



Review Paper

Crime against Women in India: A Study of Barrier to Empowerment and SDGs Progress

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Abstract

The increasing crime and violence against women in India is a matter of grave concern. Women's violence is not just a problem of the present society but has a history that spans centuries. Women have historically faced many sorts of oppression and exploitation. However, in the present times, this problem is becoming more complex and severe. The increasing violence against women in Indian society presents a horrifying scenario. The violence against women is seen in various forms and situations. The world is leading in technical breakthroughs, luxurious life and others the proportion of eve teasing, sexual assault, gang rape, murder after rape and other crime against women is also increasing. Rape and brutal murders have become very common nowadays. Dowry deaths, battering, bride burning, cyber crimes and other forms of violence have become part of daily life in modern Indian society. Criminal acts targeting women has significantly increased in independent India. The parallel growth in criminality against women is impeding the country's social, political and economic advancement. The paper argues that the growing crime against women in India represents a major obstacle to their empowerment and hinders progress towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Crime, Empowerment, SDGs, Violence and Women.

Introduction

History shows that women held a privileged status in ancient India. It is indeed a point of pride that there was a culture where they were respected and held in high regard in social life¹. Women were regarded as deities and highly esteemed in ancient Indian civilization². Women are revered in Indian culture's "Vedas Purana," where they are portrayed as the goddesses of power, wisdom and wealth respectively, Mother Saraswati, Mother Lakmi, and Mother Durga. Women were venerated as "Devi" or Goddesses in the Vedas, which extolled them as the mother. However, this reverence was more symbolic as women simultaneously faced severe suppression and subjugation in a patriarchal society³. Across India, women endured oppression and suppression due to societal adherence to traditional beliefs, suffering from violence both domestic and public, including physical and emotional abuse⁴. This contradictory situation reflects that while women were sometimes honored as goddesses, they were also often treated as mere slaves³.

In many areas of life today, women are viewed as inferior to males and have become nothing more than sex objects. Women are frequently the victims of humiliation, abuse, torture and exploitation⁴. Offences against women occur frequently. When it comes to violence, women are among the most vulnerable section of society⁵. These forms of crime and violence ranging from domestic abuse and sexual harassment to trafficking and femicide, not only inflict physical and psychological harm on

women but also perpetuate a cycle of fear and subjugation. This pervasive threat undermines women's ability to take full part in economic and social life thereby impeding their progress towards equality. In the highly developed modern era we live in, there is much debate over how to address the global issue of crime against women. Even though there are numerous rules and regulations protecting women, the number of crimes committed against them rises year after year⁶.

News of women's human rights being violated still shocks our conscience every single day. Development syndrome is the topic of inquiry. Who are the women and where are the people? Are women live-long and well? If not, who bears the blame? Women are treated unfairly while being referred to as fair sex. A woman's life is characterized by the possibility of violence at one extreme and pleasure at the other. When talking about women's empowerment, these are some difficult issues that need to be addressed¹.

In the twenty-first century, one of the key priorities is empowering women. However, in practice, women's emancipation remains a myth. We see in our daily lives how different social evils victimize women³. Despite numerous efforts by the government, women in India still have comparatively less influence and a lesser status than men. Regarding access to jobs and education, there is a gender gap. There's a big gender difference in political participation as well⁷.

In the history of human evolution, women have played an equal role to men. A nation's social, economic and political advancement will stagnate in the absence of women's participation in national activities⁸. Thus, incorporating women's advancement as a key goal in the SDGs highlights the importance of this issue. Therefore, women's empowerment is the only way for India to turn its massive female labor force into an effective human resource and reach the position of a developed nation⁹.

However, policy makers have prioritized women's welfare ever since independence but this has changed over time. Beginning with the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-78) onwards, there was a notable change in the focus from women's welfare to development. India has also supported a number of international initiatives, including the Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1993, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), and the Outcome Document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly Session on Gender Equality and Development and Peace for the 21st Century¹⁰. In this paper, it has been discussed how crime and violence against women are serious issues in today's time and how they are obstacles to women empowerment and SDGs especially SDG-5, which we aim to achieve by 2030.

