

Exploring The Nexus of Gender-Based Violence: A Psychological and Sociological Analysis of Crimes Against Women in India

Neha Roshni Yooshing

Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, University of Lucknow

Abstract

Gender-based violence against women is a pervasive global issue with profound psychological and sociological implications. This theoretical research paper delves into the complex nexus of gender-based violence by examining the psychological and sociological factors contributing to its occurrence and persistence in India. Drawing upon existing literature and theories, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of crimes against women, shedding light on the interplay between individual and societal factors. By analyzing both perspectives, this research underscores the urgency of addressing these perspectives in shaping effective policies and interventions for a safer and more equitable world for women.

Keywords: Crimes, women, victims, psychological, sociological, Gender-Based Violence, policies

Introduction

“No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women.” — **Muhammad Ali Jinnah**

The most widespread violation of human rights that affects the majority of the population and exists in all nations and all strata is undoubtedly ‘Crimes against women.’ Numerous thousands of women and girls face some kind of gender-based violence every single day. Women of all ages, religions, nationalities, and geographic locations are impacted by crime against them, which has a strong grip over their lives. In the Indian context, where deep-seated patriarchal norms and gender inequalities persist, crimes against women have continued to challenge social fabric and human rights (Koenig et al., 2006). Millions of crimes against women, including sex slavery, rape, murder, acid throwing, honor killings and dowry killings are recorded each year in India, many of which go unreported (Thirugnanam,2020).

According to the Rigveda and other ancient Indian texts, women enjoyed a high status in society at that time. Later, however, due to social, political, and economic changes, women lost their standing and were cast aside. Several wicked practices and customs entered the scene, oppressing the women and restricting them to the confines of the home (Goel,2004). Over time, the society witnessed the deterioration of the condition of females and the birth of a girl started being considered as unlucky. Today, inhumane attitudes against women are a result of changing lifestyles, uneven economic growth, and a lack of regard for moral

principles, which has led to an increase in crimes against women. These crimes not only inflict physical harm but also leave indelible psychological scars on survivors, affecting their mental well-being, dignity, and overall quality of life (Breslau et al., 1998).

Meaning of Crimes against Women and its Categories

Direct or indirect physical or mental abuse of women is considered a crime. The phrase "**crimes against women**" are specific, legally recognised acts of violence in which "**women are the victims**" (Singh and Choudhary, 2012). Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (WHO, 2021). The 1950 Indian Constitution was crucial in decreasing prejudice. The Indian Constitution has numerous clauses prohibiting gender discrimination, as well as numerous Directive Principles of State Policies (DPSPs) that support the empowerment of women. In order to effectively combat these crimes, numerous new socio-economic laws against crimes have been introduced along with numerous modifications to the existing laws. These are primarily divided into two groups: (1) Crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and (2) Crimes under Special & Local Laws (SLL).

The Indian Penal Code, 1860 (IPC) lists the following as crimes:

- Acid Attack (Sections 326A and 326B)
- Outraging the modesty of women (Section 354)
- Sexual harassment (Section 354A)
- Murder, Dowry killing and Abetment of Suicide (Sections 302, 304B and 306)
- Kidnapping (Sections 363–373)
- Rape (Sections 375, 376, 376A, 376B, 376C, 376D and 376E)
- Attempt to commit rape (Section 376/511)
- Importation of girls up to 21 years of age (Section 366B)
- Cruelty by husband or his relatives (Section 498A)
- Voyeurism (Section 354C)
- Stalking (Section 354D)
- Assault on women with intent to disrobe a woman (Section 354B)
- Eve Teasing (Section 509)

The Special and Local Laws (SLL) contain the following acts that have specific provisions to stop crimes against women and safeguard their interests:

- The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929
- The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- The Dowry (Prohibition) Act, 1961
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987
- Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
- The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

There has been no decrease in crime against women in India despite the passage of these laws and amendments to existing laws for effective deterrence against crime. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, India records 49 crimes against women per hour and 86 rapes per day on average (NCRB,2021). There are various sociological and psychological factors for it. India needs a strong and effective law enforcement system to stop this threat. The most crucial reform is for society to see women on an equal footing with men. Since some crimes are committed to demonstrate dominance, equality advocacy is crucial. Indian society still needs to get rid of its patriarchal mentality. Providing moral education is essential in the modern era so that boys understand that despite their physical differences from girls, both are equal as humans.

