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CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE HUSBAND–WIFE RELATIONSHIP IN INDIAN SOCIETY: A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

AUTHORED BY - PROF. AJAY BHUPENDRA JAISWAL¹ & AMRITA VERMA²

1. Introduction

Woman is a unique creation of nature who sustains society in various forms. Despite being delicate in physique, she possesses immense strength. A sensitive and emotionally-driven woman, whenever she breaks free from social constraints, has emerged either as a valiant warrior, a saint, a social reformer-or a dreadful criminal seeking revenge against society.

The increasing criminal tendencies among women have today become one of the most pressing and alarming issues in our society. Women are no longer limited to crimes like theft, murder, robbery, smuggling, or prostitution; they are now increasingly involved in more heinous acts such as the murder of husbands, children, and even parents.

While modern humanity continues to progress in scientific and material fields, it is simultaneously advancing in the realm of crime.

Crime is committed by all sections of society. However, when those from whom society expects behavior in accordance with moral and social norms act contrary to those ideals, such crimes become more serious and concerning than crimes committed by others.

Crimes committed by women are considered more serious because, in all societies, women are regarded as the pure and foundational unit of social structure. A woman is the focal point of society. This central position makes crimes committed by women more serious than those committed by men, as female criminality has a deeper and more disruptive impact on the social structure compared to male criminality.

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2. Study of Female Criminality

The present study is a humble attempt to understand the causes responsible for the crime of wives murdering their husbands, their socio-economic background, and the reactions of family members, relatives, and the larger community to such incidents.

3. Criminological Theories on Women

In the context of female crimes, criminologists offer various perspectives. Otto Pollak, in his well-known book "The Criminality of Women," argues that women are as criminal as men, but due to social and institutional factors, their crimes often go unreported or unnoticed.

According to Pollak, the biological and psychological structure of women inclines them toward more deceptive behaviors such as lying and emotional manipulation. He states that women are particularly involved in domestic crimes like infanticide or poisoning.

In "The Female Offender," attempts have been made to link female criminality to biological and physical traits. The author argues that women, by nature, are less criminal than men, but those women who do commit crimes are considered abnormal and biologically 'degenerate.' Cesare Lombroso and Guglielmo Ferrero classified female criminals into different types: born criminals, occasional criminals, and emotional criminals.

The book "Sisters in Crime" claims that the rise in female criminality is connected to women's empowerment and independence. In "Women and Crime," Rita J. Simon states that the nature of women's crimes is changing, but this change is a sign of progress toward freedom.

In "Women, Crime and Criminology," Coral Smart argues that traditional criminology has been male-centric, and female crime has either been ignored or misrepresented. According to Smart, female crime must be understood in the light of social, historical, and gender structures.

4. Indian Perspective

Indian criminologist Dr. Radhakant Mishra stated that in Indian society, the traditional role of women is considered to be "cultured, tolerant, and sacrificial," which makes their involvement in crime appear unnatural to society. However, when women face familial, economic, or social pressure, they may also commit crimes-reactive crimes.

According to *Dr. K.D. Gaur*, female crimes should be viewed from a legal perspective, and although the incidence of female criminality is low, when women do commit crimes, they are often given lighter punishments.

B. Sivaramayya and *N.V. Paranjape* highlighted the interrelationship between female crime and law. They linked women's criminality to structural injustice.

5. Feminist Criminology

In the context of crimes committed by women, feminist scholars believe that power is multidimensional and rooted in the structure of society. Feminist philosophers argue that crimes committed by women should not be understood solely from a legal perspective, but must also be interpreted within social, cultural, and structural contexts.

Carol Smart, in her book *Women and Criminology*, asserted that women's crimes cannot be measured by the same standards used for men. She argued that:

- (i) A female offender is also a social product, and
- (ii) Family exploitation, gender inequality, and poverty are among the factors that push women toward crime.

She also pointed out that legal systems and judicial institutions are often gender-biased.

