



INTERNATIONAL LAW
JOURNAL

**WHITE BLACK
LEGAL LAW
JOURNAL**
**ISSN: 2581-
8503**

Peer - Reviewed & Refereed Journal

The Law Journal strives to provide a platform for discussion of International as well as National Developments in the Field of Law.

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WHITE BLACK LEGAL is an open access, peer-reviewed and refereed journal providededicated to express views on topical legal issues, thereby generating a cross current of ideas on emerging matters. This platform shall also ignite the initiative and desire of young law students to contribute in the field of law. The erudite response of legal luminaries shall be solicited to enable readers to explore challenges that lie before law makers, lawyers and the society at large, in the event of the ever changing social, economic and technological scenario.

With this thought, we hereby present to you

ENSURING A RAGGING-FREE CAMPUS: LEGAL SAFEGUARDS FOR STUDENTS

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Abstract

Ragging has been a longstanding issue in many countries, persisting into the present day. This article delves into the evolving nature of ragging, tracing its origins from a relatively harmless activity to a brutal and violent practice. It examines the various forms of ragging, the legal frameworks established to combat it, and the current legislative measures in India. The article supports its analysis with relevant case laws to provide clarity and accessibility for the general public. The primary aim of this article is to raise awareness about ragging, considering its legal, sociological, and psychological dimensions. Ragging is not only a social phenomenon but also a psychological one, rooted in the mind set of superiority and dominance over those perceived as weaker. It explores the profound psychological impact on both the victims and perpetrators, highlighting its significance, especially in contemporary society where mental health has gained increasing attention.

Keywords: Ragging, history of ragging, legal framework for ragging, hazing, UGC rules, judiciary

INTRODUCTION

Ragging refers to any act that causes humiliation, embarrassment, or has a detrimental effect on a student's mental and physical well-being. This includes, but is not limited to, physical and sexual abuse, homosexual assault, or any act that harms the health of an individual. It is a violation of a person's dignity, often damaging their sense of personal honor and self-worth. Historically, ragging served as a method for individuals to establish dominance over vulnerable members of society. Its origin can be traced back to the era of anarchy, where the powerful oppressed the weak and impoverished, and has since evolved into a practice where senior students assert control over their junior counterparts in educational settings. While ragging is often associated with higher education, it is rooted in a broader sociological context of power dynamics, which have historically been present in society.

The concept of ragging is not new; it is believed to have originated in ancient Greece during the Olympics around the 8th century B.C.¹, where it began as a form of playful teasing among participants. Over time, this practice spread, first within military forces and then to educational institutions. Ragging can take various forms, including verbal abuse, teasing, and other forms of harassment that result in physical or psychological harm². The term itself is derived from the English word “rag”, which means to scold or rail against³. It underlines the aggressive nature of the act.

In the modern context, ragging is frequently referred to as hazing, particularly in educational institutions, where it is typically carried out by senior students towards freshmen or new entrants⁴. This form of harassment, often brutal and humiliating, can involve physical assault, sexual harassment, or verbal abuse, all of which leave lasting scars on the victims. The practice is an expression of a hierarchical mentality, where seniors try to assert their perceived superiority over the newcomers, creating an environment of fear and submission.

The issue of ragging has been taken seriously in India, especially in light of numerous incidents of abuse and its devastating effects on victims. In a landmark ruling in 2001, the Supreme Court

¹ Navanita Varadpande, *Of Ragging Tales and the Corpses, They Leave Behind, in our Minds*, TIMES OF INDIA (Aug. 19, 2023).

² Hemamalie Gunatilaka, *Ragging; Its Evolution and Effects: A Literature Review with a Special Reference to Sri Lanka*, Vol. 3 IN. J. R. INNOV. S. SC., 2019.

³ “Rag”, Oxford English dictionary (3rd ed. 2012).

⁴ Sonu Halder & Dr. Deb Prasad Sikdar, *Evolution and Consequences of Ragging in Indian Education System*, 7, 209 AFR. J. S.S.C. HUMANIT. RE., 209, 09-223 (2024).

of India declared ragging to be a violation of human rights, marking a significant step towards its legal prohibition⁵. Following this decision, a series of guidelines were issued by the Supreme Court to curtail ragging, with regular updates to these guidelines reflecting the evolving nature of the problem. The Court's intervention brought national attention to the need for stricter regulation and enforcement to ensure the safety of students in educational institutions.

