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P. K. Thakur
IP&TAFS
Secretary

SPEED POST

D.O.No.F.1-15/2009(ARC)pt.III   13ᵗʰ November, 2017

15 NOV 2017

Dear Sir/Madam

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in its order dated 08.05.2009 in Civil Appeal 887 of 2009 in the matter of University of Kerala versus Council, Principals', Colleges, Kerala and Others, constituted a four members committee of mental health and public health professionals with the following terms of reference.

i.   To ascertain the reasons and circumstances under which senior students resort to ragging;

ii.   To ascertain the psychological impact of ragging on students;

iii.   To assess and quantify the impact of ragging and indiscipline on the standard of education in an institution and relate it to the existing procedures used by MCI, UGC and other regulatory bodies to assess the suitability of an institution for recognition;

iv.   To recommend urgent and mandatory mental health measures to be implemented in, and practiced by school, colleges, and all educational and vocational institutions, so as to curb ragging.

The four members committee has since submitted its Report entitled "Psychosocial Study of Ragging in Selected Educational Institutions in India" to the UGC. The report has been uploaded on the UGC website and may be accessed through the link http://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/7661310_Psychosocial-Study-of-Ragging.pdf. The recommendations of the study are enclosed at **Annexure-I.**

The important recommendations which call for an urgent action on the part of the higher education institutions are as follows:

(1) The higher education institutions should organize welcome and orientation programmes at the beginning of every academic session involving the students through which a clear message shall be sent regarding acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. This must include zero tolerance to ragging, sexual harassment and discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity etc.

(2) Apart from installation of CCTV cameras, a proper surveillance mechanism consisting of a human system of wardens, mentors etc. shall be institutionalized, wherein they should be in regular touch with the students and promote their inclusion in activities such as games, sports and extra-curricular activities etc. in the hostels.

(3) A clear Standard Operating Procedure shall be laid down for dealing with the cases of ragging. The students should be made aware of these rules as well as the procedure for filing a complaint, who to approach and their contact information and the procedure that will be followed by the HEI, with assurance of anonymity of complaint.

(4) Psychosocial Support and counselling should be offered to victims as well as perpetrators so that the potential for cyclical abuse is neutralized. The engagement of counsellor's with the students could also be in the form of sensitization/training modules on power and inequalities, prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, harassment and violence, using creative methods such as drama, art, films, and other media.

(5) The institutions must appreciate the huge diversities in the institution in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, sexuality etc. and effectively address the diversity related concerns by assessing and monitoring the social climate of institutions through regular surveys of students and staff.

(6) The higher education institutions must provide an environment where the students learn the values of democratic, mutually respectful relationships, non-violent conflict resolution, autonomous and critical thinking, compassion and caring, respect for differences, fairness and so on. This can be done by holding programmes and activities that foster civic engagement and responsibility, critical reflection on social issues and deliberation on values.

You are requested to implement these recommendations and ensure a ragging free campus and create an institutional climate which is supportive and fair, with faculty who are attuned and interested in student development, that will become the foundation of a dynamic culture that is just, progressive and open to change towards an egalitarian society.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

(P. K. Thakur)

The Vice-Chancellor of all Universities

Encl: As above

<u>Copy to:</u>

1. All Regulatory Bodies
2. UGC Regional Offices
3. The Publication Officer, UGC, New Delhi for uploading on UGC website.

(P.K.Thakur)

ISSUED

Recommendations of the Committee on "Psychosocial Study of Ragging in Selected Educational Institutions in India"

One of the most striking findings of our study is the widespread acceptance of ragging in our educational institutions and indeed in our society. It is frequently described as a rite of passage, of preparing youth for a tough and competitive world, and of being masculine. The findings clearly indicate that ragging occurs in the context of power relationships, in a deeply hierarchical and unequal society and is reflective of these social processes. It also occurs as a result of a lack of appreciation of the diversities we need to celebrate in a country like ours— of ethnicity, language, religion etc. Our study of bullying in schools indicates a continuum commencing from families to schools and finding expression in ragging in colleges and higher educational institutions. Indeed the Quality Education Study 2010-11 echoes this, revealing children's bias against the girl child, the disabled, religious minorities, 'lower castes' and children from other states and speaking other languages[51]. What is therefore alarming is the finding that people do not perceive ragging as a problem and consequently, do not feel the need to address it. In the light of this pervasive approval of what is clearly detrimental to students and the educational system, and a phenomenon that extends to the larger social fabric, making recommendations to respond to this issue is a complex and a rather daunting task; it cannot be met with a 'magic bullet' approach. Thus, the surveillance/ CCTV law and order approach is not sufficient or sensitive to address the magnitude of the problem. Thus, the recommendations made in this report are unanimous, and based on a wide range of sources and reading, including the Raghavan Committee Report, our review of literature and the findings of this study. Broadly, there are two sets of recommendations: i) short-term recommendations that are more top-down in nature, at the level of institutional systems and administrations; ii) long term recommendations that call for multi-pronged approaches, that move beyond the educational system to look at root causes of the problem within the larger society. These are process-based approaches that (re)examine transformation of education,

