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Women gender violence in India, Challenges and innovative solutions

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Abstract

India has always been a male-dominated country. The situation of women was bad earlier and is still bad now. They are exploited everywhere and if they protest, they are beaten. If she goes to the police station to complain, her complaint is not registered and she is humiliated and sent away. Even in ancient times, kings and maharajas considered ladies objects of pleasure and luxury and the same thing can be seen nowadays. The main reasons for this are the male mindset and gender-based violence. Ladies are killed sometimes for dowry, sometimes for love, sometimes for revenge, sometimes for the honour of the family and sometimes for a male baby. The main reason for this is also the male-dominating nature.

In addition, Legal and Judicial Barriers, Police and Law Enforcement Issues, Healthcare System Limitations, Support Systems for Survivors, Shelters and Safe Houses, Health Services, Rehabilitation Programs, Role of NGOs and Civil Society, Community Education and Awareness, Local Success Stories, Existing Laws and Their Effectiveness, Recent Policy Changes are major causes. Everyone knows about this but no one takes any initiative to make society aware. Some future plans such as Improving implementation of existing laws, Increasing funding for shelters and support services, Enhancing training for police and judicial officers, Promoting community-based interventions can help not stop but reduce this gender violence. Therefore, the purpose of writing this review is to highlight the situation of women and make society aware of this issue So that they can be given equal rights in society.

Key words: *women, gender, violence, challenges, innovative solutions*

Introduction

Women gender-based violence is a serious problem in India, affecting countless women and girls. Religion, customs, age-old prejudices, etc. have put Indian women in a subservient and exploitable position in many domains of life. Low rates of participation in education, lack of economic independence, value biases operating against them, etc. have resulted in the women being dependent on men folk and other institutions of authority like the family, neighbourhood and the society. They are usually ignorant of their rights and even if they are not, they do not have easy access to justice.

The issues related to women are being raised and discussed in various form, in the recent times. Of these, 'women gender women violence' is gaining more and more support and recognition, the world over. But despite the enactment of laws, formulation of reformative legal processes, provision of legal aid to the needy, extensive use of the provision of Public Interest Litigation, conduct of Family Courts, Women/Family counselling centres etc., women in India have a long way to go in concretizing their Constitutional Goals into reality.

Women gender violence in India has deep roots in history and culture. Traditional norms and patriarchal values have long placed women in subordinate roles. Violence against women is not a new issue; it has evolved over centuries, influenced by various social, economic and political factors. Cultural practices like dowry, child marriage and honour killings are some of the historical elements that contribute to women based violence.

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Violence against women has insidiously permeated into every aspect of daily living. Workplace harassment, trafficking of women, sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexism in art and language – all hinder the safety and security of women.

It's a well-documented fact that women hesitate to report cases of crimes committed against them, further marginalising their voices.

Girls and women with psychological or physical disabilities are more prone to sexual violence in India, this report notes due to the barriers in communication as well as their dependency on caretakers.

When women do manage to work and get paid for it, workplace harassment is the next gendered hurdle. As per a survey of garment sector workers in National Capital Region and Bengaluru, 17 per cent of women workers reported instances of sexual harassment at the workplace. In the 2019-21 National Family Health Survey (NFHS), 29 per cent of women aged 18-49 years reported having experienced physical violence at home since the age of 15. Six per cent reported experiencing sexual violence. However, only 14 per cent of the women who had ever experienced sexual or physical violence sought help to stop it from family, friends or government institutions. There are a growing number of cases of violence women suffer from partners. In just the year 2021, about 45,000 girls were killed by their partners or other family members around the world.

Without doubt, the endorsement of violence in romantic relationships portrayed in popular culture is a factor. The sinister normalisation of gendered violence is noted in another recent publication, Analysis of sitting MPs/MLAs with Declared Cases Related to Crimes against Women 2024, which states that as high as 151 sitting MPs/MLAs have cases of crimes against women declared in their candidature affidavits.

This article will explore the history, current situation and impact of gender-based violence in India. It will also look at the challenges in addressing this issue, the support systems available for survivors and the efforts being made by communities and policymakers. Finally, we'll discuss innovative solutions and future directions to combat women gender based violence in India.

Women gender violence in India

Violence against women in India refers to physical or sexual violence committed against a woman, typically by a man. Common forms of violence against women in India include acts such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, murder, female infanticide and acid throwing [1].

