

# Guidance and Counselling for Victims of Ragging and their Families

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Ragging is a menace in many colleges/universities in India. The Supreme Court Of India has declared ragging to be a crime. University Grants Commission has announced that if in any college/university ragging occurs and the institution concerned fails to deal with it properly, then it stands to lose all existing privileges it enjoys. A lot of social activism is prevalent concerning ragging- anti ragging campaigns and opening of websites and help-lines for victims.*

*Generally marginalized/tribal communities include victims of oppression, discrimination, violence and ostracisation, be it socio-economic, cultural or communal where the perpetrator and the victim never converge. But the dynamics of ragging is such that here the victim often joins hands with the perpetrator to rag new victims. This differentiates ragging from all other forms of violence and makes it even more dangerous because of such a thin line between the perpetrator and the victim. With the victim often becoming the ragger, it may seem that s/he has gained the upper hand. But therein lies the pitfall because ragers too develop psychological problems following ragging thus remaining victims of the very ragging they perpetrate. Also, often, the victims who don't rag get along with their duties and responsibilities. This marginalizes these two types of victims of ragging as others are unable to understand their suffering. Specially for ragers, they can't find sympathizers to their problems as they are perceived either as power-figures or law-breakers and hence no one to share their guilt/regret and other psycho-physiological issues. As of, a fresher is full of anxiety at the start of a new life in college or university filled with the challenges of having to cope with the new milieu- new teachers, seniors, studies of higher standards etc. Also many such students lack proper guardianship, being far away from their families. So family support for them to handle their psychological issues and also legal matters, should they be punished for ragging, is all the more rare than that of regular students.*

**Keywords :** *Ragging, Stress, Anxiety, Depression, Traumatized, Dysfunctional, Suicide, SC/ST*

## **Introduction**

Ragging is a sad reality in many academic institutions of higher education in India. It has become such a serious problem that the

Supreme Court Of India has given a clear definition of ragging and declared it to be a crime with severe punishments to be meted out to the perpetrators according to the severity of

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the act/s of ragging. It is compulsory to run legal cases regarding ragging in a fast track court to deliver justice at the earliest. Also the University Grants Commission (UGC) has made it mandatory that any college/university found lacking in its efforts to deal with ragging in its campus will have its privileges withdrawn. Apart from these severe legal and administrative steps taken to deal with ragging, a lot of social activism is prevalent to counter this menace like holding rallies and campaigns against it and opening of websites and help-lines for victims. The same is more relevant for SC/ST students given their vulnerabilities.

Thus, it may be clarified that, this paper focuses on a social menace that has sadly become an undeniable reality of the community comprising of students in academic institutions of higher education in India, one of the most important communities in a country where pursuit of academic excellence is essential to its culture. The paper aims to highlight the rationale behind choosing the issue of ragging and explain the innovative practices in guidance and counselling introduced to handle this social evil, more so for SC/ST students given their existing problems.

The Centre for Counselling Services and Studies in Self-development, Jadavpur University started off as a counselling cell back in 1995 in Jadavpur University, Kolkata, West Bengal with the aim of providing counseling services to the students of the said university. It was transformed into a centre in 2002 becoming the first counselling centre in India in a university set-up.

In 2010, with ragging taking alarming proportions in the university, the university authorities approached the centre to intervene. Meanwhile the counsellors in the centre were getting plenty of cases where students were coming for counselling for being traumatized

by ragging. What is very significant is that many a times even the perpetrators of ragging came for counselling the reasons being discussed later in the paper. Its a unique revelation highlighted later in the paper.

**Based on the following-**

1. findings from innumerable counseling sessions with university students coming with ragging related problems and their families (keeping their identities strictly confidential),
2. extensive survey of relevant literature existing in print (authentic books and journals) and electronic (verified media reports, credible information from websites) forms,
3. findings from counseling sessions done by counselors of the centre, in their private practices, with students and their families from other colleges/universities reporting problems due to ragging,
4. directives given by The Honourable Supreme Court Of India regarding ragging including the definition of ragging, the punitive measures to be taken by the various law-enforcing agencies like the Judiciary, Police, University/ College Authorities etc. and other points based on the findings from the report presented by the enquiry done by the committee under Justice Raghavan regarding ragging in various academic institutions all over India,
5. guidelines given by the UGC regarding steps to be taken by an institution to prevent ragging, the punitive measures to be executed in the event of ragging in its premises and the consequences to be faced by the institution concerned for not following them properly ,
6. consultations by experts from various fields relevant to the issue of ragging like

psychiatrists, psychologists, lawyers etc regarding ways to prevent and deal with ragging.