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[51]Quality Education Study 2010-11 available at: http://www.ei-india.com/wpcontent/uploads/Executive_Summary-Low_Resolution-25-01.pdf; date of access: 16th June 2015.

inclusive growth and development, gender relationships (including the construction of masculinity), social hierarchies and perceived inequities.

A. Short-Term Recommendations

1. Institutional Role in Fostering Inclusion, Belonging and Acceptance of New Students

Our study shows that where the institution takes the responsibility of organizing welcome and orientation programs, it fosters a sense of inclusion and belonging, reassuring new students of their social acceptance into the institution. The role of ragging as a rite of inclusion to foster belonging to the new institution and to forge new bonds must be replaced by other mechanisms that meet the same purpose, are systematic, public, and involve the whole institutional community and not just the students. In particular, teachers, in collaboration with an elected/representative body of students, may play an important part in helping new students settle down by dealing with their anxieties, and making them feel welcome. Other institutional agencies must also be involved at this stage itself. For instance, faculty in charge of Equal Opportunity Cells should also spell out what steps the institution plans to take to reach out to students who need academic and other kinds of support, for example through remedial English courses, academic support for the learning disabled etc. Counselors should be introduced at such sessions and clear instructions should be provided to students on who to contact in case of need for assistance. In fact, some of this information, including on key contact personnel, should be part of an orientation package that students should receive upon their admission to the institution.

The recommendation is therefore for institutions to organize such welcome and orientation programs involving the student as well as the rest of the institutional community. Secondly, these orientation programs must also set out clear messages of acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. This includes zero tolerance to ragging, sexual harassment and discrimination based on caste, religion, ethnicity, etc. It may be desirable for faculty to engage the student community in debate and reflection on these issues, drawing from some of the findings and recommendations of this report as well as the Saksham Report[52] on sexual harassment.

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[52]University Grants Commission (2013), *Saksham: Measures for Ensuring the Safety of Women and Programmes for Gender Sensitization on Campus* (Saksham Report), New Delhi.

2. Maintenance of Support Systems

Surveillance systems are largely understood to mean CCTV cameras. However, surveillance systems cannot be limited to such impersonal policing. In fact, they are illegal as they intrude upon privacy. Data from other countries shows that they do not decrease the incidence of hazing and violence. While they may act as partial deterrents, i) they cannot be relied for complete coverage; ii) they also induce a sense of complacency in administrators and prevent what needs to be done i.e. building a sense of community. This sort of intervention does not address the root causes of ragging.

'Surveillance' therefore needs to comprise of a human system of guardianship—of wardens, mentors, including senior students to be in regular contact with newcomers and to include them in activities such as games/ sports and extra-curricular, in colleges and in their residential facilities (hostels), where ragging frequently occurs. In contrast to the dominance-submission relationship enforced through the intimidation and fear associated with ragging, newcomers can be exposed to another version of authority– one that is firm, yet fair and caring.

3. Institutional Response to Ragging: Implementation of UGC Protocol and Guidelines:

A disconcerting truth is that no matter what mechanisms one puts in place, instances of ragging will continue to surface now and then. Complete eradication can be the goal but as we have seen in the case of child sexual abuse, putting in CCTV cameras in schools will not prevent a motivated perpetrator from attempting to abuse. Thus, there is a need for institutions to follow a clear protocol of response in instances where ragging does occur. The UGC has a protocol for institutional response to incidents of ragging and can be found on its website. This has been conveyed to all institutions and the anti-ragging committee of the institutions should be familiar with it. Furthermore, institutions should have operationalized the protocol with clear procedures and designated staff/faculty to take action as per guidelines. Thus, students should be made aware of these rules as well as how to file a complaint, who to approach and their contact information, and the procedure that will follow, with assurance of anonymity of complainant.