Dowry Murders

A dowry death is the murder or suicide of a married woman caused by a dispute over her dowry [2]. In some cases, husbands and in-laws will attempt to extort a greater dowry through continuous harassment and torture which sometimes results in the wife committing suicide [3]. The majority of these suicides are done through hanging, poisoning or self-immolation. Bride burning, a form of dowry death, occurs when a woman is set on fire. This act is referred to as bride burning murder, and it is frequently staged to look like a suicide or accident. In some instances, the woman is set on fire in a manner that suggests she caught fire while cooking on kerosene stove [4]. Despite the illegality of dowry in India, the tradition of giving costly gifts to the groom and his relatives remains prevalent at weddings organized by the bride's family [5].

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 6,589 dowry deaths were registered in the year 2021 all over the country, a 3.85% decline from 2020, with the highest number of dowry deaths from the

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state of Uttar Pradesh (2,222 dowry deaths) and the highest dowry death rate (per 1,00,000 population) in the state of Haryana [6,7]

As of 31 December 2024, data from the NCW website showed that 17% (4,383) of the complaints were related to dowry harassment, alongside 292 reported cases of dowry deaths, showcasing the ongoing challenges women continue to face within their marital homes [8].

S. No.	Year	Dowry deaths
1	2008	8172
2	2009	8383
3	2010	8391
4	2011	8618
5	2012	8233
6	2020	6843
7	2021	6589
8	2022	7000

Honour killings

An honour killing is the murder of a family member who is considered to have brought dishonour and shame upon the family [9]. The main reasons are the refusal to enter an arranged marriage, committing adultery, choosing a partner that the family disapproves off and becoming a victim of rape.

The most prominent areas where honour killings occur in India are the northern states they are especially numerous in Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh[10,11]. Honour killings have notably increased in some Indian states which has led to the Supreme Court of India, in June 20 10, issuing notices to both the Indian central government and six states to take preventative measures against honour killings[12].

Female infanticide

Female infanticide is the selected killing of a newborn female child or the termination of a female featus through sex-selective abortion.

In India, there is incentive to bear a son due to their role in providing security for the family in old age and conducting rituals for deceased parents and ancestors. Conversely, daughters are viewed as a societal and economic burden. An illustration of this is the practice of dowry. The apprehension of being unable to afford a socially acceptable dowry and facing social ostracism can result in female infanticide in economically disadvantaged families [13].

Pew Research Centre estimated that there are as many as 9 million females missing from the Indian population in the period 2000-2019 according to Indian government data.

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Contemporary advancements in medical technology enable the determination of a child's sex during the fetal stage. Following the identification of the fetus's sex through these modern prenatal diagnostic methods, families have the option to choose abortion based on gender. A study revealed that out of 8,000 abortions, 7,997 were performed on female foetuses [14].

The featal sex determination and sex-selective abortion by medical professionals now costs The Preconception and Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994 (PCPNDT Act 1994) was modified in 2003 in order to target medical professionals. The Act has proven ineffective due to the lack of implementation. Sex-selective abortions have totaled approximately 4.2-12.1 million from 1980 to 2010 [15]. There was a greater increase in the number of sex-selective abortions in the 1990s than the 2000s. Poorer families are responsible for a higher proportion of abortions than wealthier families. Significantly more abortions occur in rural areas versus urban areas when the first child is female

Rape (sexual crimes)

India is perceived as one of the world's most dangerous countries for sexual violence against women. Rape is one of the most common crimes in India [16].

S.No.	Years	Reported rapes
1	2008	21467
2	2009	21397
3	2010	22172
4	2011	24206
5	2012	24923
6	2013	34707
7	2014	36735
8	2015	34651
9	2016	38947
10	2017	32599
11	2018	33356
12	2019	32033
13	2020	28046
14	2021	31677
15	2022	30948
16	2023	31204

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Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 defines rape as penile and non-penile penetration in bodily orifices of a woman by a man, without the consent of the woman [17]. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, one woman is raped every 20 minutes in India [18]. Incidents of reported rape increased 3% from 2011 to 2012 [19]. Incidents of reported incest rape increased 46.8% from 268 cases in 2011 to 392 cases in 2012 [19]. Rape accounted for 10.9% of reported cases of violence against women in 2016 [20]. Victims of rape are increasingly reporting their rapes and confronting the perpetrator. Women are becoming more independent and educated, which is increasing their likelihood to report their rape [20].

