

Gender Violence: Trends and Issues

Dr. Amit Jaiswal¹

¹Assistant Professor, Government Girls PG College, Bindki, Fatehpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) continues to be a pervasive challenge in India, affecting the safety, health, and socio-economic empowerment of women. This paper analyses National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data from 1995 to 2021 across various categories of violence against women, identifies key trends, and explores the economic and social implications.

The study reveals a consistent rise in most categories of violence, persistent underreporting, and systemic challenges in enforcement. The findings underscore the need for integrated policy frameworks, enhanced legal enforcement, and gender-sensitive socio-economic planning.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Domestic Violence, Sexual Violence, Child Sex Ratio, Dowry Deaths, Women's Empowerment, Forced Marriage, Honour Killings, Social Justice, Intersectionality, Violence Against SC/ST Women, Gender Inequality.

Introduction

Gender violence, rooted in structural inequalities, remains a significant barrier to gender equality and national development. Gender violence, particularly against women and girls, has profound economic consequences, both at the individual and national levels. Gender-based violence in India is a serious and persistent issue, with widespread and deeply rooted societal, cultural, and institutional factors contributing to its prevalence. A 2019 NFHS-5 report revealed that 1 in 3 women (aged 18–49) had experienced physical or sexual violence. Gender-based violence (GBV) significantly undermines socio-economic development by impeding individual potential, straining public resources, and deepening systemic inequalities. Survivors of violence often withdraw from work due to trauma, stigma, or safety concerns.

Physical injuries, psychological stress, and absenteeism result in lower output at both individual and national levels. Studies (World Bank) estimate that violence against women can cost up to 1.5% of a country's GDP. Treating injuries, trauma, and chronic illnesses related to violence places a heavy burden on public health systems. Investigating and prosecuting gender violence cases consumes substantial legal resources. Support for displaced or abused women (shelters, rehabilitation, etc.) requires sustained government investment. The prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in India is both widespread and underreported, cutting across class, caste, region, and religion. It represents a major barrier to gender equality and sustainable development.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) In India: Gender-based violence (GBV) in India is pervasive yet significantly underreported, affecting individuals across all social strata—irrespective of class, caste, region, or religion. It poses a critical obstacle to achieving gender equality and hampers the nation's progress toward inclusive and sustainable development. Total crimes against women: Over 428,278 cases reported. Cruelty by husband or in-laws (Section 498A IPC): ~137,956 cases — the most reported form of violence.

Rape cases

Table: Trends in Gender Violence in India

	TYPE OF VIOLENCE	1995	2005	2015	2019	2020	2021
DECLINING SEX RATIO	Sex Ratio (census years) ⁴	927	933	943	943	943	943
	Child Sex Ratio	-	927	919	919	919	919
	Female Infanticide	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Pre-natal sex selection	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Pre-conception Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act,	-	-	34	52	51	70
FORCED MARRIAGE	Forced or Child Marriage	-	-	32177	-	-	-
	Kidnapping and abduction of women and girls	14063	15750	-	72780	62300	75369
	Kidnapping and abduction of women to compel her for marriage (S. 366 IPC)	-	-	31778	32260	24745	28012
	Prohibition of Child Marriage Act	-	-	293	525	785	1050
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	Domestic Violence			461	553	446	507
	Torture ⁵	31127	58319	-	-	-	-
	Cruelty by Husbands and Relatives	28579	58319	1,13,403	125298	111549	137234
HONOUR KILLING	HONOUR KILLING						
				192	24	25	33
DOWRY	Dowry Death	4648	6787	7634	7115	6966	6753
	Dowry Prohibition Act	2814	3204	9894	13287	10366	13568
	Molestation ⁶	26856	34175	82422	-	-	-
	Assault on Women				48586	48037	49761
SEXUAL VIOLENCE	Assault or Use of Criminal Force on Women with Intent to Disrobe			8613	11238	10580	11102
	Assault by Police on Women to Outrage their Modesty			7	-	-	-
	Rape	13754	18359	34651	32033	28046	31677
	Incest Rape ⁷		750	557	2916	2502	2424
	Rape by Family Friends/Neighbours/ Employer or Other Known Persons				10938	13555	15196
	Custodial Rape		7	95	47	29	26
	Rape by Relative/Teacher/Guardian/Person in position of Trust [Sec. 376(2)(f)]				1999	1410	1654
	Rape on Pregnant Women [Sec. 376(2)(h)]				35	39	28
	Rape on Women below 16 years of Age [Sec. 376(2)(i)]				790	244	246
	Rape on Women incapable of giving Consent [Sec. 376(2)(j)]				393	244	256
	Rape by Persons in Control or Dominance over Women [Sec. 376(2)(k)]				182	119	53
	Rape on Women with Mental or Physical Disability [Sec. 376(2)(l)]				116	94	117
	Endanger Life of Women after Rape [Sec. 376(2)(m)]				34	24	23
	Repeated Rape on Same Women [Sec. 376(2)(n)]				2373	2879	4155
	Other Custodial Rapes				772	875	1359
	Attempt to Commit Rape			4434	3944	3741	3800
	Murder with Rape/Gang-Rape				283	219	284
HARASSMENT IN PUBLIC PLACES	Street Sexual Harassment (Eve teasing IPC 509)	4689	9984	8685	6939	7065	7788
	Sexual Harassment in Public Transport			315	606	375	357
	Voyeurism			838	1399	1260	1513
	Stalking			6266	8890	8512	9285

WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT	Harassment at the Office and Places related to Work (under IPC 509)			833	505	485	418
	Rape of Employees/Co-workers			557	-	-	-
	SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN OTHER PLACES			7537	16750	15736	16328
ACID ATTACKS	ACID ATTACKS			222	150	105	102
	Attempt to Commit an Acid Attack			46	42	33	48
	Procurance of Minor Girls (Sec. 366A IPC)			3087	3117	2471	2566
TRAFFICKIN G	Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act	8447	5908	2641	1645	1294	1678
	Importation of Girls	191	149	6	3	0	1
	Human Trafficking ¹⁰ (Sec. 370 and 370A IPC)			1027	1334	646	1219
CYBER CRIMES	Cyber-crimes against Women				8379	10405	10730
	Cyber-crime with Intent to Insult Modesty of Women			606	-	-	-
	Cyber Blackmailing/ Threatening (Sec 506,/503, 384 IPC R/W IT Act)				113	74	200
CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN FROM SCHEDULED CASTES	Cyber Pornography/Posting/Publishing Obscene Sexual Materials (Sec 67A/67B (Girl Child) of IT Act R/W IPC SLL)				1158	1655	1896
	Cyber Stalking/Cyber Bullying of omen (Sec 354D IPC R/W IT Act)				791	887	1172
	Defamation/Morphing (Sec 469 IPC R/W IPC and Indecent Rep of Women (P) Act)				61	251	276
Other Crimes against Women	Fake Profile (R/W IPC SLL)				289	354	225
	Other Cyber-crimes against Women				5967	7184	6961
	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage their Modesty (Scheduled Castes)			2800	3375	3373	3724
CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN FROM SCHEDULED CASTES	Insult to the Modesty of Women (Sec. 509) (SC)			58	143	144	157
	Kidnapping and abduction of women to compel her for marriage (SC)			455	357	394	309
	Rape (SC)			2326	3486	3372	3870
Other Crimes against Women	Attempt to Commit Rape (SC)			74	124	90	100
	Assault on Women with Intent to Outrage their Modesty (ST)			818	880	885	881
	Insult to the Modesty of Women (Sec. 509) (ST)			12	24	24	35
Other Crimes against Women	Kidnapping and abduction of women to compel her for marriage (ST)			60	54	34	35
	Rape (ST)			952	1110	1137	1324
	Attempt to Commit Rape (ST)			15	21	25	25
Other Crimes against Women	Indecent Representation of Women	539	2917	40	23	12	28
	Sexual Harassment in Shelter Homes for Women and Children				473	407	436

(Section 376 IPC): 31,677 cases — nearly 87 per day. Kidnapping and abduction of women: 71,000+ cases. Dowry deaths: 6,589 cases. Acid attacks: 176 reported cases. The following is a structured analysis of its prevalence within the Indian socio-economic landscape:

Demographic Indicators of Gender Bias: Despite a slight improvement in the overall sex ratio from 927 (1995) to 943 (2021), the child sex ratio declined from 927 (2005) to 919, reflecting ongoing female foeticide and son preference. Because of weak enforcement of prenatal laws, only 70 cases were filed under the PCPNDT Act in 2021, highlighting inadequate enforcement against sex-selective abortions.