1. Psychological Perspectives

This section delves deeper into the psychological aspect of crimes against women, shedding light on the intricate dynamics that contribute to these crimes and exploring the psychological consequences experienced by survivors. It draws upon relevant scholarly literature and research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological dimensions involved.

1.1. Perpetrator Psychology

Toxic masculinity, a prevailing issue in India and worldwide, forms the backdrop against which gender-based violence often occurs (Connell, 2005). Perpetrators of crimes against women often exhibit traits associated with toxic masculinity, such as the belief in male superiority and the entitlement to exert power over women. This psychological construct perpetuates harmful male stereotypes and fuels entitlement, dominance, and aggression. A common psychological presumption of a jilted partner is that if he sleeps with her, she will not leave him, which frequently results in the rape of young women. The societal stigma associated with a woman's virginity gives rise to this thinking. According to testimonies from victims of assault, men usually refrain from using physical violence until the victim has shown emotional commitment to him, such as by moving in together, getting married, or getting pregnant. Once an emotional tie has been established, it has been found that the man may feel entitled to control his partner's behavior because the woman cannot easily quit the relationship now (Sims,2017). Many men engage in these emotional psychological games to manipulate women.

Every year several women become the victims of numerous acid attacks, murders, and other heinous crimes just because they refuse to give in to men's expectations or sexual desires. Once again, the issue is the patriarchal mentality, which has educated men to believe they are superior to women. They may feel entitled to maintaining the connection by force or seeking revenge because they are not taught how to deal with rejection. It is essential to understand the psychological factors underpinning perpetrator behaviour, which can range from anger to power-seeking motivations (Heise et al., 2002). Psychological motivations behind these crimes can vary, but common factors include anger, frustration, and a desire to establish dominance.

These motivations can vary from one case to another but often include:

- **Anger and Frustration:** Some perpetrators are driven by anger and frustration, which may stem from personal issues, economic stress, or unresolved conflicts (Heise et al., 2002). In moments of intense anger, they may resort to violence as an outlet.

- **Desire for Power and Control:** A common underlying psychological factor is the desire for power and control over the victim (Babcock et al., 2003). Perpetrators often believe in their entitlement to exert dominance, which may be reinforced by societal norms that reinforce traditional gender roles (Connell, 2005). Cruelty towards intimate partners is commonly motivated by control and power, but it can also be a response to a man's feelings of helplessness and unwillingness to accept rejection.
- **Psychological Entitlement:** Toxic masculinity, characterized by an exaggerated sense of entitlement and superiority, can drive some individuals to commit acts of violence against women (Cleary et al., 2018). They may feel threatened by empowered women and resort to violence to reassert control.
- **Cycle of Violence:** Some perpetrators come from backgrounds where they witnessed or experienced violence, leading to a cycle of violence that they perpetuate (Walker, 1979). This cycle is often rooted in unresolved psychological issues and trauma.

At the individual level, cultural stereotypes about masculine entitlements, gender roles, and violence are reflected in attitudes and gender schemas (mental structures that an individual uses to organize knowledge and guide cognitive processes and behavior). Once a male brain has created a violence-supportive schema regarding women, their attitude and behavior towards females will be based on things that are mostly going to be criminal and cruel in nature. One-third of children who experience abuse or parental violence grow up to be violent people who may even commit crimes. Sons of violent parents are more prone than males from nonviolent homes to abuse their intimate partners (Widom, 1989). Males who experienced sexual abuse as children are more likely to commit sexual offences as adults (Briere, 1992). It is because of the result of psychological process known as "conditioning," which involves becoming trained or habituated to behave in a particular way or to accept certain conditions without thinking.

Understanding these psychological motivations is crucial for developing effective prevention strategies and interventions. It highlights the need for programs aimed at addressing anger management, challenging toxic masculinity, and providing counselling for individuals with a history of trauma or violence.