Review of Literature: (WHO, 2014)¹¹ reports stated that the SDG-5 is concerned with women's empowerment. It is a continuation of Millennium Development Goal 3. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to eradicate all detrimental behaviors and acts of violence directed towards women. The SDG-16 which aims to end cruelty, abuse, mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking and other types of violence which includes the goal of promoting inclusive and peaceful societies for sustainable development. These two SDGs set targets in addition to the other SDGs that attempted to prevent and lessen violence against women, either directly or indirectly. Gajjar¹ investigated the issue of crime against women, which is a major topic not only in India but throughout the world. Violence and crime have a negative impact on women's lives. While many advocates for women's emancipation have come and gone but crimes against women and violations of human rights persist. A gender issue essentially impacts women, either directly or indirectly. Swami Vivekananda once said "There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. A bird cannot fly on its one wing". The significance of this finding is thus highlighted by the fact that one of the main objectives of the SDGs is women's empowerment. Thus, a society that is inclusive requires the empowerment of women.

Objectives: i. To analyze crimes against women using data from the National Crime Records Bureau and other relevant publications. ii. To examine how these crimes impede women's empowerment and hinder progress towards Sustainable

Development Goals. iii. To suggest effective solutions for reducing crimes against women and promoting women's empowerment.

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive and analytical approach to examine crimes against women in India. Such crimes are a global concern and a major barrier to women's empowerment and the achievement of SDGs especially SDG-5. The study relies on secondary data sourced from the Crime Records Bureau of India, census data, population surveys, as well as review papers and journals that focus on crime against women.

Issue of Crime against Women in India: The phenomenon of violence against women is widespread. Regardless of socioeconomic status, violence against women occurs all over the world in Asia (6-67 per cent), Europe (13-46 per cent), North America (7-32 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (14-38 per cent), Africa (6-64 per cent) and Oceania (17-68 per cent)¹². Physical or mental cruelty to women, whether direct or indirect, is known as crime against women (also known as Violence against women. Crime against Women is defined as "crimes committed specifically against women and involving only women as victims"¹³.

A traditional, prejudiced mindset in society that dates back centuries might expose women to severe discrimination. The lower status of women exacerbates and perpetuates gender-based violence, including female feticide, gender discrimination in healthcare, nutrition, education, dress codes, mobile phone use, and freedom of movement, as well as early marriage, trafficking, rape, assault, insults to modesty, indecent representation of women, honor killings, and so on^{14,15}. Certain specific forms of gender-based violence against women are classified as crimes against women¹⁶. The Classification of crime against women are shown in Table-1.

Table-1: Categorization of Crime and Violence against Women¹⁷

Life Stages	Violence tied
Infancy	Sex selective abortion, disregard for proper medical treatment etc.
Childhood	Unequal access to food, healthcare and education, child marriage, child pornography, trafficking, child abuse, sexual harassment, gender based violence in schools etc.
Adult	Dowry Abuse, marital Rape, workplace sexual abuse, honor killings, rape, forced prostitution, trafficking, abuse of women with disabilities, battering, acid throwing etc.
Old age	Elderly widow maltreatment and neglect, inadequate access to care, food and support systems, disparities associated with widowhood, and a lack of assets have left them in a state of destitution and agony etc.

Crime against women has been a persistent issue, occurring both during times of peace and conflict. This offences ranges from minor teasing to rape and murder, and can happen in various settings including homes, streets, workplaces and even prisons. Few incidents of crime against women are reported, even fewer are accused and alarmingly small counts of perpetrators are actually treated harshly. Crime and violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent human rights violations. Atrocities against women and other related issues are significant factors contributing to the problems faced by women¹⁸.

Nearly every day, women are impacted by various forms of violence, which is upsetting society. According to the Central Home Ministry's Crime Record Bureau report, crime against women is becoming more prevalent and as a result, women are becoming victims of violence on a massive scale on a daily basis. It is estimated that 17 women die from dowry-related causes each day, while abductions of women occur every 44 and 47 minutes, respectively. Women can experience violence both outside and within their families. This includes crimes such as kidnapping, rape and murder, as well as domestic issues like dowry harassment, dowry-related deaths, marital rape, wife battering, sexual abuse, deprivation of nutritious food, female genital mutilation and so on⁸.