2001 to 2011 crime rates against Scheduled Castes, women and overall in India per 100,000 population

Despite an increase in reported cases of rape, numerous incidents either remain unreported or have their complaints withdrawn, often stemming from concerns about compromising family honour. Many women face challenges in obtaining justice for rape cases as law enforcement may not provide a fair hearing, and medical evidence is frequently undocumented, allowing offenders to evade consequences within the current legal framework [20].

Marital rape

In India, marital rape is not a criminal offense. India is one of fifty countries that have not yet outlawed marital rape [21]. 20% of Indian men admit to forcing their wives or partners to have sex [22]. 6.1% of married Indian women have experienced sexual violence [23].

Marital rape can be classified into one of three types [24]

Battering rape: This includes both physical and sexual violence. The majority of marital rape victims experience battering rape.

Force-only rape: Husbands use the minimum amount of force necessary to coerce his wife.

Compulsive or obsessive rape: Torture and/or "perverse" sexual acts occur and are often physically violent.

Modesty related violence

Violence against women related to modesty encompasses assaults intended to outrage a woman's modesty and insults to the modesty of women.

In the period from 2011 to 2012, there was a 5.5% rise in reported assaults with the intent to outrage her modesty, with Madhya Pradesh contributing 6,655 cases, making up 14.7% of the national incidents [25]. During the same period, reported insults to the modesty of women increased by 7.0%, with Andhra Pradesh recording 3,714 cases, constituting 40.5% of the national total, and Maharashtra documenting 3,714 cases, representing 14.1% of the national total [25].

S.No.	Year	Assaults with intent to outrage modesty	Insults to the modesty of women
1	2008	40,413	12,214
2	2009	38,711	11,009
3	2010	40,613	9,961
4	2011	42,968	8,570

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5	2012	45,351	9,173
6	2013	70,739	12,589
7	2014	82,235	9,735
8	2015	82,422	8,685

Human trafficking and forced prostitution

A mother who travelled from her village in Nepal to Mumbai, in India, with the aspiration of locating and rescuing her teenage daughter who had been trafficked into an Indian brothel.

During the period between 2011 and 2012, a noticeable surge of 5.3% was observed in the occurrences of violations under the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act [47] of 1956 in India. Within this alarming trend, Tamil Nadu reported a substantial 500 incidents, representing a significant 19.5% share of the total nationwide violations [25]. Simultaneously, Andhra Pradesh documented 472 incidents, contributing significantly with an 18.4% share to the overall national statistic. This increase in reported violations underscores the pressing need for enhanced efforts and measures to address and curb the illicit activities falling under the purview of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956 in various states across the country [25].

S.No.	Year	Imported girls from foreign countries	Violations of the Immoral Traffic Act
1	2008	67	2659
2	3009	48	2474
3	2010	36	2499
4	2011	80	2435
5	2012	59	2563
6	2013	31	2579
7	2014	13	2070
8	2015	06	2424

Domestic violence

Domestic violence is abuse by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as dating, marriage, cohabitation or a familial relationship. Domestic violence is also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, dating abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV). Domestic violence can be physical, emotional, verbal, economic and sexual abuse. Domestic violence can be subtle, coercive or violent. As politician Renuka Choudary says, in India, 70% of women are victims of domestic violence.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS) conducted in 2016 uncovered a concerning aspect: a substantial 86% of Indian women who experienced domestic violence chose not to disclose their ordeal, refraining from sharing it with friends or family members. This silence is intricately tied to the victims' internalization of social

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norms, leading them to believe that they are inadequate as wives and, consequently, deserving of the inflicted punishment.

The pervasive acceptance of domestic violence among women is further highlighted by survey findings indicating that 45% of Indian women rationalize their husbands' abusive actions. The complexity of this issue is illuminated by the National Family Health Survey of 2019–21, pointing out the alarming acceptance of spousal abuse in the southern states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana [26, 27]. In these states, a striking 80% of wives express agreement that their husbands are justified in resorting to physical violence, a notably higher percentage compared to other regions in India.