The team of experts at the counselling centre of the university formulated a truly innovative and elaborate action plan to deal with ragging in the university premises comprising of the two campuses and the various hostels of the university. The said plan was sanctioned by the university authorities which sponsors the execution of the same.

A two-pronged strategy was devised for the anti-ragging campaign in the university, namely-

1. **Preventive:-** it constitutes running an Anti-ragging Campaign throughout the university to prevent ragging at all costs, involving a zero-tolerance policy towards ragging and including the following practices executed by the experts attached to CCSSS –
  - a) Developing varied contents for population-specific workshops to be held with different populations of the university, namely–
    - i) First-year students of each department of the university, newly admitted, still unadjusted to the new settings (especially those from rural/suburban areas), not being united as yet among themselves, thus potential victims of ragging,
    - ii) Senior students of each department of the university, including potential raggars specially those who were ragged as juniors, those who do not actively perpetrate ragging but are party to it and those who oppose it directly,
    - iii) Teaching and Non-teaching staff of the university including those who have tacit support towards ragging,

stay neutral to ragging and those who oppose it,

- iv) Members of the Anti-ragging squad including students, staff (teaching and non-teaching) and university authority personnel,
- v) Hostel boarders of each hostel of the university,
- b) Conducting separate hour-long workshops with each population mentioned above disseminating the contents customized for the population concerned, that involve-
  - i) Establishing what constitutes ragging, introducing the definition of ragging as given by The Honourable Supreme Court Of India,
  - ii) Demarcating what ragging is not, thus creating distinctions between ragging and other evils like bullying, harassment, domestic/workplace violence etc.
  - iii) Dispelling all myths and misconceptions regarding ragging,
  - iv) Logically negating all justifications given by the perpetrators and other supporters of ragging trying to trivialize or glorify it for vested interests,
  - v) Explaining the dynamics of ragging regarding how and why it is perpetrated and propagated underlining its unique nature and dangerousness,
  - vi) Highlighting how ragging adversely affects the victims and their families, the institution and moreover even the raggars and their families,
  - vii) Stating the various punishments for the raggar/s and also the institution

- if the latter fails to curb ragging in its premises and punish the culprits,
- viii) Elucidating the do's and don't's of ragging for the ragger/s, victim/s, onlooker/s, anti-ragging squad members and the institution regarding possible incident/s or during an incident of ragging occurring to prevent it further,
  - ix) Introducing other avenues for senior students to stay away from ragging,
  - x) Promoting healthy co-existence among seniors, juniors and university staff.
  - c) Inviting luminaries from various fields like former chief justice of The High Court Of Kolkata, eminent psychologists, psychiatrists etc to address the anti-ragging squad regarding how to deal with ragging in the university,
  - d) Making suggestions to the university authorities regarding further steps to be taken to prevent/curb ragging, based on findings from counseling sessions with victims/raggers and their families and observations derived from the workshops,
2. Curative:- it constitutes the steps to be taken after incident/s of ragging occur/s-
- a) In the anti-ragging workshops mentioned above the following are done-
    - i) Elucidating the do's and don't's of ragging for the ragger/s, victim/s, onlooker/s, anti-ragging squad members and the institution after an incident of ragging has occurred, the principle being intervention at the earliest,
    - ii) Addressing grievances of victim/s and others willing to share their negative experiences regarding and/

or making efforts to prevent/deal with them,

- b) Providing counseling services to students (victims/raggers)/staff and their families who seek/referred to for counseling for being adversely affected by ragging.

### **Contents of the Anti-ragging Workshops**

Definition of Ragging given by The Honourable Supreme Court of India-

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 junior student, indulging in rowdy or undisciplined activities which causes or is likely to cause annoyance, hardship or psychological harm or to raise fear or apprehension thereof in a fresher or a junior student or asking the student(s) to do any act or perform something which the student will not do in an ordinary course and which has the effect of generating a sense of shame or embarrassment so as to adversely affect the psyche and do a physical harm to a fresher or a junior student.'