Crimes against women are a direct threat to India's efforts to empower women. A number of significant obstacles impede the empowerment of women in India. There is still a gender disparity in education, with women having less education than males and encountering more obstacles in the workplace and in further education. Many women are forced into exploitative home responsibilities by these problems which are made worse by poverty. Women's wellbeing is also greatly impacted by health issues, particularly those related to maternity care. Gender differences in nutrition and health also lead to greater death rates, while professional inequality and gender bias impact women's employment and promotion prospects. Inequalities within households also restrict the duties and obligations of women⁷.

Numerous global investigations endeavored to ascertain the fundamental origins of criminality against women. The fundamental causes of criminality against women have been the subject of numerous international investigations. A number of factors have been linked to crime against women, including women's educational attainment, poverty, alcohol and drug usage, gender inequality, deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and cultural traditions¹⁹⁻²¹.

The SDGs a collection of 17 goals and 169 targets or aims intended to end abuse, exploitation, injustice and initiate a period of progress for everyone, globally were agreed upon by all 193 UN member states with unanimous consent on September 25, 2015. The SDGs placed a high priority on preventing violence against women. Gender equality and the empowerment of women are the sole focus of SDG-5, but SDG-

16 provides indirect support for these goals as well. This is shown in Table-2.

Table-2: Goals and objectives for preventing and ending crime and violence against women²².

SDG	Description
SDG 5	Empowering women and girls and achieving equitable treatment of genders
Aim 5.1	Eliminate all types of global discrimination against women
Aim 5.2	Eradicate all types of offences against women
Aim 5.3	Abolish all harmful practices, including underage marriage, coerced marriage and female genital excision
Aim 5.4	Acknowledge and value women's unpaid care giving and domestic work
Aim 5.5	Promote women's leadership and contribution in decision-making across all sectors
Aim 5.6	Affirm access to reproductive health and rights for everyone, everywhere
Aim 5.a	Equitable access to financial services, assets and economic resources
Aim 5.b	Promote empowerment of women through technology
Aim 5.c	Implement and fortify laws and policies that promote gender parity
SDG 16	Promoting harmonious and equitable societies for long term sustainability
Aim 16.1	Decrease all types of offences and deaths associated with them in order to create inclusive and peaceful society

The task of supervising the implementation of the SDGs has been given to the NITI Aayog. These Aayog established a multidisciplinary Voluntarily National Review Task Force to oversee the documentation assessment and processing¹⁰. The SDGs may not be achieved as a result of Crime against women since it interacts with many facets of social, economic and gender equality. The effects of crime against women directly affect the following Sustainable Development Goals. The goals of the SDGs cover SDG-5 (Gender Equality), SDG-3 (Health and Well-being), SDG-10 (Inequality Reduction), SDG-4 (Educational Quality), SDG-8 (Economic Development and Decent Work), SDG-11 (Sustainable Urban and Rural Development), SDG-16 (Justice, Peace, and Institutional Strength), and SDG-17 (Collaborative Partnerships for Achievement). Reaching the SDGs by 2030 requires addressing crime against women on a global and national level¹⁹. Since these crimes have a direct impact on the advancement of several SDGs, preventing them is essential to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal²³.

About 48,800 women and girls were victims of murder at the hands of intimate partners or family members across the globe

in 2022. This indicates that, on average, more than five women or girls are killed by a member of their own family every hour²⁴. One out of every three women reports having experienced violence of some kind. It could be committed by an intimate partner or by someone else and could take the form of physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Violence can negatively impact women's physical, emotional, sexual and reproductive health²⁵.

India has a child sex ratio of 934 per 1000 live births²⁶. The female literacy rate is approximately 70.3 per cent, which is 14.4 per cent lower than the male rate²⁷. India, which is ranked 129th out of 146 nations according to the global gender inequality index, fell two spots in the worldwide rankings from 127th in 2023 to 129th in 2024. India is currently the worst performer in South Asia, coming in fifth place after Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan²⁸.

One woman in India is sexually assaulted every 16 minutes, and another woman is mistreated by her in-laws every 4 minutes. There are 88 documented rape attacks every day in 2019. According to the Indian Penal Code, the most common crimes against women are "assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty" (21.8 per cent), "kidnapping and abduction of women" (17.9 per cent), "cruelty by husband or his relatives" (30.9 per cent), and "rape" (7.9 per cent). The rate of crime per lakh female population in 2019 was 62.4 compared to 58.8 in 2018. The highest numbers of recorded rape crimes were in Uttar Pradesh (3,065) and Rajasthan (6,000)²⁹.

