

## **Status of Reproductive and Sexual Rights of Women in Rural Areas: A Piece of Original Research Work**

**\*Sunayana Singh**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human rights are fundamental rights and freedoms that every person is entitled to, regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other characteristics. These rights are considered inherent to all individuals simply by virtue of being human. Sexual and reproductive rights of women are a crucial aspect of human rights, encompassing a range of rights related to a woman's autonomy over her body, reproductive health, and overall well-being. These rights are recognized internationally and are grounded in various human rights treaties and declarations. Some key components of sexual and reproductive rights for women include: Right to Health, Autonomy and Decision-Making, Access to Contraception, Maternal Health, Safe and Legal Abortion, Freedom from Violence and Discrimination, Education and Information, Privacy and Confidentiality, Equality and Non-Discrimination and Legal Protections. United Nation prepared a Charter which is known as Universal declaration of Human Rights 1948 in order to have just and equal world. Representative of 48 countries were initial signatories to this Charter on December 10 ,1948.

United Nations Population Fund plays a leading role in advancing sexual and reproductive health globally, World Health Organization provides guidance on sexual and reproductive health issues, including safe motherhood, family planning, and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and United Nation Women focuses on gender equality and women's empowerment. Even after making so many rules, Gender-based violence (GBV) against women in rural areas is a widespread and deeply concerning issue, with women facing various forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence simply because of their gender.

Sexual violence is a prevailing crime against women universally which affects women's health. Women tolerate violence silently because their exploiter is someone close to them. Therefore; it becomes very difficult for women to report law-enforcing agencies. There are laws to safeguard the reproductive and sexual rights of women. In Indian context, its constitution has provision of reproductive and sexual rights which says that women can decide about the number, spacing and limiting of their number of children. It also ensures the reproductive and sexual security (which makes sexual violence is a criminal act and punishable under Indian penal code) and she has right to live healthy reproductive and sexual life. She owns total control over her body: mentally, emotionally, physically and sexually.

Sexual violence is committed by the close ones (either family members or relatives or husband of a woman). In majority of cases, it goes unreported. If it is not reported, one cannot get justice. Even sexual crimes are

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reported and then taking it to the logical end is long-drawn process. Generally; sexual crimes are committed in closed doors. If victim woman try to raise her voice, her family members do not co-operate or sometimes, they become against her.

Therefore; it's very serious issues that despite having laws women suffer most. Various international research studies and reports reveal that crime against women are not going down and major reason is that un-reporting of cases and sexual crimes are committed by close ones. In view of above cited background, this research study was planned and done in rural areas of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, India, to investigate knowledge of birth control methods, pregnancy, family size, reproductive and sexual status with special emphasis on women's say in these matters.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

As we wanted to investigate the ground realities of reproductive and sexual rights in rural areas. Therefore, semiliterate or illiterate women were included in this research study with their consent. Rural areas (villages Panchayat) of Bharatpur district Rajasthan, India was selected for this research investigation 40 woman of 20 to 40 years of age were included in this study. Aims and objectives were clearly explained to them and their consent was taken and their name kept secret.

Well defined questionnaire was prepared on reproductive and sexual matters of women. Detailed personal interview was taken when the questionnaire and questionnaire got okayed by them.

### **QUESTIONNAIRES**

Questionnaires was prepared on four following aspect of reproduction and sexual life.

- A. Contraceptive choice
- B. Pregnancy
- C. Family size
- D. Sexual life

### **CONTRACEPTIVE CHOICE**

Name

Age

Marriage age

Knowledge about pregnancy

Knowledge about contraceptives (yes/ no)

Contraceptive method used, who imparted the knowledge about the birth control method ?