Patterns of Violence: Kidnapping and abduction of women rose fivefold, from 15,750 (2005) to 75,369 (2021). Many of these fall under Section 366 IPC (abduction for forced marriage), underscoring continued prevalence of forced marriages, compounded by weak enforcement of child marriage and trafficking laws.

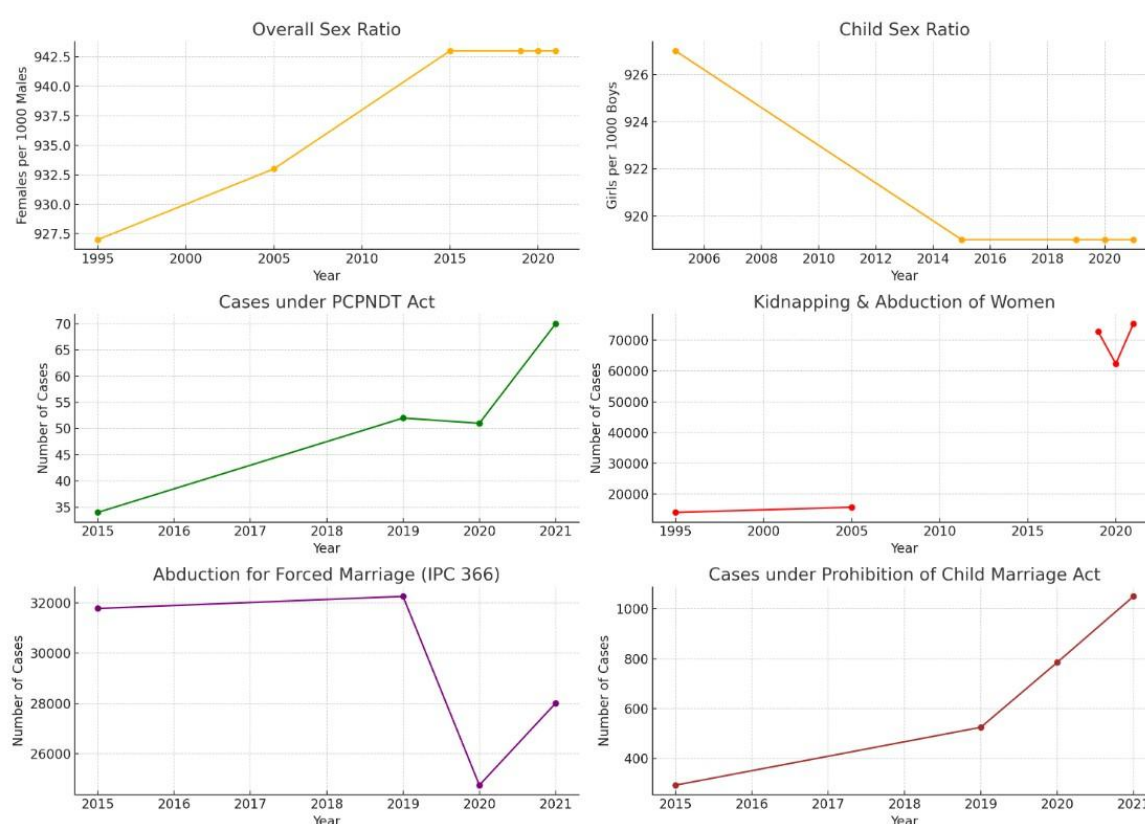
Domestic Violence and Cruelty by Husbands/Relatives: Reported cases rose from 28,579 (1995) to 137,234 (2021), making this the largest category of crimes against women. However, just 507 cases were filed under dedicated domestic violence laws in 2021, indicating serious underreporting and limited trust in the justice system.

Honour Killings: Although only 33 cases were officially reported in 2021, anecdotal evidence suggests significant underreporting. Family complicity and societal pressure inhibit disclosure, making honour-based violence a silent yet dangerous form of GBV.