Our study showed a reluctance to take action against perpetrators in incidents of ragging for fear of damage to the reputation of institutions. Consequently, the perpetrators themselves are reassured by the culture of impunity that pervades our social lives and feel that they can get away because they have the 'right' social and political contacts and/or because they rely on the institution's concern about its reputation. We feel, on the contrary, it is to the credit of the institution if incidents of ragging are reported and responded to; this indicates not only the anti-ragging position of the institution, and its commitment to maintain this stance, but it is also reassuring to the student community and indeed civil society of the safe and enabling nature of the institution. Further, it counters the cultures of impunity, denial and silence that problems such as ragging and abuse are shrouded in.

4. Widening the Role of the Anti-ragging Cell of UGC

Currently, the primary focus of the anti-ragging cell in the UGC is to deal with the complaints of ragging. The cell should also actively function as a nodal body to disseminate various information/literature pertaining to harmful effects of ragging, ways to curb the practice and improve psychosocial climate in institutions, etc. through booklets, website and audio-visual material. The cell should also conduct seminars, workshops, essay-writing competitions, etc. and engage students, faculty and college management in its endeavor to eradicate ragging.

5. Accountability

While the NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) takes into account the issue of institutional response to ragging, this is attended to by most institutions in a perfunctory and mechanical manner. In order to instill greater accountability, it is necessary for the NAAC to actually check whether the institutions are fulfilling the conditions required for accreditation. Therefore, in addition to the mandatory form, institutions need to be regularly and systematically visited or inspected by the NAAC to ensure adherence to accreditation guidelines.

6. Psychosocial Support and Counseling

Psychosocial support and counseling should be offered to victims as well as perpetrators so that the potential for cyclical abuse is neutralized. While it is desirable to have counselors in every college, we recognize that there is a shortage of human resources and skills in this area. Therefore, we recommend that every college identifies a nodal agency offering counseling/training services and nominate one or two faculty volunteers to train at these agencies and, in collaboration with them, offer support to affected students. Also, the UGC should budget for the provision of counselors and should have a list of recognized nodal agencies which can be accessed for counseling services, till such time as these capacities are developed within institutions.

For victims, counseling would need to focus on issues of support, reassurance and safety on the one hand, and on identity, assertiveness and efficacy on the other; for some victims, the impact may be in the nature of trauma in which case, referral systems for more specialized care, must be made accessible. The counselor or mentor may facilitate this process. For perpetrators, counseling requires to focus on sensitization, empathy-building and perspective-taking issues.

Counselors must also extend their roles beyond individual interventions to larger contact and engagement with student communities who face a great many problems such as first-generation literates, rural-urban and inter-state migration. Many of them are unable to deal with the 'freedoms' they are dealing with for the first time, in impersonal institutional spaces. Above all, our young people are not socialized to deal with issues of gender and sexuality. Ragging is a college-related custom that reflects social power dynamics around seniority compounded by compulsions related to gender. Thus, the counselor's community engagement should be in collaboration with existing committees within the institution, such as the gender sensitization committee, to foster a culture of conversations towards an egalitarian ideology formation. This engagement could be in the form of sensitization/training modules on power inequalities, prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, harassment and violence, using creative methods such as drama, art, films and other media. Involving the new students early in this process will foster inclusion and a sense of belongingness in them.

7. Promotion of Diversity

It is important for all educators in our country to appreciate and celebrate the huge diversities of India, in terms of ethnicity, language, religion, sexuality etc. One platform to flag off this idea of diversity is, for example, for students to organize food festivals celebrating cuisines from different states and communities of India.

Sexual minorities face a great deal of discrimination, including sexual violence and ragging. For instance, our study shows that ragging is often the manifest expression of homo-phobia. This again calls for synergistic interventions by various college committees (anti-ragging, gender-sensitization and sexual harassment committees). There are also colleges that have Queer student groups, who can be drawn upon to create an inclusive atmosphere through their activities.

Another group that is frequently discriminated against is people with disabilities. Institutions need to be disability-sensitive in a proactive manner such as providing for toilets and other infrastructure that is disabled-friendly. What is not adequately appreciated is that all of us are potentially people with disabilities. Indeed, more people acquire disabilities than are born with it. It is important that issues of access should be addressed. All public places should be disabled-friendly, commencing with our schools.