1.2. Victim Psychology

Considering the psychological perspective of women, since they value relationships and have personality attributes like agreeableness and sympathy, women are typically seen to be more forgiving than males. Women are likely to willingly forgive the first violent incident against them because they perceive it to be an anomaly. They do not realize that doing so can encourage future violent behavior leading to crimes like cruelty by husband or his relatives and domestic violence against them. Victims of rape and domestic violence display a range of mental conditions that are similar to those of trauma victims from other situations, such as war and natural calamity. Many trauma sufferers feel shock, denial, disbelief, anxiety, disorientation, and withdrawal after a traumatic event (Bessel, 1994). The psychological repercussions on victims are profound, encompassing conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and pervasive feelings of helplessness (Breslau et al., 1998).

1.3. Consequences for victim

- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** One of the most common psychological consequences of gender-based violence is the development of PTSD among survivors. PTSD manifests through symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and hypervigilance (Breslau et al., 1998).

These symptoms often persist long after the traumatic incident, affecting the victim's overall well-being.

- **Depression and Anxiety:** Victims of gender-based violence frequently experience depression and anxiety disorders as a result of their traumatic experiences. The persistent fear, guilt, and shame associated with the violence can contribute to the development of these conditions (Campbell & Raja, 1999). Survivors may also suffer from panic attacks and social anxiety.
- **Low Self-Esteem and Self-Blame:** Many survivors of gender-based violence internalize the blame for what happened to them, leading to feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth (Frazier et al., 2001). They may question their own actions and decisions, even when they are not at fault. This self-blame can hinder their recovery process and make it challenging to seek help.
- **Dissociation and Coping Mechanisms:** Some survivors employ dissociation as a coping mechanism to disconnect from the traumatic experience. Dissociation involves detaching from one's emotions or sense of self as a way to endure the pain (Draucker et al., 2009). While it can help in the short term, it may hinder the victim's ability to process and heal from the trauma.
- **Impact on Relationships:** The psychological consequences of gender-based violence can extend to survivors' interpersonal relationships. Survivors may struggle with trust issues, difficulty forming healthy attachments, and challenges in maintaining intimate relationships (Davies et al., 2015). These consequences can have a profound and lasting impact on their personal lives.
- **Sense of Powerlessness:** Gender-based violence often leaves victims with a profound sense of powerlessness. This feeling of helplessness can affect their self-perception and their ability to take control of their lives (Herman, 1992). It may also discourage them from reporting the crime or seeking assistance.

Understanding these psychological consequences is essential for providing appropriate support and counseling to survivors. It highlights the importance of accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services, as well as initiatives that challenge victim-blaming and promote survivor empowerment. Recognizing the psychological toll that gender-based violence takes on victims is a crucial step in crafting effective interventions that facilitate healing and recovery.

2. Sociological Perspectives

Crimes against women in India have deep sociological roots that can be attributed to a complex interplay of cultural norms, structural inequalities, and institutional factors. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 45,026 women committed suicide in India in 2021, more than 23,000 of them housewives (NCRB,2021). These were primarily due to low social position, early arranged marriages, early motherhood, marital abuse, and financial dependency. Understanding the sociological perspective is vital for comprehending the broader context in which these crimes occur.

Rape is a social evil that has reached epidemic proportions, destroying the lives of millions of women worldwide. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, one rape is reported every 15 minutes in India (NCRB,2020). In response to these incidents, whether rape, acid attack, or molestation, society constantly tries to blame the victim and find fault with her. Instead of blaming the perpetrator, communities criticise women's conduct to legitimise male sexual dominance and violence. Those who have been victims of assault are frequently shamed. The most prevalent scenario is doubting the girl's character or presuming

she was wearing provocative clothing or being out during late hours, which resulted in her being raped. As a result of this societal mindset, boys and men naturally become fearless and get the encouragement because they know the shame will ultimately come upon the girl. Because of the fear of societal humiliation, few victims and their families even hesitate to report rape crimes, and many victims commit suicide.