In addition to the Supreme Court's directives, several states in India, including Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Karnataka, have enacted their own laws to address the issue of ragging. These legal frameworks are aimed at preventing ragging, punishing perpetrators, and providing support for victims. At the national level, there are various regulations that focus on preventing ragging in higher education institutions. Among the key legislations are the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which seeks to address a broad range of criminal offenses, and the 2009 regulations issued by the University Grants Commission (UGC), which specifically target ragging in educational institutions.

Furthermore, other regulatory bodies such as the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) and the Medical Council of India (MCI) have also issued guidelines to combat ragging within their respective domains. These regulations are designed to foster a safe and respectful environment for students, with the ultimate goal of eliminating ragging in educational spaces altogether.

While significant progress has been made in India to combat ragging, the practice remains prevalent in many parts of the country. However, certain countries like Canada and Japan have been successful in eradicating ragging through strong legal frameworks and effective enforcement. In India, organizations such as the Coalition to Uproot Ragging from Education (CURE) continue to raise awareness and support victims of ragging⁶. A report by CURE in 2007 highlighted the alarming prevalence of ragging, revealing that more than 60% of the cases involved physical abuse, while 20% included sexual harassment. These statistics underline the severity of the issue and the continued need for stringent measures to protect students from such abuse. The psychological and emotional toll on victims is immense, and it is clear that

⁵ Vishwa Jagriti Mission through President v. Central Government through Cabinet Secretary and Ors., (2001) 3 SCR 540.

⁶ Anti Ragging policies, Vikaspedia (Feb. 5, 2025), <https://en.vikaspedia.in/viewcontent/education/policies-and-schemes/anti-ragging-policies>.

more needs to be done to ensure that educational institutions are safe and inclusive spaces for all students.

HISTORY

Ragging, as a concept, traces its origins back to the ancient traditions of Greece around the 8th century B.C., where it was seen as a part of the Olympic Games. The practice, which was initially linked to initiation rites, spread over time to various institutions, including the military and educational establishments. In England, ragging, or bullying as it was then called, became a tradition within army schools, and later, it moved into English civilian schools. Freshmen were subjected to public humiliation, such as parading down the streets, which was often disturbing for the newcomers, particularly for girls, and caused significant discomfort to the public as well. Over the centuries, this form of hazing spread across various educational institutions, including engineering and medical colleges, particularly in the European and American regions by the 15th century.

By the 18th century, ragging took on a new dimension. It was no longer merely a light-hearted initiation; instead, it evolved into a more serious and troubling practice. The devastation caused by World War I saw a transformation in the nature of ragging. Soldiers returning from the front lines introduced more violent methods, some of which included extortion, verbal abuse, forced humiliation, and even forcing victims to undress or wear degrading clothing⁷. The harshness of these acts mirrored the brutality and cruelty soldiers experienced during wartime.

Ancient civilizations such as the Romans, Egyptians, and Greeks were also familiar with forms of ragging, albeit with different terminologies and methods. The Greeks, for instance, practiced a similar form of violence called “racking”, which was designed to torture victims using a device known as the “rack”. Over time, both ragging and racking merged, with their effects being amplified by their respective cultural and historical contexts. In French culture, the term “brimade” was used to describe hazing or ragging, and throughout the 1920s, numerous campaigns were launched in France to curb the practice as it became crueler and more violent.

In the Netherlands during the 1960s, a particularly brutal form of ragging known as “dachan treatment” gained notoriety, resembling the psychological and physical torture inflicted on

⁷ IN. J. R. INNOV. S. SC., *supra* note 2.

prisoners in World War II concentration camps. These early examples highlight how ragging gradually moved beyond its initial innocuous intent into a form of psychological and physical abuse.

In India, the practice of ragging began to emerge during the British colonial era, influenced by Western norms. The practice found its roots in the country's medical and engineering colleges, where a hybrid of Western methods and local traditions came together. However, it wasn't until the 20th century that ragging gained a more widespread, and alarming, presence across all educational institutions in India. In the early years, ragging was largely harmless, but with the spread of mass media and increased cultural exposure in the 1960s and 1970s, ragging became more violent and extreme.

During the 1990s, ragging reached a terrifying peak in India, especially in southern states where it was often accompanied by alcohol consumption, physical violence, and, in extreme cases, sexual abuse. The most shocking and tragic example of this escalation occurred in 1997 with the murder of Pon Navarasu, a medical student from Tamil Nadu, who was tortured and killed by his seniors as part of a ragging ritual⁸. This horrific event spurred the Tamil Nadu government to introduce the first state-level anti-ragging law in 1997, marking a significant milestone in the fight against ragging in India.