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Husband knowledge about the birth control method. (yes/ no)

B. PREGNANCY

1. Age of first /second/ third pregnancy with gap period also
2. Pregnancy- Planned /Unplanned
3. Delivery place:- Home /Hospital

C. FAMILY SIZE

1. Family size
2. Who decided family size (me or husband or in-laws or others)

D. SEXUAL LIFE

- Does your husband involves you as an equal sex partner or just he fulfills his desire- yes /no
- Does he understand your sexual need -yes /no
- Does your husband drinks- yes/ heavy drinker/ no
- Does your partner tortures physically you during sex- yes/ no
- What sort of physical torture is done by your husband [write in brief]
- Do you want to stay in your marriage- yes/ no
- Are you aware of your reproductive and sexual rights- yes/ no
- Are you satisfied with your married or sexual life- yes /no

What change you want to see in your partner in order to improve your sexual life [write in brief]

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis was done using standard error and standard deviation formulae of obtained data

**Standard error-**

$$SE = \sigma / \sqrt{n}$$

SE= standard error of the sample

$\sigma$  = sample standard deviation

n =number of sample

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Standard deviation

$$\sigma = \sqrt{\sum(X_i - \mu)^2 / N}$$

$\sigma$  = population standard deviation

N = the size of the population

$X_i$  = each value from the population

$\mu$  = the population mean

Data being presented in tabulation and Pie diagram form.

### **OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS**

40 women volunteered to participate in our study and they got any scientific platform to discuss their plight and condition for the first time in their life. Age of volunteering women ranged 20 to 40 year.

#### **SOCIAL, EDUCATION AND ECONOMICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN VOLUNTEERS**

All women were from rural areas of Bharatpur district of Rajasthan India. These women were from poor background. Majority of them were illiterate or semi-literate.

#### **MARRIAGE AGE**

Marriage age of these women ranged 10 to 25 years. Very early marriage was recorded at the age of 10. General marriage stated between 15 to 19 year.

**Age of first pregnancy:-** Age of first pregnancy of these women occurred before attaining the age of 20 in almost all ladies and second pregnancy was developed between the age of 20 to 25 [Table- 1].

**Planning of pregnancy and delivery:-** 68% of women of this study had unplanned pregnancy and were having no idea of unsafe period of menstrual cycle and 50%, women delivered the baby at home without any medically qualified supervision [Figure-1].

**Knowledge of birth control methods:-** 80% women had no idea of birth control methods and 85% of their husbands were ignorant of the contraceptives methods available. [Figure-2,3].

**Family size:-** 20% women had two kids, 35% had three children and 43% had more than three in their family.

**Sexual life :-** 65% women of this study told that their husbands just fulfil their sexual desire or need and they just treat like as sex object or slaves, 30% of women told that their husbands or partner involve them actively in sexual act [ Figure-4].

Almost 70% husband of studied group of women did not understand the need of their wives [Figure-5].

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40% women revealed that their husband tortured them before or during sex. Nature of brutal torture was abusing, beating, twisting arms, pulling hair, forcing for sex, burning breast and outer privates parts with cigarette and bidis, biting chest and breast, thighs, sprinkling chilli powder over vagina, excessive demand of sex and sex during menses and doing sex immediately after delivery of baby.40% husbands behave like this off and on [Figure-6].

Despite high percentage of women undergone sexual, physical, mental assault and torture apprised us that they are satisfied with sexual life and this was very strange and 25% women were not satisfied sexually [Figure-7]. 87% women wanted to stay in marriage despite all these problem, while 10% ladies set that they have no option but to stay in the marriage[ Figure-8]. All women wanted caring and understanding husband [Figure-9].

TABLE-1 AGE OF PREGNANCY (IN YEARS)

Age of pregnancy	*Scores Mean ± SD
Age Of 1stPregnancy	19.475 ± 3.4042771
Age of 2nd Pregnancy	21.461538 ± 2.741937
Age of 3rd pregnancy	23 ± 2.779233