2.1. Cultural Norms and Patriarchy

- **Patriarchal Traditions:** India's deeply entrenched patriarchal culture is a foundational element contributing to gender-based violence. Traditional norms that emphasize male dominance, authority, and control over women perpetuate a power imbalance. For example, practices like "purdah" (seclusion of women from public view) have historically limited women's social and economic participation, reinforcing their subordination (Connell, 2005). When they get married, women are expected to follow their husbands' wishes, do what they are told, and not seek for decision-making equality. If they violate these rules, their husbands or his family may be cruel to them as a form of punishment or discipline—a crime that is punishable by the law.
- **Dowry System:** The dowry system is a cultural practice in India that has contributed significantly to crimes against women. Dowry-related disputes and violence often arise when dowry demands are not met (Dalmia, 2000). In 2019, India reported over 8,000 dowry-related deaths (National Crime Records Bureau, 2019). This practice commodifies women within marriage, as they are seen as a source of wealth for the groom's family.

2.2. Structural Inequalities

- **Gender Inequality:** Structural gender inequalities persist in India, limiting women's access to resources, education, and opportunities. This gender gap exacerbates women's vulnerability to various forms of violence and discrimination. The gender gap in education continues to exist in some regions, with lower female literacy rates (Census of India, 2011). This disparity exacerbates women's vulnerability to violence and discrimination, as education is often a protective factor (Sen, 2001). In terms of land and property inheritance rights, women are subject to social and legal discrimination. Most women do not receive any portion of their parents' property and do not possess any property in their own names.
- **Economic Disparities:** Socioeconomic disparities play a significant role in crimes against women. Poverty and limited economic independence restrict women's choices and increase their dependence on abusive partners or family members (Kabeer, 2005). Women in economically disadvantaged communities may have fewer options to leave abusive relationships due to financial constraints. Even now, people rejoice more over the birth of a son than a daughter. A girl is referred to as "Paraya Dhan" when she is born because she is seen as a liability who would eventually get married and be given over to her future husband's family. Sons are therefore given preferential treatment over daughters.

2.3. Institutional Factors

- **Legal Framework:** India has taken steps to address gender-based violence through legal reforms, including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 (Government of India, 2013). However, gaps in enforcement and legal processes persist.

For example, despite legal provisions, many cases of domestic violence still go unreported or unresolved due to societal pressures, fear of retaliation, or lack of awareness about legal remedies.

- **Social Services:** The availability and accessibility of social services, such as shelters, counselling, and support networks, vary across regions. Inadequate support infrastructure can hinder survivors from seeking help and reporting crimes. For instance, rural areas may lack sufficient counseling services or shelters for survivors. Women from marginalized communities often face greater challenges in accessing these services (Nigam, 2013).

2.4. Consequences for Society

- **Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes:** In India, instances of domestic violence that go unreported or unaddressed contribute to the normalization of violence against women within households. This normalization reinforces traditional gender stereotypes that portray women as submissive and men as authoritative. Such stereotypes hinder efforts to challenge deeply ingrained gender norms (Connell, 2005).
- **Economic and Social Costs:** Gender-based violence places a significant economic burden on society. The healthcare costs associated with treating survivors of violence, including medical, psychological, and social services, are substantial. Moreover, the lost productivity resulting from survivors' diminished physical and mental health affects economic development. For instance, the World Bank estimates that gender-based violence can cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP (World Bank, 2021). This financial drain diverts resources from other critical social programs.
- **Undermining Development Goals:** Crimes against women hinder progress toward gender equality and broader development goals. Gender-based violence impedes women's full participation in social, economic, and political spheres. It restricts their access to education, economic opportunities, and healthcare services, preventing them from realizing their full potential (Sen, 2001). For instance, in regions where violence against women is prevalent, female workforce participation rates may remain low, hindering economic growth and development.
- **Psychological Impact on Future Generations:** Children who witness or experience gender-based violence in their households often suffer from psychological trauma. This trauma can affect their mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being. Additionally, exposure to violence during childhood increases the likelihood of perpetuating the cycle of violence in adulthood (Hamby et al., 2010). This intergenerational impact compounds the societal costs of gender-based violence.
- **Social Fragmentation and Trust Erosion:** Communities where gender-based violence is prevalent may experience social fragmentation and erosion of trust. People in such communities may be hesitant to intervene in cases of violence due to fear or cultural norms that discourage interference in private matters. This breakdown in social cohesion can have wider implications for community solidarity and safety (Bott et al., 2005).
- **Legal and Justice System Strain:** An increase in reported cases of gender-based violence places a strain on the legal and justice systems. Overburdened courts, delayed trials, and limited resources allocated to addressing such cases can result in delayed justice for survivors. This situation further erodes confidence in the legal system and perpetuates a culture of impunity (Government of India, 2013).