Despite the efforts made in the 1990s and 2000s, ragging remains a significant issue in Indian educational institutions. Even today, ragging manifests in a variety of forms, ranging from mild verbal abuse and psychological humiliation to extreme instances involving forced drinking, physical violence, and sexual exploitation. The widespread nature of ragging, especially in medical and engineering colleges, continues to devastate students, causing lasting physical and psychological trauma. This cruel behavior often includes the forced consumption of substances like alcohol or tobacco, and sometimes, students are subjected to stripping, being forced to watch pornography, or enduring physical assaults⁹.

LEGISLATION RELATED TO ANTI – RAGGING

India's legal framework to combat ragging operates at multiple levels, combining national

⁸ AFR. J. S.SC. HUMANIT. RE., *supra* note 4.

⁹ Prof. Mohan Rao Et al., Centre of School Medicine and Community Health of Social Sciences JNU, Psychosocial Study of Ragging in Selected Educational Institutions in India (2015).

criminal laws, institutional guidelines by the University Grants Commission (UGC), and state-specific legislation. This layered approach ensures accountability, prevention, and punishment for ragging-related offenses.

1. Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023 The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC), addresses ragging indirectly through provisions criminalizing acts associated with physical, psychological, or sexual harm. For instance, Section 122 penalizes voluntarily causing hurt during ragging with imprisonment up to six months and/or a fine, while Section 123 enhances punishment to seven years for grievous injuries. Acts of intimidation, such as mental harassment or threats, fall under Section 351 and attract up to two years of imprisonment. Sexual harassment or abusive conduct linked to ragging is covered under Section 302, which prescribes imprisonment up to 10 years, and Section 196 penalizes obscene behavior. Though the BNS lacks a dedicated anti-ragging section, these provisions are widely invoked to prosecute offenders.
2. UGC Guidelines (2009)- The UGC's *Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions (2009)*, framed in response to the Supreme Court's directive in the Aman Kachroo case, mandate strict institutional accountability. Ragging is broadly defined as any act that causes physical or psychological harm, fear, or trauma to students. Institutions are required to establish Anti-Ragging Committees and Squads to monitor compliance, conduct orientation programs, and obtain affidavits from students and parents pledging non-participation in ragging. Punishments for offenders include expulsion, suspension, or fines, while institutions failing to enforce guidelines risk losing recognition or funding. The UGC also operates a 24/7 helpline (1800-180-5522) and online portals to report incidents.
3. State-Specific Anti-Ragging Laws- Several states have enacted stringent laws to address ragging. For example, the Maharashtra Prohibition of Ragging Act (1999) criminalizes verbal abuse, bullying, or public humiliation, imposing penalties of up to two years' imprisonment and/or a ₹10,000 fine. Kerala's 1998 law imposes similar punishments and introduces collective fines on entire student groups if perpetrators remain unidentified. Karnataka amended its Education Act in 2000 to bar ragging offenders from admission to any institution, while Tamil Nadu's 1997 law prescribes up to two years' imprisonment and a ₹5,000 fine. Andhra Pradesh takes a stricter stance, with fines up to ₹50,000- and three-years' imprisonment under its 1997 legislation.

India's anti-ragging framework blends criminal prosecution under the BNS, institutional accountability via UGC guidelines, and localized penalties through state laws. Effective implementation requires collaboration between educational institutions, law enforcement, and civil society to ensure safe campuses. While legal provisions are robust, sustained awareness campaigns and zero-tolerance policies remain critical to eliminating this deep-rooted issue.

JUDICIAL ACTION AGAINST RAGGING CASES

Over the years, judicial intervention has played a crucial role in shaping anti-ragging laws and ensuring their strict implementation. Several landmark cases have contributed to the evolution of these laws, leading to the formulation of strict guidelines and regulations to prevent ragging in colleges and universities.

One of the earliest and most significant cases was *Vishwa Jagriti Mission v. Central Government (2001)*, where the Supreme Court directed the establishment of stringent anti-ragging guidelines. This case led to the formation of the Raghavan Committee, whose recommendations resulted in the UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging, 2009. These regulations mandated educational institutions to adopt preventive measures such as anti-ragging affidavits, committees, and severe punishments for offenders. Similarly, in *University of Kerala v. Council, Principals' Colleges Kerala (2009)*, the Supreme Court reinforced the importance of strict anti-ragging policies and warned institutions of potential consequences, such as withdrawal of recognition and funding, for non-compliance.