Medona Lampton, focusing on crimes committed by adolescent girls, stated that "girls' crimes are often reactive responses to trauma such as suicide attempts or abuse." According to her, these girls should not be seen as criminals, but rather as victim-survivors.

But *Carlen*, in her book *Women, Crime and Poverty*, argued that for women, crime is not biological, but rather a structural response to their conditions.

The essence of the feminist perspective is:

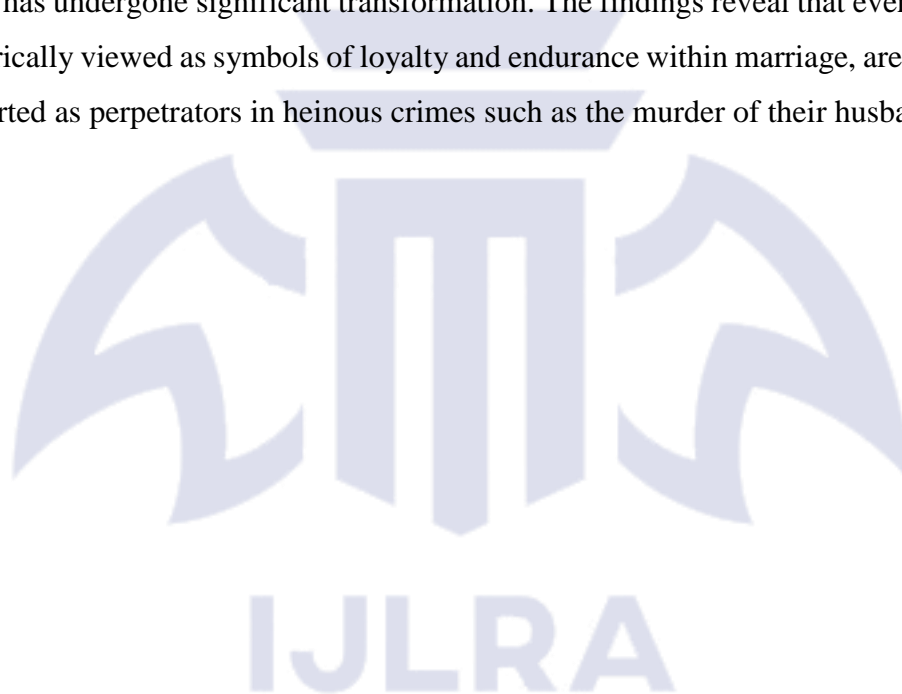
- (i) A female offender should not be seen merely as a criminal, but as a product of socially constructed circumstances.
- (ii) It is crucial to understand the hidden factors behind women's crimes—such as domestic violence, gender inequality, exploitation, and structural barriers.
- (iii) The very definition of crime is shaped by a patriarchal system, which portrays women

either as virtuous or as deviant.

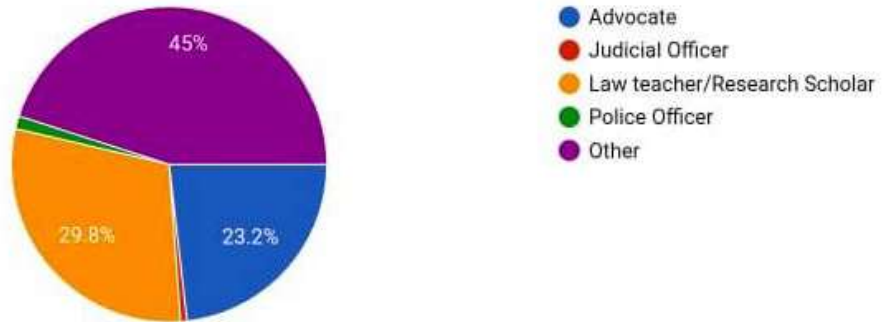
6. Technology and Female Crime

Technology has transformed the nature, reach, and methods of crimes committed by women. It has not only introduced new forms of criminal activity, but has also contributed to concealing women's involvement, increasing the complexity of such crimes, and interlinking them with broader social structures.

