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Q12

Case study. You are recently posted as district development officer of a district. Shortly thereafter you found that there is considerable tension in the rural areas of your district on the issue of sending girls to schools. The elders of the village feel that many problems have come up because girls are being educated and they are stepping out of the safe environment of the household. They are of the view that the girls should be quickly married off with minimum education. The girls are also competing for jobs after education, which have traditionally remained in boys' exclusive domain, adding to unemployment amongst male population. The younger generation feels that in the present era, girls should have equal opportunities for education and employment, and other means of livelihood. The entire locality is divided between the elders and the younger lot and further sub-divided between sexes in both generations. You come to know that in Panchayat or in other local bodies or even in busy crossroads, the issue is being acrimoniously debated. One day you are informed that an unpleasant incident has taken place. Some girls were molested, when they were en route to school. The incident led to clashes between several groups and a law and order problem has arisen. The elders after heated discussion have taken a joint decision not to allow girls to go to school and to socially boycott all such families, which do not follow their dictate. (a) What steps would you take to ensure girls' safety without disrupting their education? (b) How would you manage and mould the patriarchic attitude of the village elders to ensure harmony in the intergenerational relations?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · GS IV · 20 marks · Ethics Case Studies

Case Studies on above issues.

Core demand of the question

- **As District Development Officer:** elders oppose girls' schooling and jobs; youth want equality; the village is split. Girls are molested on the way to school; clashes follow; elders decide girls will not go to school and will socially boycott families that disobey. (a) Steps to keep girls safe without stopping education. (b) How to mould patriarchal attitudes of elders for intergenerational harmony

Revision summary

Molestation is a crime; a boycott of school-going girls is intimidation, not culture.

Keep schools open; add escorts, lighting, protection and a real FIR, not a compromise panchayat.

Do not cut rations to enforce elders' dictate.

Mould patriarchy with respected local voices, women's separate hearings, and jobs for anxious young men - after justice, not as a swap for it.

Intergenerational peace is shared honour and equal education, not the girl's silence.

Introduction

A molestation is a crime. A boycott of families who send daughters to school is a second crime wearing custom. My duty is safety and **Article 21A** together, not a bargain that trades the girl for a quiet week.

Body

Stakeholders

- Girls who were assaulted and all girls who now fear the road.
- Families under threat of **social boycott**.
- Village elders, young men and women, and those who want jobs without sharing them.
- Schools, teachers, Panchayat, police, and women's groups.
- You as District Development Officer, with development tools and a duty to call in law and order.

Values and issues

- Right to education and equality (**Articles 14, 15, 21, 21A**).
- Bodily integrity; molestation is not a "social dispute".
- Dignity of the girl child; no peace that silences her.
- Emotional intelligence with elders without surrendering the Constitution to a boycott.

(a) Safety without disrupting education

- **First 48 hours:** criminal case for the molestation, medical care, in-camera statement, protection for witnesses and the girls' homes. Do not hold a "compromise panchayat" that withdraws the FIR.
- **Immediate safe passage:** police or home-guard beat on the school route at opening and closing hours; volunteer parent chains; where needed a temporary vehicle or escort, not a lock on the school gate.
- Keep the school open. Closing it "for peace" rewards the assailants and the boycott.
- Lighting, trimming of isolated stretches, and a staffed room in the school until parents arrive.
- **Protection against boycott:** public distribution and other entitlements must not be cut by a private edict. Tell ration dealers and Panchayat staff that a **social boycott** enforced through official goods is unlawful. If needed, move supplies through a camp or a neighbouring depot.
- Meet girls and mothers separately from the shouting crossroads, so that fear can be spoken.
- Fast-track the criminal process so that the village does not invent its own punishment of the victims.
- If some men block the road, it is a law-and-order offence, not a debate on culture.

(b) Moulding patriarchal attitude, harmony between generations

- Do not humiliate elders in public on day one; humiliation hardens them. Also do not sit at their feet and trade the girls' attendance for their blessing.
- Separate the assault from the employment fear. Jobs for women are not the cause of molestation; crime is.
- Use respected local voices who already educate daughters - a retired teacher, a woman sarpanch from a nearby panchayat, a faith leader who will quote dignity rather than seclusion.
- **Show numbers:** schemes, scholarships, and examples of local women who study without "ruining" the village. Fear of male unemployment is a real anxiety; answer it with skills and work for youth, not with pulling girls out of class.
- **Gram sabha after the crime is charged, not instead of the charge:** a facilitated dialogue on safety, with women speaking, and a written village pledge that boycott is illegal.
- **Long term:** girls' toilets, female teachers, secondary school within reach, and **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao**-type mobilisation that is local, not only a banner.
- Intergenerational harmony is not silence of the young. It is elders keeping honour, and youth keeping rights, in the same street. Honour that needs an uneducated daughter is not honour.

Options I reject

- **Option:** close school until tempers cool.
- **Merit:** fewer clashes this week.
- **Demerit:** the Constitution loses; the molester learns the method.
- **Option:** only lectures on patriarchy without a charge-sheet.
- **Merit:** looks modern.
- **Demerit:** girls remain unsafe; elders call it insult.

What I should do as DDO

- Coordinate with the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police; development officers do not run a crime scene alone.
- Fund the escort, lights and toilets from district schemes at once.
- Put the boycott on record as a threat to civil rights; use relevant penal provisions against criminal intimidation and against those who enforce a blockade of school-going children.

Flow diagram

Molestation -> FIR care protection care protection
 FIR care protection -> School stays open with escort
 Social boycott -> Stop blockade of entitlements
 Elders fear -> Dialogue after charge not instead
 Dialogue after charge not instead -> Youth skills without pulling girls out

Conclusion

Safety is a criminal investigation plus a guarded road, not a closed school. Patriarchal fear is answered with dialogue, female leadership and youth jobs, after the assault is treated as a crime. Harmony that needs a girl at home is not harmony.

Facts & figures

Article 21A and Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

Education of children is a right; a village edict cannot cancel it.

Articles 14 and 15

Equality and non-discrimination; pulling only girls from school is a constitutional failure, not a private custom.

Criminal law on sexual assault and intimidation

Molestation and a coercive boycott are police matters; a panchayat cannot compound them as a social feud.

Safe route and female teachers

Standard, evidence-backed supports that raise girls' attendance without waiting for attitudes to become perfect.

Social boycott

Collective punishment of families; when it blocks food, school or movement it is a rights violation the district must break.

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