As also discussed in the Saksham Report, students from rural and more 'traditional' backgrounds moving into larger city universities and colleges may need assistance to address experiences of discrimination as well as ideas about 'appropriate' behaviour for men and women because this creates confusion and alienation among students. Thus, the rural-urban cultural clashes manifested through dressing sense, language, accent, kind of schooling, economic background, etc. is often a critical factor in ragging. Institutional residential facilities or hostels are spaces where these issues need to be addressed. One way of doing so is to allot hostel seats through lottery so that they reflect diversity; students from different batches of the colleges, from varied geographic and socio-economic backgrounds interact and learn from each other, fostering a sense of respect and a spirit of acceptance and not merely tolerance. Institutions that encourage students to cluster, based on region/religion/community, with an apparent objective of ensuring safety and protection, are counter-productive to

fostering the spirit of diversity; in fact, such measures lead to exacerbating parochialism that feeds into ragging.

Lastly, in order to address diversity-related concerns, assessments and monitoring of the social climate of institutions through regular surveys of students and staff, especially when there are significant changes in the student community such as increase in student intake/method of admission/social composition of student population .etc., would help enhance diversity interventions.

B. Long-Term Recommendations

1. Interventions at School Level: Inclusive Education

Enough evidence about the prevalence, range and severity of bullying practices has emerged from this limited exploratory study to suggest that there is need for a national study or series of studies on the phenomenon. Such studies need to take into consideration urban, peri-urban, semi-urban and rural schools; government schools (which vary from the better resourced Kendriya, Navodaya and Sainik Schools, to poorly resourced rural or municipal schools) and private schools (where again, there is a very wide range); residential and non-residential schools; and religious schools (e.g., Vedic Pathashalas, seminaries and Madrassas). Studies need to make strong recommendations on operationalizing two major concepts—inclusive education and life skills education.

Despite the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Right to Education (RTE) initiatives, there are indications of exclusion and intolerance within the school, triggered and maintained by school systems, by parental prejudices and the warped hierarchies of the larger community surrounding the school. We are convinced that this intolerance forms the roots of later discrimination in institutions of higher education. Thus, we recommend that issues on religious and caste-based bullying should receive adequate attention in subsequent studies, as should sexual bullying, and exertion of peer pressure to engage in smoking, drinking or the use of other psychotropic substances. The foundation of such initiatives should be fostering the spirit of egalitarianism.

While awaiting the conduct and results from such studies, training teachers in providing students with life skills education, including conflict resolution, and assertiveness skills will be very important. In addition, designing meaningful, non-academic, practical modules on rights-based issues from a children's perspective, will be important for teachers as well as students to begin to work against deep-seated patterns of social prejudice which are continuing to play themselves out in our schools. These should be designed to actively work against notions of using bullying to 'teach a lesson' or 'for fun'. Likewise, active strategies to teach the general student community not to condone bullying behaviours, so that bullies are not perceived as 'popular' or powerful will be necessary.

2. Peer Support

It is recommended that the student body be actively involved in planning and implementation of programs to foster belongingness and inclusion. Such interventions include student mentors, student guides and buddy systems. Further, life skills education needs to be continued into college addressing issues that perplex youth—such as sexuality and intimate relationships, contending with academic and peer pressure. However, life skills programs at this stage need to move from individual and personal to the public and social spheres addressing issues such as by-stander response to situations of violence and social injustice.

3. Institutional Cultures and Pedagogies

Institutional cultures and pedagogies play a formative role in the lives of students. They influence the ways in which students think and respond, not only in the immediate present but also in the distal future. This is a crucial concern since it lies at the core of value education, a goal that all educational institutions profess. Sadly, as the present study has shown, there is a large gap between the stated ideals of institutions and ground realities. Indeed, there is a widespread belief that ragging serves as a 'socialisation' device equipping youngsters to meet the demands and be successful in the 'real' world – becoming tough mentally and physically, even if that entails aggression and manipulation of the existing power dynamics. In this regard, ragging reflects a set of values actually prevalent, perhaps deeply embedded, in our society. Educational institutions must live up to their lofty ideals by providing an alternate reality where students learn the values of democratic, mutually respectful relationships, non-

violent conflict resolution, autonomous and critical thinking, compassion and caring, respect for differences, fairness and so on. Some examples of how this may be done are:

i) Programs and activities that foster civic engagement and responsibility, critical reflection on social issues and deliberation on values;

ii) Co-curricular activities such as sports, music, theatre, social service to enable a sense of aesthetic engagement, openness and affiliation;

iii) Creation of opportunities for student engagement and voice in college decisions, including student membership on college boards/committees so as to foster ideas of responsible agency and citizenship;

iv) Pedagogies that stimulate students to question and seek answers on their own so that sensitive reflection is the style of responding;

v) An institutional climate that is supportive and fair, with faculty who are attuned and interested in student development, that will become the foundation of a dynamic culture that is just, progressive and open to change towards an egalitarian society.