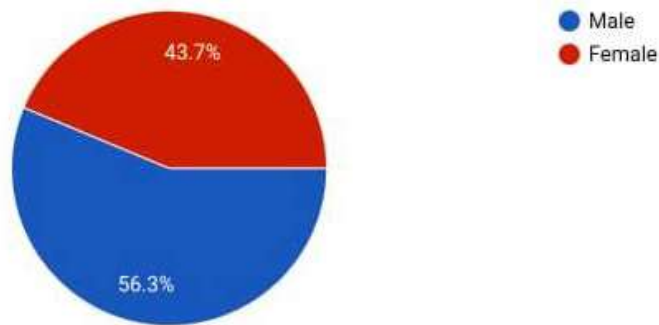
In Indian society, the marital bond between husband and wife has traditionally been regarded as the most reliable and sacred relationship. However, the present study indicates that this perception has undergone significant transformation. The findings reveal that even wives, who were historically viewed as symbols of loyalty and endurance within marriage, are increasingly being reported as perpetrators in heinous crimes such as the murder of their husbands.



Profession

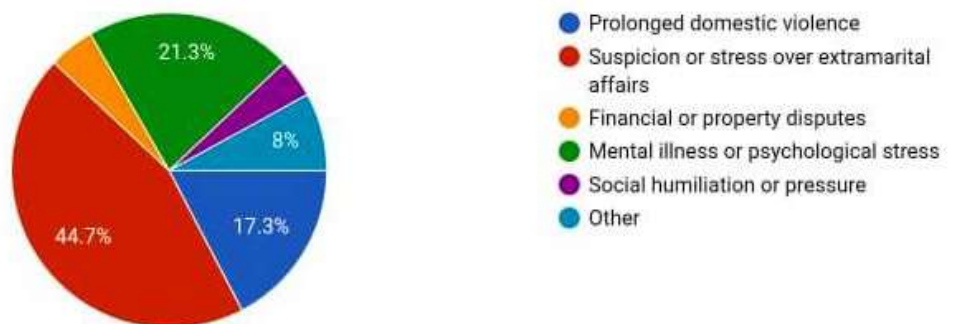


Gender

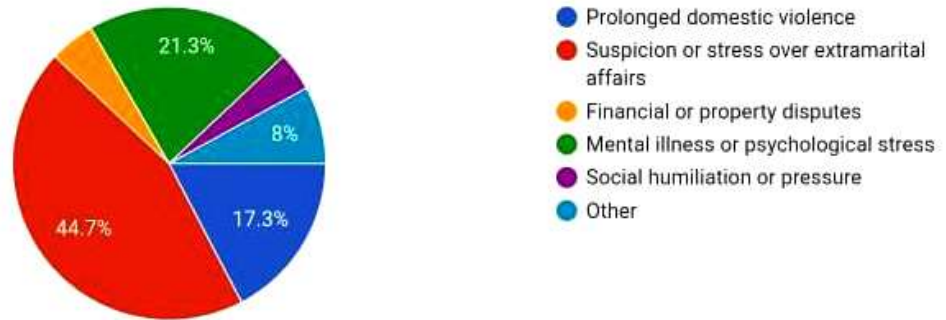


Section B: Social Causes and Experience

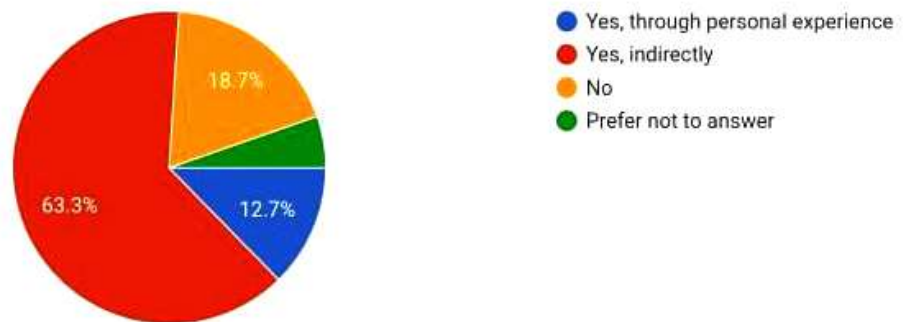
In your opinion, what are the major reasons behind wives Killing their husband?