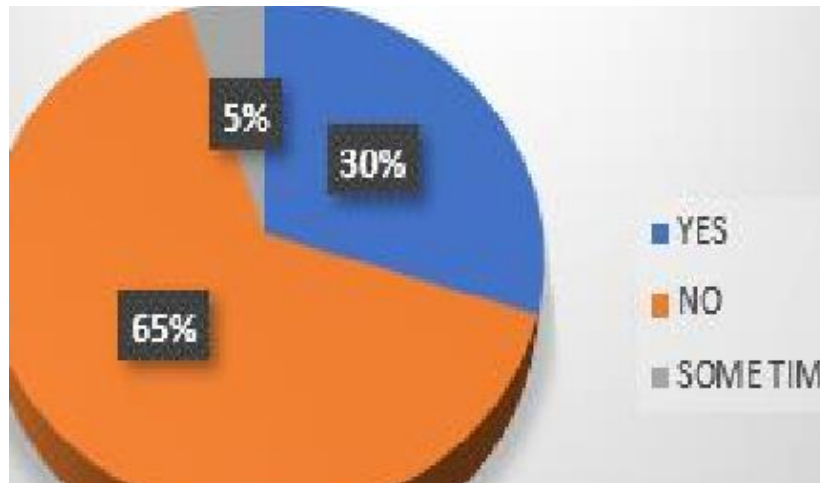


Figure 1: % of planned and unplanned pregnancy

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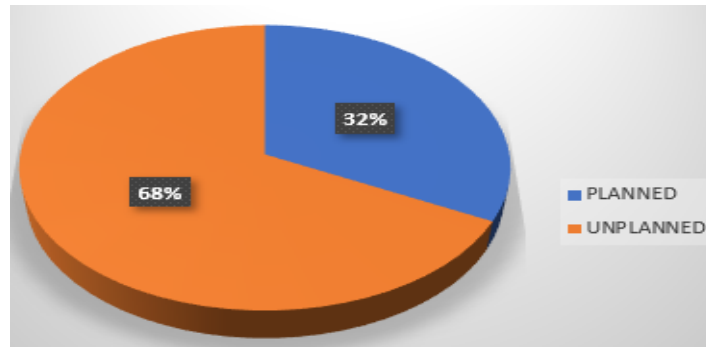


