



Crime against Women in India: A Socio-economic Study

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Abstract

The reform process has accelerated the economic growth of India along with some negative social impacts. Post reform years are experiencing increasing number of sexual violence against women in India. This study wants to find out the socio-economic causes behind increasing number of crimes against women in India after reform. For this purpose we have selected ten states of India, the first five states (Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan) having highest incidence of crime against women and another five states (Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Sikkim) which have least incidence of crime against women in India in the year 2013, according to the data published by National Crime Records Bureau. The statistical analysis shows that while education of women may not ensure enhancement of their social status, economic empowerment of women lowers the crime committed against them. It is evident that Gender inequality which is measured as the difference between HDI and GDI and poverty play significant contributors to the rising crime graph against womenfolk. But migration (or Urbanisation) may not have a prominent role to play in growing crime against women in India.

Keywords: crime, women, globalization, HDI, GDI, gender inequality, anomie, poverty.

Introduction

The brutal gang rape of a young woman in New Delhi on December 16, 2012 has again raised the question regarding actual condition of women in our society. It has put a big question mark on the safety of women despite their increasing economic participation and educational achievements. This very incident has raised our concern about the increasing frequency of violence against women in India, especially the sexual violence. India has gone through the process of reform during the last two decades. The reform process has accelerated the economic growth of the country along with some social changes. The modernization process that is a prominent part of our reform policy

is said to include decrease in poverty, increasing literacy rate, improved gender equality as well as industrialization. But with modernization and globalization we have some negative impacts on the socio-cultural position of the country. Increasing economic inequality, environmental destruction, difference between rural and urban classes and continuing human rights violations and more importantly the crime against women are few things to name. There are two basic forms of violence as described by Adriana Gomez (1996), structural and direct. Structural violence arises from the dominant political, economic and social systems, blocking access to the means of survival for large number of people; exploitation of thousands for the benefit of a few, extreme inequality in the distribution of wealth and repression and discrimination against those who diverge from given norms. Structural violence according to Gomez is the basis of direct violence. Open or direct violence is exercised through aggression, arms or physical force. (Larrain and Rodrigue, 1993).

The gender dimension to the definition of violence amplifies it to include violent acts perpetrated on women because they are women. Gender Violence is defined as “any act involving use of force or coercion with an intention of perpetuating promoting hierarchical gender relations” (APWLD, 1990, Schuler,1992), as “any physical, visual, verbal or sexual act that is experienced by the woman or girl at the time or later as a threat, invasion or assault, that has the effect of hurting her or degrading her and/or takes away her ability to contest an intimate contact”, can be described as gender violence(Kelly, 1998).

The international attention on this issue has been increased after the United Nations’ declarations on the Elimination of the Violence against Women in 1993 and the Platform for Action on the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. In 1993, in UN General Assembly declarations, the violence against women was defined as “any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.” (UNFPA, 2007; Manderson and Bennett, 2000). In the Beijing Platform, violence against women was declared as „an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace” (Momsen,2006). It has re-defined violence against women as a physical act of aggression of one individual or group against another or others. Violence against women is any act of gender-based violence which results in, physical, sexual or arbitrary deprivation of liberty in public or private life and violation of human rights of women in violation of human rights of women in situations of armed conflicts (Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 Country Report).

While domestic violence includes physical, sexual and/or psychological acts caused by intimate male partners, sexual violence and rape are almost used interchangeably. Most researches are conducted based on the already existing data or on their own primary surveys. The aim of those studies was to identify the factors responsible for the violence against women. Some of those studies are based on the ecological framework presented by Heise(1998) which characterizes personal, socio-cultural and situational factors. The modernization process in India, brings socio-economic as well as cultural changes. According to some study, increase in sexual violence can be correlated with the pace of economic growth and social changes (Ohlin,2006; Trivedi, 2010:183). With increased access to economic resources which is the outcome of empowerment of women challenging the traditional values and norms of the society is another important reason of growing violence against women. Empirical evidence in this regard were found by Metha and

Simister(2010:1066) based on the National Family Health Survey(NFHS, 2007:100). Sen and Dreze(2002:267) argue that violent crime is a feature of „modern society“. Khanna and Varghese(1978) opined that better education, improved status and greater opportunities brings conflict within the society against women. The Statistical analysis carried out by Hackett(2011:285) observed that women who challenge traditional norms face violence in the family. This was observed in the rural areas of the relatively socially developed states and in cities in less socially developed states. Koeing et al(2006:132) using Heiss’s framework found that women with secondary education experience less domestic violence. Tamsin(2006:170) concluded that domestic violence is seen as a reason to maintain patriarchal authority over women as they challenge patriarchy. In fact there are evidences which reveal that masculinity and domestic violence are inter-linked(Nayak, 2003 and Hamberger et. al, 1997). Numbers of family members, type of marriage and husband’s education have significant role in domestic abuse(Murthy et al. 2004). Gendered socialization process also influences domestic violence(Sahu, 2003). It is emphasized that low education level and poverty have important influences on domestic violence. Marriage at younger age also makes women more vulnerable to domestic abuse.