This differentiates ragging from every other social evil though they may have many similarities.

Thus certain myths and misconceptions regarding ragging need to be done away with like-

1. student/s misbehaving with junior/s or students of same batch, in school is not ragging- it may be termed bullying
2. senior member/s of family/extended family misbehaving with junior/s or members of same age is not ragging- it may be termed domestic violence
3. senior/s misbehaving with junior/s in office is not ragging- it may be termed workplace violence/aggression
4. even in an academic institution of higher education, teaching/non-teaching staff misbehaving with student/s or student/s

misbehaving with senior/s or student/s of same batch in campus, hostel or outside is not ragging

5. lastly any person/s misbehaving with another/others in any other public/private place/s is not ragging- it/they may take various form/s like torture, exploitation, harassment, insult, abuse, violence, domination, sexual exploits etc.

So it is important not to confuse the above mentioned social injustices with ragging because then tackling ragging properly and doing justice to its victim/s become difficult. Though there may be some similarities in the modus operandi and the consequences, each form of social abuse is unique in its nature and thus needs to be dealt with in accordance with its characteristic dynamics to eradicate it forever.

Coming to the dynamics, what makes ragging unique is that here when the victim/s (the junior student/s) become senior/s s/he/they join/s hands with the perpetrator/s (her/his/their senior student/s) to rag her/his/their junior/s. In this way the vicious cycle of ragging is maintained. No other social crime involves the victim joining hands with the perpetrator, as part of its dynamics. There are such instances in other social evils but only as stray examples and not as part of the system that runs the cycle and maintains the evil act/s. So to handle ragging this cycle needs to be broken which automatically differentiates tackling ragging from dealing with other social evils. Thus it is necessary not to confuse ragging with other social abuses.

Now, why does the victim join hands with the perpetrator? It is because when someone is ragged s/he is filled with tremendous aggression which s/he cannot exert upon her/his perpetrator/s. But this aggression has to be channelized so the victim aims at her/his junior/

s who act as soft targets upon whom this pent up aggression can be easily vented. It gives a false sense of power that is vainly used to nurture the bruised psyche battered black and blue while being ragged. Other than this some one indulges in ragging because—

1. to show off power or stamp authority over junior/s for fear of not getting respect otherwise and losing her/his social position among juniors
2. if her/his batch-mate/s indulge in ragging s/he may join in to avoid being left out or criticised by them
3. to derive sadistic pleasure
4. for many seniors ragging is the only way to exert themselves upon the junior/s to force the latter to bow down before them, obey them unquestionably and thus compel them in joining in all the maladaptive activities which the seniors may indulge in like consuming alcohol, drugs, watching pornography and so on. This ensures that the seniors are not alone in doing such acts. This gives them a false sense of security
5. many seniors nurture the myth that it is fashionable to rag and also important in order to become famous, powerful and influential in campus.

The myths that the perpetrators and supporters of ragging try to pass off as justifications for ragging are—

1. ragging is important for juniors because it makes them mentally and physically tough- but they cannot justify who gave them the authority to toughen the juniors or whether they are at all qualified to do so,
2. ragging prepares the juniors for the future to face the big bad world they will face once they leave the campus- again they cannot reason out as to who gave them the grand responsibility of preparing the

- juniors for the world outside something which they have not faced themselves yet.
3. ragging is needed for better interaction among seniors and juniors to create a positive atmosphere in campus– yet the fact is nothing positive comes out of ragging. Interaction among students is surely but if is done forcibly where interaction becomes interrogation then it becomes ragging as per the definition given by The Honourable Supreme Court of India and surely it can never bring out anything positive.
  4. a bit of ragging is alright. It is just for fun- it is to noted that there is nothing called Mild Ragging. As per the definition given by The Honourable Supreme Court of India any disorderly conduct by means of words spoken or written or by an act which causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological harm to a junior student by her/his senior/s amounts to ragging. Now the senior/s concerned cannot know before hand whether their so called Mild Ragging will cause any harm to the junior/s and to what extent. Thus such Mild Ragging needs to abandoned.
  5. ragging, if not physical, is alright- again going by the definition of ragging given by The Honourable Supreme Court of India, any disorderly conduct that causes or is likely to cause psychological harm amounts to ragging.
  6. ragging is a temporary phase. Once it finishes everyone concerned becomes friends- this is the most dangerous aspect. Ragging never creates friendships. The harmful effects of ragging remain with the victim for the rest of her/his life if not handled properly. She may try to get out of it by justifying that ragging indeed

is beneficial and may participate in ragging her/his juniors. In this way s/he will only maintain the vicious cycle of ragging and create more victims directly or indirectly.

