

GRASSROOTS COMICS FOR SAFETY AND SECURITY OF WOMEN – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF USING PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES FOR SPREADING AWARENESS

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Abstract: India, the nation of various colors, traditions, cultures, religions, and languages, is bound by a strong value system of respect and unity. But in the shadow of this value system, the brutality of inequality and insecurity between the two genders resides that gives birth to the feeling of being unsafe day and night. According to a report by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a crime against women is recorded every 1.7 minutes in India. Every 16 minutes a rape case is recorded in this country and every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence.

The present study attempts to establish Grassroots comics, as a powerful medium to spread awareness about the insecure environment and security issues of women in today's world using participatory communication approach. Also, the study provides an overview of various aspects related to safety and security of women perceived by college students of University of Delhi, especially young girls. Participatory communication approach was used to develop stories to be depicted in different comics. A total of 50 grassroots comics were developed and analyzed by adopting a participatory approach using survey and questionnaire method.

The findings revealed that all the comics were able to successfully articulate the effective message and spread awareness among the audience in an entertaining method. The respondents were able to relate their personal experiences with various types of safety issues depicted in various comics which in turn helped them to get the message more easily. The study concludes that grassroots comic is a very powerful tool to spread awareness about security issues of women in a metropolitan city like Delhi. It uses the participatory approach and provides scope to the victims to spread awareness about their hardships by showcasing their personal stories on a larger platform.

Keywords: Women Safety, Participatory Communication, Grassroots Comics and Young Girls.

Introduction: The development of a nation depends upon the opportunity given to both its male and female members in terms of making their own choices and try out new things in life. In the earlier times of Indian history, women were equal part of the society, given respect and honor with equal opportunities to develop themselves socially, intellectually and morally. However, women status in the Indian society is deteriorating by the passage of time because of various bad practices against women. There have been innumerable debates about gender in India over the years. Much of it includes women's positioning in society, their education, health, economic position, gender equality etc. What one can conclude from such discussions is that women have always held a certain paradoxical position in our developing country.

While on one hand, India has seen an increased percentage of literacy among women, and women are now entering professional fields, the practices of female infanticide, poor health conditions and lack of education still persisting still continue. Even the patriarchal ideology of the home being a woman's 'real domain' and marriage being her ultimate destiny hasn't changed much. If one looks at the status of women then and now, one has to look at two sides of the coin; one side which is promising, and one side which is bleak.

Promises to address gender gap are far from reality. In India, women do not seem to enjoy all the rights to freedom provided under the Constitution of India. According to a report by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), a crime against women is recorded every 1.7 minutes in India. Every 16 minutes a rape case is recorded in this country and every 4.4 minutes a girl is subjected to domestic violence (Basu, 2005).

A total of 3,27,394 cases of crime against women were reported in the country during the year 2015 as compared to 3,37,922 in the year 2014, thus showing a decline of 3.1% during the year 2015. These crimes have continuously increased during 2011 - 2014 with 2,28,650 cases in 2011, which further increased to 2,44,270 cases 2012 and 3,09,546 cases in 2013, to 3,37,922 cases in 2014. It declined to 3,27,394 in 2015 (NCRB, 2016).

Need for Development Communication - The Theoretical Framework: The role of communication for empowerment is crucial. Development Communication is a branch of communication, which enables people, particularly the vulnerable groups, to participate in shaping decisions to ameliorate their own wellbeing. Development communication promotes changes in people behaviours and attitudes and increases their participation in the development process.

Need for Participatory Communication: Participatory Communication for Development endeavour is essentially building relationships with the community and thereby facilitates collective action for social change. It empowers local communities to discuss and address their problems and practices, as well as to engage other stakeholders in building an improved policy environment. For communication to be effective it must integrate different perspectives and knowledge from all actors and agents to ensure the appropriation by local communities for sustainability of the social change process and, at the same time, influence policy and decision-making processes at all levels (family, community, local and national). Participatory research offers problem-solving approach. The objective is to uncover the causes of community problem and mobilize the creative human potential to solve issues by transforming the conditions underlying those issues (Servaes, 1991).

Grassroots Comics- A Development Tool: The idea of grassroots comics was introduced by Sharad Sharma and Leif Packalen. They both have an expertise in cartooning and development. They have worked extensively in formulating the methodology of grassroots comics in practice. The basis of grassroots comics methodology used in this research is influenced by their book 'Grassroots Comics- a development communication perspective (2007). According to them, 'Grassroots comics are developed by socially active people themselves, rather than by campaign and art professionals. They are genuine voices which encourage local debate in the society' (2007). In essence, grassroots comics is a communication tool which calls for a larger degree of participation, both from people within the community and the researcher.