The *Aman Kuchroo Case (2009)* in Himachal Pradesh brought nationwide attention to the severe consequences of ragging after a first-year medical student lost his life due to extreme physical abuse by seniors. This tragic incident led to the Himachal Pradesh government making ragging a non-bailable offense, setting a precedent for stricter laws across India. Additionally, the *State of Maharashtra v. Dr. Praful B. Desai (2003)* case highlighted the importance of video conferencing in judicial proceedings, ensuring the protection of victims and witnesses in sensitive ragging cases.

Other notable cases include the *AIIMS Ragging Case (2018)*, where students of the premier medical institute faced physical and psychological harassment. The Delhi High Court took strict action, reinforcing the importance of UGC's anti-ragging guidelines in medical institutions. More recently, the *Jadavpur University Ragging Case (2023)* saw the tragic death

of a first-year student, leading to protests, arrests, and strict directives from the Calcutta High Court for stronger anti-ragging measures.

The judiciary has played a crucial role in enforcing anti-ragging laws by ensuring institutional accountability, recognizing ragging as a serious criminal offense, and strengthening victim protection mechanisms. Despite the existence of legal frameworks, challenges in enforcement, victim reluctance to report, and institutional apathy still persist. However, continued judicial intervention and strict enforcement of anti-ragging regulations have led to significant improvements. A zero-tolerance policy, coupled with stronger legal and institutional measures, is essential to create a safer and more inclusive academic environment for students in India.

OTHER STRATEGIES TO BE CONSIDERED

To control ragging in educational institutions, a multi-faceted approach is needed. This includes strict policies, awareness campaigns, support systems, peer support groups, regular monitoring, counselling services, engagement activities, and parental involvement. These strategies aim to educate students about the negative impacts of ragging, establish confidential reporting mechanisms, create mentorship programs, and form committees to address incidents promptly, provide counselling services for victims and perpetrators, organize social events to encourage positive interaction, and keep parents informed about anti-ragging measures. By fostering a culture of respect and support, institutions can significantly reduce the occurrence of ragging.

CONCLUSION

The issue of ragging has been a matter of serious concern for over two decades. However, despite the long-standing attention it has received, the problem continues to escalate at an alarming rate. One of the most horrifying recent incidents, the ragging and death case at Jadavpur University, highlighted the inefficacy of current law enforcement and raised questions about the adequacy of existing legal provisions. While the laws in place have certain merits—such as ensuring uniformity in their application across India and recognizing ragging as a national issue—there are significant shortcomings that still allow such incidents to proliferate.

The judiciary has made commendable efforts to eradicate ragging through its judgments and directives, but the expected results have not been achieved. The guidelines and rulings intended

to curb ragging have not yielded the desired outcome, as incidents of violence and harassment in educational institutions continue to be reported. The role of other branches of government, particularly the executive and legislature, has been crucial in tackling this issue. In 2006, a significant reform in the anti-ragging law was enacted with the collaboration of the executive and legislative branches, aiming to strengthen the legal framework against ragging and reduce its occurrence. Despite these efforts, however, incidents of ragging remain disturbingly high, indicating a gap between legal provisions and their practical application.

Ragging is not a problem exclusive to India; it is a global issue that transcends national borders. Across the world, different countries face various forms of ragging and harassment in educational institutions, and the need for a global approach to tackle this problem is pressing. The issue should be addressed at international forums and considered a violation of basic human rights, as it fundamentally undermines a person's right to live with dignity. The negative impacts of ragging on victims—both physical and psychological—are profound, and the violation of their fundamental rights cannot be ignored.

One potential solution could involve empowering victims by allowing them to directly approach the judiciary under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. This provision would provide victims of ragging with a direct legal avenue to seek justice and relief, bypassing the often complex and slow-moving institutional processes. However, this alone will not be sufficient to address the root causes of ragging. It is imperative that a multi-faceted approach is adopted, combining legal reforms with societal awareness and institutional accountability.

The fight against ragging will only succeed if all the necessary measures are followed rigorously and if society as a whole actively participates in this mission. Educational institutions, government authorities, parents, and students themselves all have roles to play in eradicating this deeply entrenched issue. Only through sustained and coordinated efforts can we hope to create a safer and more respectful environment in our schools and universities, where students can pursue their studies without fear of harassment or violence.