In India, within the past 20 years there has been an increase in crimes against women. Molestation and dowry deaths are positively associated with torture and rape. Notably, the expanding accessibility of different web media platforms is also contributing to the daily rise in cybercrimes³⁰. While overall crime in India has decreased over the past 20 years, crime against women has grown³¹. According to a new Bureau of National Crime report, there have been disturbing figures about crimes against women. This report shows a 4.0 per cent increase in recorded crimes against women in 2022, with 18.7 per cent assault, 19.2 per cent kidnapping, and 7.1 per cent rape. The crime rate per lakh women increased from 66.4 in 2022 to 64.5 in 2021, primarily under cruelty by husband or his relatives³².

The Indian government has taken a number of legislative and preventive actions to protect women and lessen the number of cases of crime against women. These include the Legislative Services Authorities (LSA) Act, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2018, the creation of the National Commission for Women (NCW), programs like Mission Shakti and Sakhi-One-stop Centers, as well as campaigns like the Digital Shakti Campaign and the Nirbhaya Fund³³. Despite these efforts, the National Crime Records Bureau, UN Women, UNDP, UNODC, and WHO all release alarming data and statistics about women.

Thus, Crime against women undermines their empowerment and progress toward the SDGs. Crime and discrimination limit

women's participation in social, economic or political life, violating their fundamental human rights and hindering societal growth. Fear and trauma can discourage women from pursuing education, employment, leadership opportunities, perpetuating poverty and inequality. Ensuring women's safety, upholding human rights and promoting a more inclusive society are essential to addressing these challenges.

Results and Discussion

India has enacted various laws and established numerous government programs to combat violence against women. Despite these efforts, crimes against women continue to rise. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) provides troubling statistics, highlighting the need for more effective and comprehensive strategies to address and prevent such violence.

Crime against women is a extreme disregard for human rights. All types of crimes against women have severe and far-reaching effects on their lives. These crimes directly obstruct progress toward several SDGs particularly Goal 5 which focuses on equal gender rights.

Various issues, challenges and factors act as obstacles to women's empowerment, creating significant constraints. Factors such as pauperism, educational deprivation and discriminatory practices exacerbate these challenges. To achieve SDGs and build a sustainable world, it is essential to prioritize and advance women's empowerment.

Suggestions: i. Promoting the awareness of women's rights, education and health must be a top priority in both rural and urban communities. ii. Building women's capacity and empowering them through equal opportunities. iii. Ensuring women are equally visible in all life domains. iv. There should be a push for Mahila police stations, Mahila Courts and Women's Cells in police stations, to specialize in handling cases related to women only. v. Making certain that all applicable laws are enforced diligently and that complaints are handled quickly, with particular attention to issues of violence and gender-based harm. vi. Adequate rehabilitation of women who have experienced violence. In addition, raising awareness among relevant authorities is necessary. vii. There is a pressing need to change society's negative attitudes toward women. viii. Public documents should be cleansed of any content that disrespects the dignity of women.

Conclusion

Women are increasingly becoming victims of various templates of crime in India and around the world. Families in our nation are still dominated by men. The gender gap persists throughout the nation and women's participation is minimal. Let us pledge to build an inclusive society where everyone, regardless of gender, has the same opportunity to express them and contribute to their own and the community's well-being. A society without

women is like a body without a heart. This will elevate the values and standards of families, society and ultimately the nation. Pandit Nehru famously stated, "When women move forward, the family, the village, and the nation move." While women represent half of the world's populace, gender inequity can be found in every country worldwide. The empowerment of women has surfaced as one of the most urgent challenges of our time in the twenty-first century, both nationally and globally. The government's ambition to accomplish the SDGs by 2030 cannot be done alone. Society must create an environment free of gender discrimination, ensuring women have equal opportunities and full participation in all domains of life. As responsible citizens, we have a duty to raise awareness and report all instances of crime against women within our communities. In today's era of globalization, there is an urgent need to mobilize India's Criminal Justice System in order to maintain the country's law and order condition so that one can feel comfortable and secure.

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