Another important feature of grassroots comics is that it helps dramatize sensitive issues and bring them into debate in the community. Moreover, comics are always related to the problems being faced by the community, thus making them participatory in nature. They are a communication tool for all citizens that can transcend the barriers of language, literacy, media access, resources and social classes. For these reasons, grassroots comics have been extremely successful in communicating sensitive issues across various sections of the society

Aim of the Study: The study aims to assess the effectiveness of participatory grassroots comics for creating awareness about safety and security of women in Delhi.

Objectives of the Study:

1. To explore girls' understanding and perspectives of their vulnerabilities to safety and security of women in Delhi
2. To develop an intervention to impart knowledge about issues related to safety and security of women.

3. To train girls to develop grassroots comics using participatory communication as an approach.
4. To examine the effectivity of participatory grassroots comics in creating awareness about the issues related to safety and security of women in Delhi.

Methodology: Participatory approach was adopted at each and every stage of the study.

Phase I - Introduction of Participatory Communication Tools and Media Analysis: A group of 50 girls were identified pursuing B.Sc. Home Science Hons., 1st year students through random selection method. A workshop was conducted by a communication expert to explain the concept of participatory communication to the selected group of girls. The workshop also focused on various media tools which can be used to for creating awareness using participatory approach. The group was exposed to a range of different tools included story scroll, wall newspaper (*Diwar Akhbar*), flashcards, flipbooks, grass-root comics, radio jingles and short films. An analysis was then done to understand the strengths and weakness of all the media tools. After a detailed exposure and group discussion about application, advantages and disadvantages of each and every tool, the group of students decided to develop grass-root comics as a tool of generating awareness and bringing change in the present situation about a particular social and development issue of the society.

Phase II - Sensitization Workshop - Trigger Films: The concept of gender equality was introduced to the group through sensitization workshop which included both theoretical and practical exposure. An expert from 'Breakthrough' a Non-governmental organization working for safety of women in Delhi was invited to conduct the session. To provide a hands-on real life experience of these issues various a range of trigger Films were chosen related to safety and security, women's right, education and empowerment.

These Trigger films on various social and development issues were projected followed by a rigorous group discussion on the criticality of the issue / problem related to their safety faced by the group of students in their day to day life in a metropolitan city of India that is Delhi. An active group discussion about the concept, prevalence of the problem in India and Delhi, causes and effects and degree of criticality of the issue, possible solutions to minimize the problem build an in-depth critical understanding in the group.

After the discussion session, the group decided to take safety of women in metropolitan city, Delhi in different social settings like home and public places as a main theme to develop grass-root comics on its various aspects. Each member of the group was able to relate their own life experience with the issue. Therefore, they decided to develop grass-root comics on their own life experiences of vulnerability of hampered security of women in Delhi.

Phase III – Training Workshop – Grass-Root Comics: The third phase of study included a training workshop on development of grass-root comics. Mr. Sushil Kumar, Grass-root Comics Trainer, World Comics Network, India was invited to train the group on various development perspectives and how an interesting story can be developed on a paper into four frames by using simple drawing techniques, a pencil and a black pen. The workshop was divided into six parts included holistic introduction, facial expression drawing section, story and dialogue box drawing section, figure drawing section, special effects section and lastly common errors and their understanding section.

1	Background
	About Grass-root Comics Syndicated Comic Strips Comic Booklets
2	Facial Expressions Drawing Section
	Drawing Faces Chart Of Facial Expressions Draw Your Partner Face Comic Character Activity
3	Story And Dialogue Box Section
	Deciding On Theme And Issues Writing A Story Writing A Text In A Comics Different Types Of Balloon Final Wall Poster Measurement
4	Figure Drawing Section
	Body Postures Creating More Postures Dance With Drawing Activity
5	Special Effects Section
	Special Effects Shadow Act And Draw Foreground & Background Using Different Camera Angle Inking
6	Common Understanding Section
	Common Error Part-1 Common Error Part-2 Frequently Asked Questions

Phase IV – Development of Stories: Every group member took her own real life situation of eve-teasing and sexual or verbal harassment at home or at public places. This showed that by the age of 19-20 years every girl was exposed to these types of harassment at least once in their life time, which indicates the vulnerability of hampered social security and safety of women in Delhi.