Mitra and Singh’s study of Kerala paradox shows that despite the ongoing modernization process, women still face constraints due to their subordination and experience violence which shows increasing gender inequality. For instance, in Kerala, on one hand women face discrimination in the labour market and high unemployment rates as well as increased reporting of sexual violence against them, on the other hand they have high literacy rates, better sex ratio and higher mean age at marriage, in comparison to the rest of the country. The Kerala paradox can be described to be a result of a clash between women’s traditional subservient roles and their obtainable gender empowerment, which could have instigated the violence As Rathod (2009:229) argues, gender differences have declined in accordance with modernization, but it might take more time to see a result from it.

This result as well as others that showed the same tendency can be put in relation to what Hirdman calls the gender contract (2003:55). In the line with Connell’s (2003:76) reasoning gender relations are something that change with social change. However, according to Sekher and Hatti (2010:2) social and economic development does not ensure changes in cultural ethos in the society. With the modernization process women are becoming more independent through employment and education. This has created a dilemma for men as women becoming less dependent on men. This is called “crisis in masculinity” (Sideris, 2007, Staudt, 2011).

The advocates of modernization argue that violent continues to exist only because the process of modernization has not reached its full potential. This could explain the violence in rural areas which are less developed and have patriarchal society. But statistical findings show that violence against women mostly occurred in urban areas and in metropolitan cities. Accordingly modernization has positively affected the increase of reports of sexual violence against women. With increasing women’s movements, their empowerment and growing consciousness among women about their rights and most importantly socio-cultural changes brought about more and more intolerance towards crime as compared to earlier. But still women are reluctant to report violence as they accept it as a normal part of life.

The sexual violence against women can therefore be treated as having a negative relation to the modernization process. On the one hand, women have easier access and opportunities to education and employment, having higher literacy rates and awareness of laws and human rights and these in a positive way influence the increasing reports on violence against women. Modernization process with its new norms, values and division of labour put pressure and create tensions in gender relations and thus lead to a disturbance in the society which has contributed to anomie as described by Durkheim (1984).

The National Crime Records Bureau reported that by 2020, growth in the rate of crimes against women would be expected to exceed the population growth rate. Earlier, many crimes against women were not reported to police due to the social stigma attached, especially rape and molestation. Official statistics show a dramatic increase in the number of reported crimes against women. Women belonging to any class, caste, creed or religion can be victims of violence. In a society like India where women are always perceived in relation to man, her position is always subordinate. Moreover, this perception has given birth to various customs and practices in which women are given subordinate status with respect to men and the arrangement is legitimised by religion. Thus violence as a feature of man-woman relationship is embedded in the culture itself. Violence against women, both inside and outside their home, has been a crucial issue in contemporary Indian society.

Table-1 presents the number of crimes against women under different heads during the period 2008 to 2013 in India.