Figure 2: knowledge of women about contraception

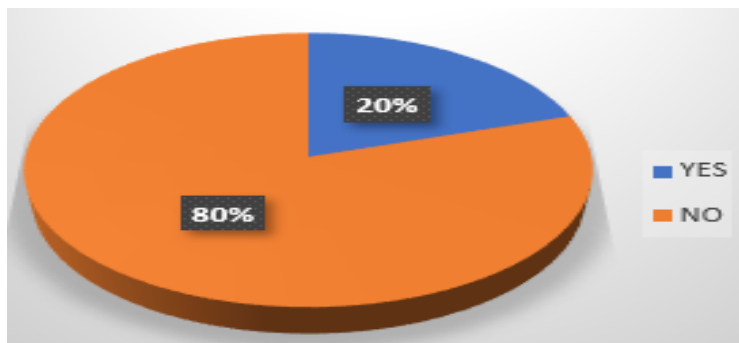


Figure 3: knowledge of husbands about birth control method

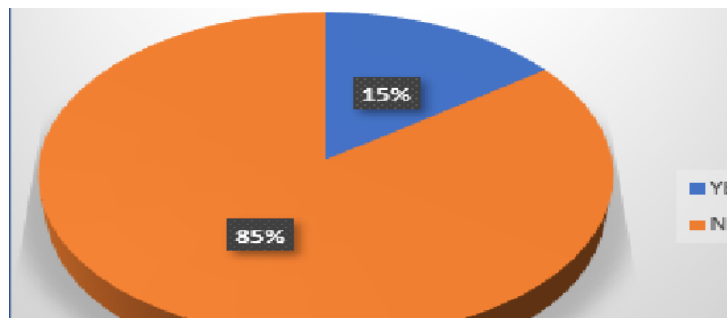


Figure 4: Husband's behavior involving wife in sexual activities equality

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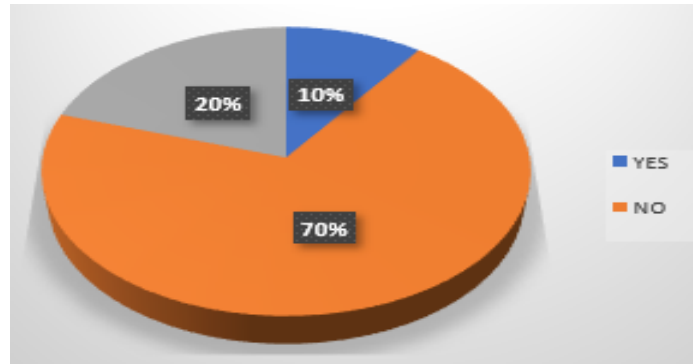


Figure 5: Understanding of husband about Sexual need of wife

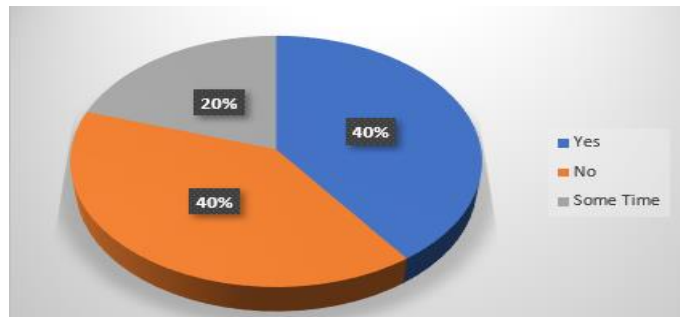


Figure 6: Women being tortured by their husband during sexual activities

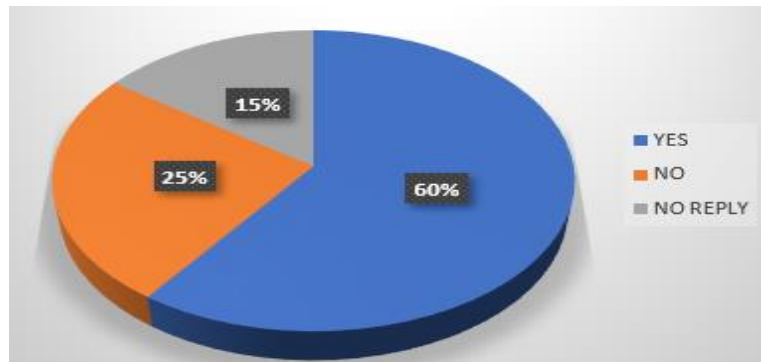


Figure 7: Satisfaction of women in married life

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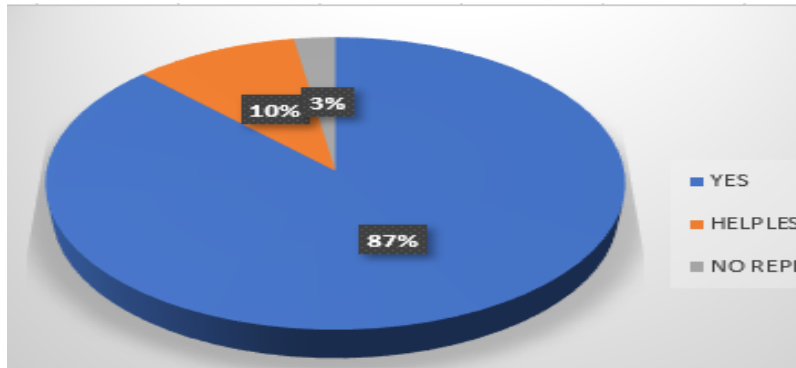