Equally disconcerting is the acknowledgment by 38% of Indian men admitting to engaging in physical abuse against their partners [28]. In response to the widespread prevalence of domestic violence, the Indian government has implemented legislative measures, notably the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005. While these efforts signify a commitment to addressing the issue, the data underscores the complex interplay of societal attitudes and norms that contribute to the persistence of domestic violence, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to challenge and dismantle deeply ingrained beliefs and behaviours [25].

S.No	Year	Reported cruelty by a husband or relative
1	2008	81344
2	2009	89546
3	2010	94041
4	2011	99135
5	2012	106527
6	2013	118866
7	2014	122877
8	2015	113403

Forced child marriage

Young girls face a heightened susceptibility to coerced early marriages, owing to their dual status as both children and females. Their vulnerability is exacerbated by their limited comprehension of the significance and obligations associated with marriage. The perception of girls as a burden on their parents and apprehension that they might break their chastity prior to marriage are contributing factors to child marriage. There have been calls for interventions and awareness programs to address the root causes and consequences of child marriages, recognizing the unique challenges faced by young girls [29]. Around 7.84 million female children under the age of 10 are married in India [30].

Acid throwing

Acid throwing, also known as an acid attack or vitriolage, stands as a brutal form of violent assault disproportionately affecting women in India. This act involves the intentional hurling of acid

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or corrosive substances onto an individual's body "with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill [31]. Typically directed at the face, acid attacks cause severe burns, damaging the skin and often exposing or dissolving bone.[32, 33] The aftermath of such attacks is marked by enduring physical scars, potential blindness, and the onset of various social, psychological, and economic challenges.

Recognizing the gravity of this issue, the Indian legislature has taken steps to regulate the sale of acid [34]. However, despite these measures, women in India face a heightened risk of falling victim to acid attacks, constituting at least 72% of reported cases. Disturbingly, the country has witnessed a rising trend in acid attacks over the past decade [35].

Between 2014 and 2018, National Crime Records Bureau data revealed that 1,483 victims registered cases of acid attacks in India. While the number of acid attacks continues to rise, there is a concerning decline in the number of people charged by the police. Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Delhi collectively account for 42% of all acid attack victims in India. Perpetrators of these horrific crimes often evade punishment, as exemplified by the fact that out of 734 cases that went to trial in 2015, only 33 cases resulted in completion [36].

Perpetuation

The persistence of violence against women in India is deeply rooted in entrenched systems of sexism and patriarchy that permeate Indian culture [37]. The cycle begins in early childhood, where young girls face unequal access to education compared to their male counterparts [38]. Gender-based inequality manifests even earlier, with reports indicating that female children often receive less food and are provided with less nutritious diets lacking in essential elements like butter and milk and 80% of boys attend primary school, while only half of the girls are afforded the same opportunity [38].

Education itself becomes a contributing factor to the perpetuation of gender disparities, as girls are informed about the inequities they will face in life, whereas boys remain uninformed and unprepared to treat women and girls as equals [19].

As women progress into adulthood, the social climate continues to reinforce inequality, contributing to the prevalence of violence against them. Within the context of marriage, many women in India come to perceive violence as a routine aspect of their married lives. Those subjected to gender-based violence often face victim-shaming, being told that their safety is solely their responsibility and that any harm they endure is their own fault. Social and cultural beliefs, such as the importance of family honour, exert immense pressure on women to remain complicit in the face of abuse [19].

When a woman decides to report an incident of gender-based violence or crime, access to adequate support is not guaranteed. Law enforcement officers and doctors may opt not to report cases due to fears of damaging their own honour or bringing shame upon themselves. Even when a victim seeks medical assistance, archaic and invasive methods like the notorious "two-finger test" are often employed, exacerbating the problem and causing psychological harm [39].

Challenges for women violence

1. Legal and Judicial Barriers: The legal system in India often fails to protect victims of gender-based violence. Many laws are outdated and do not address the current realities faced by women. Additionally, the judicial process is slow, causing delays in justice. Victims frequently encounter intimidation and harassment during trials, which discourages them from seeking legal help.

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2. Police and Law Enforcement Issues: One shocking example of systemic violence is how women gender-based violence cases are often handled by Indian police. About 40% of officers believe that most complaints are exaggerated, leading to a lack of proper investigation. This attitude results in many cases being dismissed or not taken seriously. Moreover, there is a shortage of female officers, making it difficult for women to report crimes comfortably.