The group of 50 students was suggested to recall all the elements of their story and write it on a paper. Later on, they were told to decide upon the main characters of their story. After writing a detailed description of the story, all the 50 stories were presented in front of the group. After the story telling session, the students were advised to divide their story in four major scenes to make them fit in form of four panels at a later stage.

After three rounds of story crunching, rephrasing and rewriting, the story then converted into a conversation between story characters through dialogues. This phase came to an end with the last but most interesting part which was to identify an eye and attention catching title for the story.

Phase V – Development of Grass-root Comics: After story development phase, the students were provided with an A3 size plain paper sheet with four frames of same size. The first part of the sketching included finagling the foreground and background of each and every frame. After this, they were suggested to inculcate their main characters into the frames keeping in mind an appropriate space left for writing the dialogue. The characters of the story were given deep details of sketching through their clothes and facial expressions as per their role in the story. The character themselves were made to

easily recognize their roles and nature in the story. The background and foreground were decided according to the locations of the story.

After the basic sketching of the frames the group was told to arrange and write the dialogues in the blank space according to their sequence. The dialogues were again crunched and rephrased to according to the available space of the frames. Then the dialogues were assigned a dialogue box according to the situation of the scene and expressions of the characters. The final stage of the comic development was inking. The group was suggested to give all the details to their comics with pencil first and finish the sketching. After finalizing the sketching part the comics were ink by a black pen to give emphasis on the main elements of the frames. Inking helps in highlighting the character's main features and expressions which in turn makes the story more visually interesting and attracting.

Phase VI – Evaluation: Evaluation was done using survey method. A questionnaire was prepared to evaluate each comic. The parameters included understanding of the issue depicted in the comic, interest, attractiveness and awareness generation capacity on the basis of which the comics were evaluated.

Findings and Discussion: A total of 50 comics were put to survey for their evaluation of common understanding, interest, attractiveness and awareness generation capacity. Through a rigorous evaluation process, it was found that 100% of the comics were able to clearly articulate the topic to the audience through clear stories and characters. It was also found that all the 50 comics were easy to understand and comprehend by the respondents.

On the scale of awareness building capacity, 78% of the respondent said that the information provided in the comics was very useful in terms of its correctness and appropriateness according to the today's environment, while on the same time 19% of the respondents said that the comics needs some minor improvements and 3% respondents expressed the need for some major improvements to increase their effectiveness about the issue. 80% of the respondents believe that the language of the comics to depict the situation was appropriate and was very nicely used to build the connection with the degree of pain female counterparts go through during each incident of eve teasing or any kind of social insecurity like sexual harassment. While 16% of respondents suggested some minor improvements and 3% with major improvements and only one person didn't like the language of the stories.

Comics and their stories are based on the real life incidents of people, their experiences and how they handle the situation in their life. Comics can be also classified as 'The mirror of the society'. 60% of the respondents were strongly agreed with the fact that the comics were able to showcase hard and dark realities of the society, while 25% were mildly agree and 15% were neutral about the same. Through survey results a mixed response was obtained about the degree of reality and relatability of characters used in the comics to depict the stories. 60% of the respondents were able to relate strongly while 40% said it was mildly relatable.

Comics have an ability to attract people and are an easy and entertaining way to bring people's attention and spread awareness about the common social issues. It was observed that the comics were able to attract and hold interest for a reasonable amount of time of 75% respondents, while the reaction of rest 25% was neutral. 50% of the respondents had a firm believe that comics is an entertaining, easy to articulate and understand and very strong medium to raise the voice in the society and in front of the Government authorities, while another 50% of the respondents had a mixed response for it, as 30% with mind agreement, 17% as neutral and 3% with mild disagreement.

Overall the respondents rate comics on the scale of Excellent (23%), Good (50%), Medium (26%) and Poor (1%).

Conclusion: Women safety is one branch of gender inequality. Diverse communication strategies have been designed and implemented to end or prevent diverse types of crime against women and young

girls. Some have brought positive results. Others have shown less positive results. The study indicates that participatory communication should foster gender equality and help to overcome some of the barriers responsible for gender inequality in terms of women safety since it facilitates both individual and societal level changes, acquainted of the local context and esteeming a multiplicity of communication approaches.

Another key agent is the younger, who produces behavioural changes over generations and may influence their peers and older generations. Better education and awareness make them both an audience and a vehicle of communication.

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