3. Implications for Policy and Interventions

Recognizing the sociological dimensions of crimes against women in India is vital for developing comprehensive strategies to address this issue. This section outlines the implications for policy and intervention strategies based on the theoretical findings.

3.1. Holistic Support Services:

- **Psychological Aspect:** Implementing accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services for survivors is imperative (Davies et al., 2015). These services should offer trauma-informed care, counselling, and support to address the psychological consequences of gender-based violence.
- **Sociological Aspect:** Establishing community-based support networks and shelters is essential for survivors who need a safe space to escape abusive environments. These services should be geographically accessible and culturally relevant (Nigam, 2013).

3.2. Education and Awareness:

- **Psychological Aspect:** Comprehensive educational programs should be designed to raise awareness about the psychological consequences of gender-based violence, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety. These programs can help reduce stigma and encourage survivors to seek help (Davies et al., 2015).
- **Sociological Aspect:** Educational initiatives should not only target survivors but also focus on changing societal norms and attitudes that perpetuate violence. This includes challenging traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality in schools and communities (Kishor & Gupta, 2009).

3.3. Legal Reforms and Enforcement:

- **Psychological Aspect:** Legal reforms must prioritize survivor well-being by ensuring that the justice system is sensitive to their psychological needs. This includes training law enforcement and legal professionals to handle cases with empathy and understanding (Government of India, 2013).
- **Sociological Aspect:** Strengthening the legal framework is crucial to hold perpetrators accountable and send a strong message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated. Strict enforcement of laws and swift justice can deter potential offenders (Government of India, 2013).

3.4. Economic Empowerment:

- **Psychological Aspect:** Promoting economic opportunities and financial independence for survivors is essential to rebuild their self-esteem and confidence (Kabeer, 2005). Training and employment programs can contribute to survivors' psychological recovery.
- **Sociological Aspect:** Addressing economic disparities and gender inequalities through targeted policies can reduce the dependency of survivors on abusive partners or family members. Empowered women are more likely to break free from abusive situations (Kabeer, 2005).

3.5. Community Mobilization:

- **Psychological Aspect:** Building a sense of community and social support can alleviate the isolation and shame often experienced by survivors (Bott et al., 2005). Community-driven interventions can foster resilience and recovery.
- **Sociological Aspect:** Engaging communities in dialogue and activism against gender-based violence can challenge entrenched norms and promote collective responsibility for preventing and addressing such violence (Bott et al., 2005).

4. Conclusion

The issue of crimes against women in India is a deeply rooted and complex problem that demands comprehensive action. It is influenced by both psychological and sociological factors, with far-reaching consequences for individuals and society. Perpetrators often justify their actions through toxic masculinity, entitlement, and unresolved traumas, while victims endure psychological scars such as PTSD, depression, and low self-esteem. Sociologically, cultural norms and patriarchy contribute to this issue, with traditional gender roles and practices like the dowry system reinforcing power imbalances. Structural inequalities, such as gender disparities in education and economic opportunities, further increase women's vulnerability. Gaps in legal enforcement and limited social services hinder survivors from seeking help, perpetuating a culture of impunity. These crimes have broader societal consequences, including reinforcing harmful stereotypes, imposing significant economic and social costs, hindering progress toward gender equality and development goals, and perpetuating violence across generations. To address these challenges, comprehensive policies are needed. This includes accessible mental health services, community-based support networks, education and awareness programs, legal reforms, economic empowerment, and community mobilization initiatives. Such measures empower survivors, challenge societal norms, and create a safer and more equitable society in India. In conclusion, combating crimes against women requires not only legal changes but also a shift in societal attitudes. By addressing both psychological and sociological dimensions, India can move toward a future of justice, equality, and empowerment for all its citizens.

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