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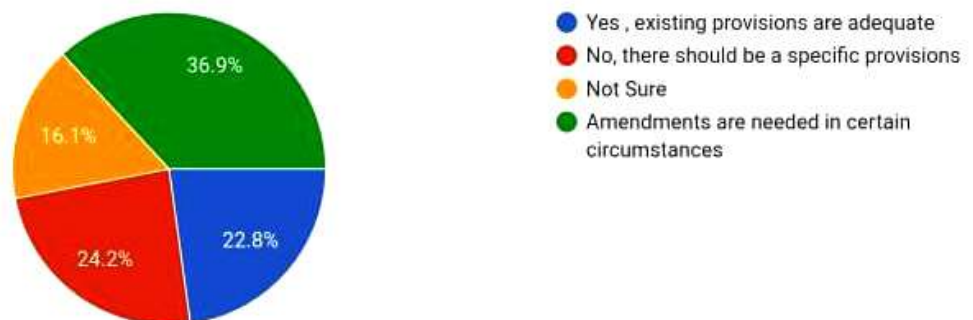


Have you ever encountered or heard of a case where a wife killed her husband?

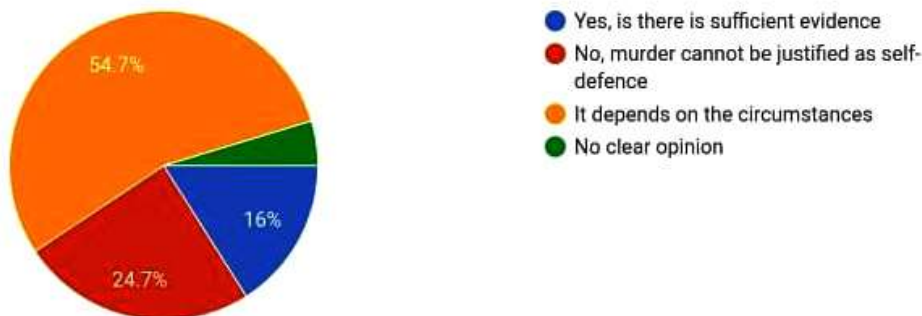


SecC : Legal Perspective

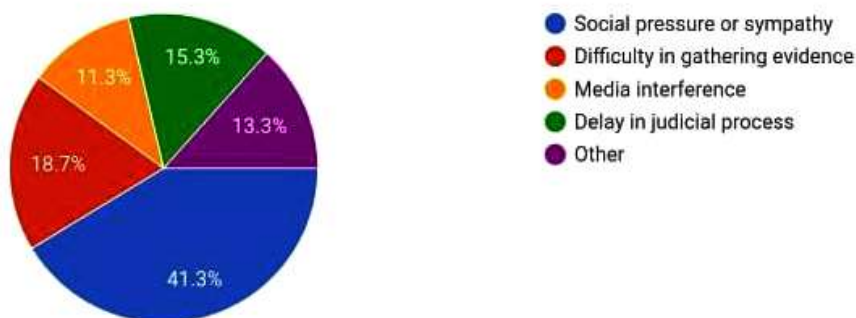
Are the current legal provisions (such as Section 302 of IPCV or BNS sec 101) sufficient for such cases?