3. Healthcare System Limitations: The healthcare system in India is not equipped to handle the needs of women gender-based violence survivors. There is a lack of sufficient shelters, counselling services, and rehabilitation programs. Medical professionals often lack training in dealing with such cases, leading to inadequate care and support for victims.

4. Support Systems for Survivors: The lack of sufficient shelters, counselling services, and rehabilitation programs for survivors of women gender-based violence is a critical issue.

5. Shelters and Safe Houses: Shelters and safe houses provide a temporary refuge for survivors. These places offer a safe environment where individuals can start to rebuild their lives. However, the number of available shelters is far from adequate, leaving many without a safe place to go.

6. Counselling and Mental Health Services; Counselling and mental health services are essential for helping survivors cope with trauma. The percentage of survivors of women gender-based violence seeking health care is far lower than needed. Many survivors do not receive the mental health support they require, which can hinder their recovery [40].

7. Rehabilitation Programs: Rehabilitation programs aim to help survivors reintegrate into society. These programs often include job training, education and other support services. Despite their importance, these programs are not widely available, making it difficult for survivors to regain their independence.

In South Asia, the prevalence of lifetime intimate partner violence is 35% higher than the global average. This highlights the urgent need for effective support systems for survivors.

8. Role of NGOs and Civil Society: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups play a crucial role in combating women gender-based violence in India. These organizations provide essential services such as legal aid, counselling and safe shelters for survivors. They also work on raising awareness and advocating for policy changes to better protect women.

9. Community Education and Awareness: Community education programs are vital in changing societal attitudes towards women gender-based violence. These initiatives often include workshops, seminars, and public campaigns aimed at educating people about the importance of gender equality and the harmful effects of women gender-based violence. In Nagaland, India, around 2,000 government-run schools will benefit from women gender-based violence interventions supported by the World Bank.

10. Local Success Stories: Local success stories serve as powerful examples of how community efforts can make a difference. In various parts of India, grassroots movements have successfully reduced instances of women gender-based violence by empowering women and educating communities. These stories highlight the importance of collective action and the impact it can have on creating safer environments for women.

11. Existing Laws and Their Effectiveness: India has several laws aimed at combating women gender-based violence. The primary legislation addressing domestic violence in India is the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), enacted in 2005. This landmark law provides a framework for protecting

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women from various forms of abuse. However, its effectiveness is often questioned due to poor implementation and lack of awareness.

12. Recent Policy Changes: Recent years have seen some policy changes aimed at strengthening protections for women. Amendments to the Criminal Law in 2013, following the Nirbhaya case, introduced stricter penalties for sexual offenses. Despite these changes, challenges remain in ensuring these laws are enforced effectively.

Innovative solutions for women violence

1. Technological Interventions: Technological advancements are playing a crucial role in combating women gender-based violence in India. Mobile apps and online platforms are being developed to provide immediate help to victims. These tools can connect women to emergency services, legal aid and counselling. For instance, some apps allow users to send distress signals to pre-selected contacts and local authorities.

2. Educational Programs and Campaigns: Education is a powerful tool in the fight against women gender-based violence. Schools and community centres are implementing programs to teach young people about gender equality and respect. Campaigns are also being launched to raise awareness about the impact of cyber violence on women. These initiatives aim to change societal attitudes and reduce the stigma associated with reporting violence.

3. Empowerment and Economic Independence: Empowering women economically is essential for reducing women gender-based violence. Programs that provide vocational training and financial literacy can help women gain independence. When women have their own income, they are less likely to stay in abusive relationships. Additionally, community-based projects are being set up to support women entrepreneurs and create safe work environments.

The future of combating women gender-based violence in India lies in a combination of technology, education and economic empowerment. By addressing these areas, we can create a safer and more equitable society for all [41].

Conclusion

Women gender-based violence in India is a serious problem that affects many women and girls. The challenges are many, from lack of support services to societal attitudes that blame victims. However, there are solutions. Education and awareness can change how people think about gender roles. Better laws and stricter enforcement can help protect women. Support services like shelters and counselling can help survivors heal. By working together, we can make India a safer place for everyone. To better address women gender-based violence, future legislation should focus on: Improving implementation of existing laws, Increasing funding for shelters and support services, Enhancing training for police and judicial officers, Promoting community-based interventions, Effective legislation is crucial, but it must be paired with robust implementation and community support to truly make a difference.

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