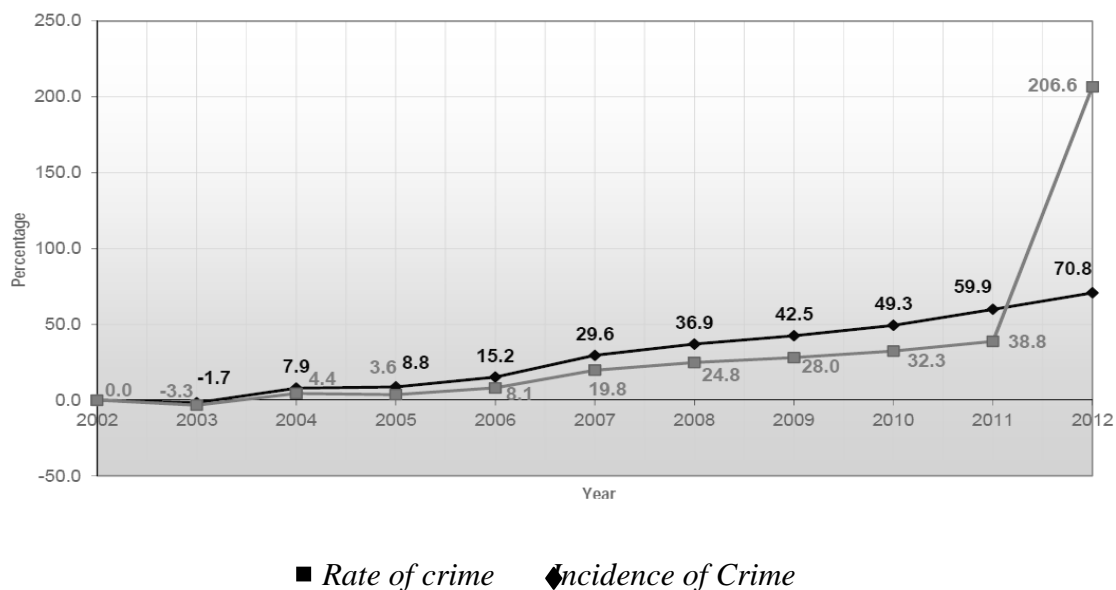
Table-1

Sr. No.	Crime Head	Year					
		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
1.	Rape	21,467	21,397	22,172	24,206	24,923	
2.	Kidnapping and Abduction	22,939	25,741	29,795	35,565	38,262	
3.	Dowry Death	8172	8383	8391	8618	8233	
4.	Cruelty by Husband and relatives	81,344	89,546	94,041	99,135	106,527	
5.	Assault on women with intention to outrage modesty	40,413	38,711	40,613	42,968	45,351	
6.	Insult to the modesty of women	12,214	11,009	9,961	8,570	9,173	
7.	Importation of girl from foreign country	67	48	36	80	59	
A.	Total IPC crime against women	1,86,616	1,94,835	2,05,009	2,19,142	2,32,528	
8.	Commission of Sati Prevention Act,1987	1	0	0	1	-	
9.	Immoral Traffic Prevention Act,1966	2659	2474	2499	2435	2563	
10.	Indecent representation of women(prohibition) Act,1956	1025	845	895	453	141	
11.	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	5,555	5,650	5,182	6,619	9,038	
B.	Total SLL crime against women	9,240	8,969	8,576	9,508	11,742	
Total	(A+B)	1,95,856	2,03804	2,13,585	2,28,650	2,44,270	

Source: NCRB, 2013

It is evident from the above table as well as figure-1, that the number of crimes against women are rising over the years especially rape and other kinds of sexual harassments.

Figure-1



Source: NCRB, 2013

In order to develop an effective policy towards the empowerment and betterment of the conditions of women in India it is essential to have an in depth study of the subject. Most of the empirical studies conducted so far either reflects the regional picture or the country as a whole. But the comparative analytical studies of the regional variations on this topic are few.

The objective of the present study is to identify the socio-economic factors which are influencing the crime against women in India. For this purpose we have selected ten states of India, the first five states(Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan) having highest incidence of crime against women and another five states(Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand and Sikkim) which have least incidence of crime against women in India in the year 2013, according to the data published by National Crime Records Bureau.

The present research aims to find out the factors which would explain the differences in the statistical data obtained for the above states regarding crime against women. The study also wants to explore some policy implications depending on the fact that while some states are having higher incidence of crime against women, some states are reporting lower incidence of crime against women.

Section II explains relevant data and sources which are used for our purpose while Section III discusses the results obtained from the present study. Section IV concludes the study with policy implications.

II Data and Sources

For this purpose we have selected some socio-economic indicators influencing the position of women in Indian society. Status of women is denoted by two indicators, the employment of women and education of women. The gendered power inequalities are represented by the difference between HDI (Human Development index) and GDI(Gender Development Index), which are obtained from the Publications of Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. The indicators selected to represent economic and demographic factors in the post-reform India are poverty and migration (here urbanisation is used as a substitute of migration) respectively. The employment of women is represented by women work force participation ratio and education of women is denoted by female literacy ratio, the source of all these data is Census, 2011, India.

III Result and Discussion

The different socio economic factors which are taken into account to analyse the reasons behind growing incidence of crime in India in recent years are presented below.

Table-2

Name of the State	Rate of Crime(c)	Female Literacy rate(l)	Female workforce participation ratio(w)	Inequality Index(g)	% of BPL population (p)	Ratio of urbanisation (u)
Assam	89.54	67.27	20.71	.010	37.9	14.08
Tripura	86.95	83.15	21.08	.037	17.4	26.18
West Bengal	70.30	71.16	18.32	.020	26.7	31.89
Andhra Pradesh	66.05	59.74	35.11	.011	21.1	33.49
Rajasthan	63.75	52.66	33.49	.015	24.8	24.89
Sikkim	38.57	76.43	38.57	.006	13.1	24.97
Uttarakhand	21.50	70.70	27.33	.005	18.0	30.55
TamilNadu	21.23	73.86	31.54	.011	17.1	48.45
Meghalaya	19.38	73.78	35.15	.005	17.1	20.08
Nagaland	4.70	76.69	38.06	.003	20.9	28.97

To find out the relation between the rate of crime and these selected socio-economic variables, first we have estimated the correlation between the incidence of crime and those variables and then tested the significance of the estimated correlation coefficients. The result of this analysis is presented in the following table.