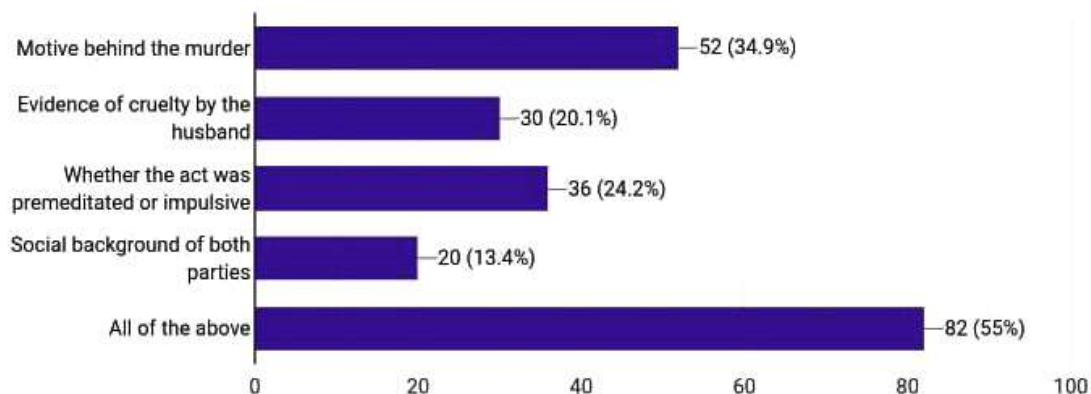
Can " self - defence" be a valid ground in such cases?



What are the major challenges in police investigation when wife is the accused? (Select one or more)

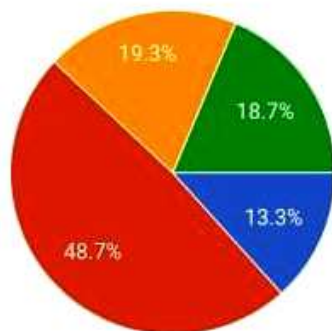


What aspects do court give special attention to in such cases?(Select one or more)



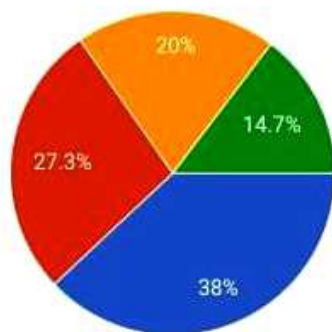
SecD: **Social Impact and Reforms**

Does the media report such cases in a balanced manner?



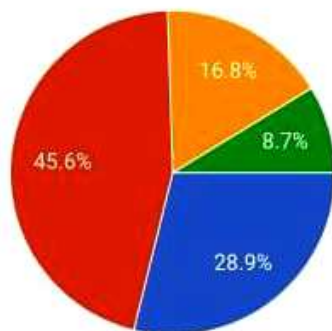
- Yes, reporting is balanced
- No, it's often
- Sometimes neutral reporting is seen
- Cannot comment

Do changing gender roles influence the occurrence of such crimes?



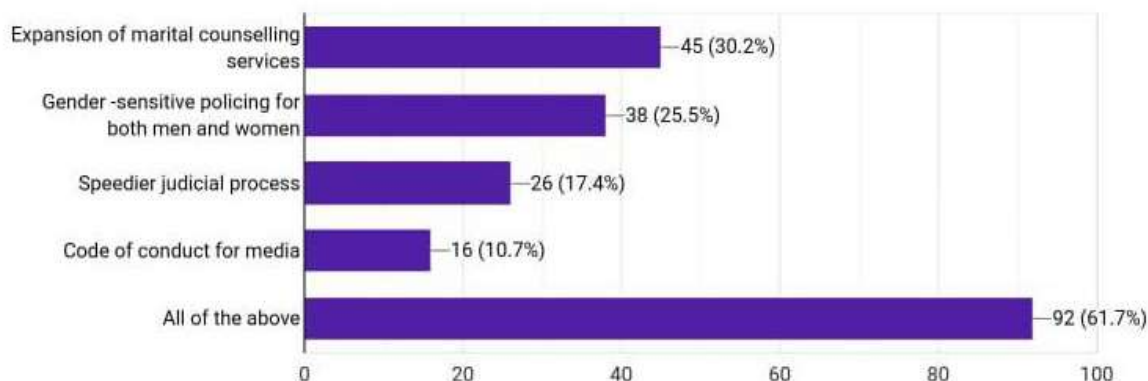
- Yes, It could be a contributing factor
- No, these are isolated personal matters
- To some extent
- Not Sure

Are martial counselling or meditation services adequately available?

