the college authorities enforced strict rules to ensure ragging did not take place.

The students were also aware of the ill-effects of ragging. Majority of the students agreed that ragging decreases self-esteem, adversely affect studies, promotes substance use and leads to severe depression.

At the same time significant number of students [males (71%), females (62%)] said that mild ragging was fun and acceptable. They also held the view that ragging makes the juniors bold and strong and improves the bonding between junior and senior medical students. A similar finding of ragging being considered as a positive mechanism of facilitating socialization and introduction of new comers with senior batch colleagues was shown in the study conducted among medical students of BP Koirala Institute of Health Sciences, Dharan, Nepal.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, when asked whether the students would complain if they or any of their classmates were ragged, 75% girls said that they would complain to the college authorities indirectly suggesting that nearly 25% girls were ambivalent about it. Also, only 45% boys said they would complain, 30% said they would complain only if there was severe ragging (a highly perceptive term) while 23% said they would never complain.

All these findings suggest that students consider ragging as an acceptable part of their culture. Ragging was a practiced social norm in our society. Recently ragging has been accorded the status of a punishable offence as there is a change in its legal status. However our study shows that similar change is yet to be seen in the attitude and perception of students. They continue to view ragging as a form of so-called "introduction" between juniors and seniors and accept its presence as a part of regular college life.<sup>7</sup>

It would take considerable efforts to bring about the change in the mindset of students and public-at-large towards ragging so as to eradicate the roots of this menace.

## CONCLUSION

Ragging has been a severe menace in the various medical colleges of our country for many years. Our study concluded that students consider ragging as an acceptable part of their culture. Even though students are aware that ragging is a punishable offence, they also

think that ragging is fun and makes juniors bold and strong. Despite adequate measures by the college authorities, a sizeable number of students said that they wouldn't complain if they or someone else was being ragged. Measures are required to make students aware of the grave consequences of participating in any form of ragging.

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