The effects of ragging are enormous and can be both long-term and/or short-term. What is to be noted is that, not only does ragging affect the victim, which is obvious, it also affects the ragger, which often go unnoticed.

**Effects of ragging on the victim maybe classified as:-**

- **Physical-** if there is physical violence involved it may cause short-term/long-term/permanent damage to one or more organs of the victim's body depending on the magnitude of violence inflicted leading to bodily malfunctions like
  1. Abnormal blood pressure (high or low)
  2. Abnormal heart rate (high or low)
  3. Twitching, fidgeting, ticks
  4. Screeching of nails and/or teeth
  5. Drop in immunity level of body leading to greater susceptibility to illnesses and diseases
  6. Excessive gain or loss in weight
- **Behavioural-** changes may occur in victim's behaviour related to her/his physiological functions, like
  1. Lack of sleep that may lead to insomnia. Or excessive sleep
  2. Overeating or under-eating
  3. Excessive sweating
  4. Hot flushes
  5. Excessive urination
  6. Disturbed movements
- **Emotional-** changes may occur in the victim's emotional expressions like
  1. Lack of affect. Or excessive affect
  2. Increased irritability at all times
  3. Heightened fear/anxiety/anger

4. Low frustration tolerance
5. Guilt/shame/embarrassment/regret
- **Cognitive-** changes may occur in the cognitive functioning of the person like
  1. Lack of concentration/memory
  2. Inability to perform cognitive tasks that she could do otherwise
  3. Lack of planning/focus
  4. Suicidal thoughts
  5. Lack of motivation
  6. Paranoid thoughts
- **Social-** changes may occur in the person's social functioning too like-
  1. Social withdrawal
  2. Inability/lack of interest in social interaction
  3. Overdependence on others
 The person may develop certain disorder/s like-
  1. Schizophrenia
  2. Paranoia
  3. Obsessive-compulsive disorder
  4. Manic Depressive Psychosis
  5. Phobia
  6. Generalized Anxiety Disorder
  7. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
  8. Dissociation
  9. Psychosomatic Disorders
  10. Physical ailments caused by acute stress

Needless to say the family members of the victims also go through severe pain and can develop one or more of the problems mentioned above. After running the anti-ragging campaign for five years and doing innumerable counseling sessions with numerous students seeking help for ragging related problems it can be proudly stated that incidences of ragging have reduced dramatically in the university and a much more positive atmosphere prevails among the seniors and juniors of the university. It was significant to note how ragging affects even the ragger too.

Often many a ragger would come for counseling reporting bio-psycho-social problems similar to those faced by the victims, mentioned above.

The anti-ragging campaign has become a flagship activity of CCSS with many other colleges/universities modeling their anti-ragging drives based on this. Also various departments/authorities in the university who were aloof or ignorant of this entire movement are now forced to take cognizance of this because of the following-

Consequences of ragging for the ragger/s depending on the severity of the crime-

1. Suspension from attending classes ranging from days to weeks to months to a semester
2. Debarring from sitting in examinations
3. Year loss
4. Debarring from sitting in interviews for campus placements
5. Rustication from the institute
6. Police Arrest
7. Trial in a fast-track court of law
8. Imprisonment

How incidences of ragging may affect the institution-

1. Loss of reputation for the institution
2. Decrease in the number of companies coming for campus interviews
3. If ragging is not curbed and cases of ragging not handled properly then-
  - a) Loss of NAAC credits
  - b) Loss of UGC, CSIR DST etc grants and other facilities
  - c) Institute being blacklisted

### Conclusion

Hope this paper will contribute in its own way to create a proper understanding as to what ragging is, how it is propagated and maintained by virtue of the myths associated with it, how it is different from other social evils and thus help in abolishing it forever which can be done

only by doing away with the dynamics of ragging and breaking the myths regarding it once and for all specially for SC/ST students given their already present adjustment issues and trauma.

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