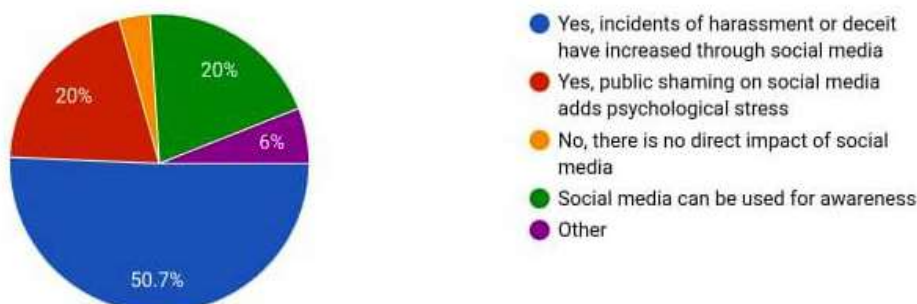


- Yes, but very few people avail them
- No, there is a serious lack of such services
- Available only in some urban areas
- Not aware

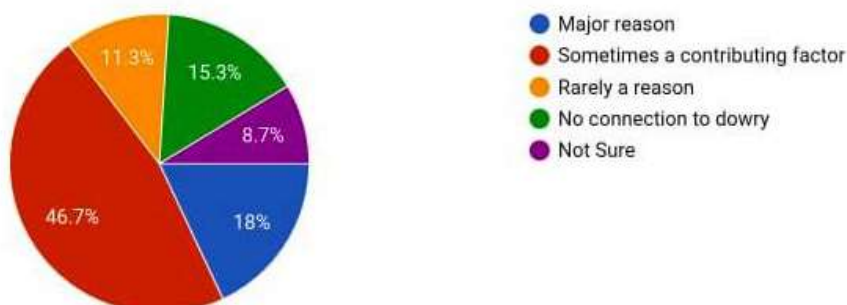
What reforms would you recommend?(Select one or more)



Do you believe social media (e.g. Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram) Plays any role in such incidents or domestic violence?(Select one or more)



To what extent do dowry demands and related harrasment contribute to such cases?



This conclusion emerges from a comprehensive survey that included responses from advocates, judges, legal educators, research scholars, police officials, and members of the general public. Collectively, their views highlight a paradigm shift: marriage is no longer universally perceived as a sacred institution bound by spiritual and cultural values, but is increasingly influenced by ideological compatibility, personal autonomy, and economic considerations.

The study further observes that in situations where a third party intrudes into the marital relationship-whether in the form of extramarital involvement, economic dependency, or ideological conflict-the wife may, in extreme cases, attempt to exit the relationship even through criminal means. This reflects a changing socio-legal reality, where personal relationships are shaped not merely by traditional ideals but also by contemporary pressures and aspirations.

Implications for Policy and Law

Gender-Neutral Policy Framework: Policymakers must take into account the evolving nature of marital relationships and frame laws and policies on a gender-neutral basis, ensuring fairness irrespective of the gender of the perpetrator or victim.

Judicial Approach: The judiciary should also adopt gender-neutral reasoning while adjudicating marital disputes and crimes within the domestic sphere.

Data and Crime Classification: The Central Bureau of Crime (or relevant national agencies) should compile separate statistical data on crimes committed by women, so as to better understand the underlying causes, socio-economic contexts, and circumstances leading to such offenses.

Strategic Responses: Based on such empirical evidence, tailored strategies should be developed to address the challenges posed by women's involvement in serious crimes, particularly those within the family structure.

Conclusion

The study concludes that marital relationships in India are no longer immune to societal transformations. What was once considered an indissoluble sacred bond is increasingly subject to the dynamics of personal choice, economic pressures, and ideological differences. As gender roles evolve in society, the law and policy must adapt accordingly, ensuring a balanced, gender-neutral framework to safeguard both individual rights and social stability.

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