Table:3

Correlation Coefficient	t-value (dof 8)
$r_{cl} = -.28029$	-0.826
$r_{cw} = -0.7078$	-2.834**
$r_{cgd} = .7133$	2.879**
$r_{cp} = .6237$	2.257*
$r_{cu} = -.3324$	-0.997

*t value significant at 90% confidence interval

**t value significant at 95% confidence interval

Where, r_{cl} = Correlation coefficient between Crime rate and female literacy rate

r_{cw} = Correlation coefficient between Crime rate and female workforce participation ratio

r_{cgd} = Correlation coefficient between Crime rate and gender inequality index

r_{cp} = Correlation coefficient between Crime rate and ratio of poverty

r_{cu} = Correlation coefficient between Crime rate and ratio of urbanisation

dof= Degree of Freedom

It is evident from the above analysis that literacy rate of women has a negative correlation with crime against women in our country though the rate is not very significant ($t=-0.826$ at 8 dof). Therefore according to the present analysis, the education of women which is an important determinant of modernization may not ensure enhancement of their social status and empowerment. The female workforce participation ratio has an inverse relation with the incidence of violence against women. The results reveal that economic empowerment of women lowers the crime committed against them. Increasing economic empowerment of women ensures a better standard of living for them and makes them more conscious about their rights. So between the two factors which represent the status of women in the modern society, economic participation of women plays comparatively important role than their educational attainment.

It is well established that the difference between HDI and GDI measures gender inequality that exists in a society. More the difference between the two more prominent is the gender inequality. Table-2 reveals that the difference between HDI and GDI is more in the states where the crime rate against women are higher. Lower gender inequality ensures a lower incidence of violence against women in India as shown by both Table-2 and Table-3. In fact the rate of crime against women holds a direct relation with gender inequality, as per our analysis. The correlation between crime rate and gender inequality is significant at 5% level. So in case of India, gender inequality acts as a significant contributor to the rising crime graph against womenfolk.

It is observed from the above analysis that poverty has an important role in explaining the incidence of violence against women. The high positive correlation (0.6237) between poverty and the rate of crime against women explains this fact. But migration or urbanisation does not have a significant correlation with the incidence of violence against women in India. So according to the statistical analysis migration (or Urbanisation) may not have a prominent role to play in growing crime against women in India.

IV Conclusion

The above results make it clear that despite economic independence and educational attainment gender inequality still exists on a large scale in Indian societies. Thus, in simplest form one can say

that the crimes against women are mostly due to men's attitude towards women. The economic participation of women in the society and their declining dependence on men creates a form of „anomie“ which actually explains the causes behind abuse of women in India. Most of the cases of reported crimes are from the lower economic stratum. Crimes against women are universal but the upper and middle class people prefer to hide such crimes. The trend is that the lower class are more open and it is reflected in the society. Most of the cases registered in the police stations are from the women of lower class strata. A cross section of the population from the general public, police officials and social workers are of the opinion that there is a definite relationship between income and the crime. Main reason they attribute for this opinion is that poverty is the root cause of most of the crimes. Poverty along with male domination puts women in the households in a vulnerable situation.

This study tries to get a deeper understanding of some of the underlying factors of increased reports of violations against women in India and emphasizes both positive and negative effects of modernization process in the country. The empowerment of women which is the direct consequence of modernization has disturbed the prevailing gender structure in the society, leading to men using power to abuse women to maintain gender inequalities. So as far as our study is concerned, India is suffering from the “crisis in masculinity” (Sideris, 2007, Staudt, 2011).

The experience of violence retards the empowerment of women and acts as an obstacle in the way of socio-economic and demographic development of a country. In view of the above, it is essential to have programmes that involve the community as a whole, especially, the males for effective solution of the problem. It can be further suggested that girls should be encouraged to take part more and more in economic activities. It is the duty of the government to give stress not only on women literacy, but the male literacy as well. Stringent laws are required against the perpetrators of the violence and there should be laws to safeguard the women to curb this social evil. Finally, a complete social cultural transformation is needed to bring about a change in our outlook towards gender roles. It would facilitate the implementation of appropriate and meaningful solutions to this problem in India.

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