Figure 8: % of mental state of women to Stay in marriage

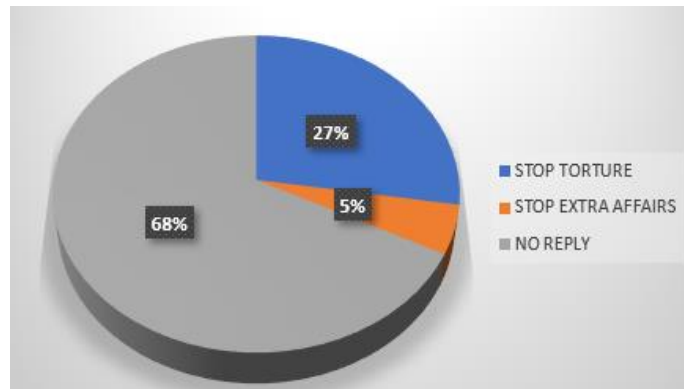


Figure 9: Thinking of women for healthier married life

**DISCUSSION**

Current study shows that majority of girl got married during their teenage and without their consent, their parents arranged the marriage. Child marriage is not allowed under Indian constitution which is violation of child marriage act. These women and their husband were not having the basic knowledge of birth control methods which results in early pregnancy, [majority of ladies got pregnant before attaining the age 20 or during their teenage]. Occurrence of pregnancy in teenage girl is really very risky and harmful for reproductive health. Various studies have shown that teenage pregnancy may result in death of mother and improper development of baby as the body of female is not ready or mature enough for pregnancy.

This study also reveals that majority of pregnancies were unplanned because both husband and wife were not educated and got married in a very early age and very dangerous part of the disclosure by these

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women that they delivered the baby at home without any medical supervision or assistance which further aggravates the danger to the mother and baby. It has been established that child deliveries at home without any medically qualified staff or with untrained person can be real threat to the life of mother and baby by various research studies.

Here this pregnancy complications may become manifold to teenage pregnancy and subsequent pregnancies without any major gaps. This study shows that average kids number was 2-5 per family. Despite having constitutional provision for safeguarding the human and reproductive rights of women ground realities show that women's life plight is unchanged.

Our research findings also show that women are treated as sex slaves by their husband. (however our sample size is only 40 and more such studies are needed to be carried out in this regard) which indicates the psycho-sexual behavior of their husband. Such kind of behavior of male partners have been seen and reported by various researchers irrespective of caste, color, class, education and status.

Current study shows the horrible sexual tortures behavior like: beating, biting the private sexual parts of their wives by their husband, sprinkling chili powder are the cruel acts of males.

This reflects that women are most unsafe in their marriages and these cruel and horrible acts are committed by close-ones under closed door setting and so called legal protection called marriage. This goes unreported. Husband is major threat to her life and dignity.

Generally it is said and seen that woman is sexually, psychologically attacked by out-siders and various studies have shown this phenomenon also. This is study shows that woman is tortured sexually and assaulted by her life partner.

Despite this horrible ordeal almost on daily night in closed door, she generally doesn't reveals or reports to any body (as she fears that it may stake her marriage), therefore crime within the marriage never comes to light in majority of women's cases.

Surprising results of this study show that the majority of women want to stay in their marriage despite their plight. The reason is very simple that they have come to the conclusion that their (women) life could be much more miserable, if they walk out of their marriage.

Now question arises that what could be done in such a horrible state? The laws related to the prohibition of child marriage should be enforced in a letter and spirit, this will prevent the teenage pregnancy and delivery which may lessen the danger to the life of a girl.

Registration of every marriage should be mandatory. Pre-marriage counselling of the couple regarding responsibilities sexual rights, matters and behavior should be in place by the qualified and caring counsellors.

#### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

Aims and objectives of this study were very sensitive and personal pertaining to the reproductive and

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sexual matters. Women need trust and confidence to discuss these personal issues. Women should be included from all strata of the society (specially from different educational and financial status).

There should be greater number of the volunteers then only we can drive precise conclusion. Data being presented in this study for the period of the one year. We are in process of collecting and overcoming above mentioned limitations.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion this study (though sample size is 40) shows that teenage marriage is still a common practice in rural areas, women and their husbands are not having knowledge of pregnancy, birth control methods. Majority of delivery of babies happen at home.

Sexual violence or torture inflicted by husbands are very common and it goes on unreported. Reproductive and sexual rights at ground level is still distant dream for women.

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