Dowry-Related Violence: With 6,753 dowry deaths in 2021 and rising cases under the Dowry Prohibition Act, dowry-related crimes remain a persistent problem. These reflect patriarchal norms and economic coercion in marriage practices.

Sexual Violence: Rape cases more than doubled from 13,754 (1995) to 31,677 (2021). Most offenders are known to the victim, highlighting the embedded nature of sexual violence within families and communities. Other forms include incest, custodial rapes, and rape-murders.

Trends in Gender-Based Violence Indicators in India



Emerging and Underreported Forms of Violence: Violence against women has also shown changing patterns in recent times, also, very few of the violence against women get reported because of different reasons.

- i. **Public and Workplace Harassment:** "Outraging modesty" cases increased from 4,689 (1995) to 7,788 (2021). Only 418 workplace harassment cases were reported in 2021, likely due to fear of reprisal and poor implementation of the POSH Act (2013). Stalking and voyeurism have also sharply increased.
- ii. **Acid Attacks:** Though limited in number (102 cases in 2021), acid attacks cause irreversible disfigurement and trauma, often pushing victims to the economic and social margins of society.
- iii. **Trafficking and Exploitation:** While cases under the Immoral Traffic Prevention Act have declined, other forms of trafficking and procurement remain widespread. The apparent drop likely reflects underreporting and evolution of trafficking methods rather than actual progress.
- iv. **Cyber Crimes Against Women:** Cyber crimes targeting women rose from 8,379 (2019) to 10,730 (2021), including cyberstalking, blackmail, and distribution of explicit content. Poor enforcement and digital illiteracy compound women's vulnerability online.
- v. **Violence Against Marginalized Groups:** Rape and abduction cases involving Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) women have increased significantly. In 2021, 3,870 SC women were raped, compared to 2,326 in 2015, revealing the intersectionality of caste and gender-based violence.
- vi. **Indecent Representation of Women:** Cases under the Indecent Representation of Women Act fell from 2,917 (2005) to 28 (2021). This drop likely reflects a combination of legal inattention, shifts to digital platforms, and underreporting rather than actual improvement.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Gender-Based Violence

- i. **Loss of Productivity:** Victims often suffer long-term physical and mental health issues, leading to absenteeism or underperformance (presenteeism). Businesses also incur higher costs due to reduced employee morale and increased turnover.
- ii. **Increased Healthcare Expenditures:** Treatment of physical injuries and mental trauma imposes high costs on both families and public health systems, diverting resources from education and development.
- iii. **Erosion of Human Capital:** Violence disrupts education, especially for girls facing abuse or early marriage, leading to school dropouts and reduced lifetime earnings, limiting long-term human capital formation.
- iv. **Intergenerational Poverty and Trauma:** Children in violent households often face developmental delays, lower academic performance, and higher risk of becoming future perpetrators or victims, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.
- v. **Pressure on Social Protection and Justice Systems:** Rising violence necessitates more spending on policing, legal proceedings, rehabilitation, and shelters, creating budgetary strain and reducing investment in other development areas.

Negative Impact on Economic Growth: According to the World Bank, intimate partner violence can cost 1.2% to 3.7% of a country's GDP. GBV weakens labor supply, deters innovation, and stalls inclusive development.

- i. **Labor Market Gender Inequality:** Gender violence discourages women's workforce participation and upward mobility, reinforcing gender wage gaps and limiting access to leadership roles.
- ii. **Decline in Investment and Tourism:** Countries with high GBV levels may be seen as unsafe or unstable, discouraging foreign direct investment (FDI) and reducing tourism revenues.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations: Gender-based violence in India is a multi-dimensional challenge that hampers national development through:

- Suppressed female labor force participation
- Increased public and private healthcare and legal system burdens
- Reduced investments in education and skill development
- Reinforcement of intergenerational poverty and inequality

Policy Recommendations:

- Strengthen enforcement of laws like the PCPNDT, Dowry Prohibition, POSH, and Domestic Violence Acts.
- Enhance gender-sensitization training for police, judiciary, and public servants.
- Improve victim reporting and support systems, including helplines, shelters, and legal aid.
- Integrate gender equality into development policies across education, employment, health, and digital inclusion sectors.
- Promote community-led awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms and foster safe spaces for women and girls.

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