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Anti-Dowry Legislation and Misuse: A Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Soon after independence, the Government in the centre and the states took upon themselves the responsibility of designing and passing several legislations to curb evil practices and protect women and other weaker sections from their cruel capture and impact. Anti-dowry legislation is one such. Although unsuccessful in completely halting the heinous practice, the Dowry Prohibition Act has undoubtedly created some public implications. One such important one is the psychological solace it has brought to thousands of affected wives harassed and tortured for dowry even after several years of marriage.

This paper investigates a rather unwanted impact of the situation: an empirical study in a district in southern Karnataka has shown traces of misuse of the law to bring to book the parents-in-law despite their claims of innocence. The paper attempts to highlight how more excellent research is needed on domestic violence caused by dowry practice and the process of legal reform.

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Introduction

Dowry is an age-old practice associated with matrimonial arrangements in patriarchal societies, where the value of the bridegroom is considered through cultural ethos as higher and more valuable. The gravity of its practice has become more profound and violent in its impact on women as time passes (Jeejeebhoy, 1998). Modernization, Industrial Development and later Globalization and its associated processes have only enabled its continuity in advanced ways and class characters. It has come to acquire a difference in its nature, amount or value and has become a market.

Why is dowry practice difficult to abolish? Why is policy-making around it difficult? Which factors keep our society alive, and is there agreement/consensus among sociologists and other social scientists about why it exists? Notably, economics and sociological literature contain several possible explanations and even theories. However, what is lacking is adequate empirical evidence about the continued practice of dowry and its elevated domestic violence on women.

Law has two sides to it, like a coin: one is where it is welcomed by society because it protects those for whom it is designed. However, at the same time, it is criticized and hated by others who are supposed to be the inflictors of that injustice or evil practice (like dowry). In the case of Dowry Prohibition Law, section 498-A is something wives look forward to, but it is a curse on their husbands and in-laws (Administrator (2021)). Studies have reported that the law has not successfully abolished dowry practice. However, in the process, at times, it has allowed for misuse by the woman or her parents or brothers out of sheer revenge over her husband and in-laws (National Center for Elderly Abuse 2005).

2. Dowry Abolition Law/s

In India, the Government has enacted a few provisions to curb and end the heinous dowry system: one is Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, and the other is the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. The first one (Section 498-A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860) speaks about the Cruelty meted out against women by their husbands and/or their relatives; the second one -the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 –has declared/announced that dowry is a punishable offence under the law. Besides these two, there are several other legislative provisions. However, a negative fallout of the law and its usage over a few decades is the sheer misuse of the purpose for which it was passed by the Indian Government (Chhibber et al., 2019). One very negative development is its misuse where instead of using it to safeguard women victimized for dowry and protect them from harassment supposedly by the husband and his relatives, the law is used to "exact revenge upon the husband and his parents, brothers and other relatives and publicly shaming them and even getting them arrested by the police.

Section 498-A IPC says that "whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such women to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall be liable for a fine". Cruelty is defined under the Section as any "wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the women to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health of the women". It also includes any form of harassment to her to get demands fulfilled. Harassing the woman for dowry is declared a cognizable offence. Once the complaint is registered, the police will have to act on the person charged with the complaint. The severity of the law had the objective of punishing those who inflicted torture and harassment on the woman (wife) and coerced her (or her natal family) to meet the unlawful demands, failing which she is driven to commit suicide or murder by the husband and his relatives.

It is a non-bailable warrant issued to the husband and his family. There have been many cases of punishment to the husband and father-in-law – one year of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 10000 (in 1989). However, to address the increasing statistics of dowry deaths in the country reported in the media, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983 (Act 46 of 1983) and Section 113-A of the Indian Evidence Act were passed. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, in its Section 3, has provided for penalties for giving and receiving dowry. Punishment was raised to 5 years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 15000 or more, equivalent to the amount of dowry, which must be ultimately returned to the wife (Supreme Court of India).

3. Misuse of Law

One fundamental question sociologists have raised in the above context is automatically labelling the husband as the accused and the wife as the victim. However, this need only sometimes be the case. There is the argument that in recent times, there has been an increase in the number of cases where the husband and relatives were falsely accused under the above law. Are anti-dowry laws being misused?

4. Analysis of findings of the study

The data used in this paper was generated as part of ongoing research on the issue of Domestic Violence against Women in Karnataka (related to dowry harassment). It was carried out in a district in the southern part of the state. Two taluks were selected based on development indicators. From each taluk, 116 married women were chosen to be interviewed about their experiences and difficulties encountered on account of torture for dowry and more dowry. The selection of these women respondents had been made taking into consideration their approaching the police to file a complaint against their husband and in-laws for alleged harassment for dowry and for experiencing torture and violence at home.

The present paper has confined itself to the information provided by the parents-in-law of the respondents about their experiences regarding domestic violence supposed to have been inflicted on their daughters-in-law. The basic premise here is that in at least a few cases, older adults- father-in-law, mother-in-law, and husband- were not guilty of harassing the wife for dowry or such demand. The paper is inspired by the accusation by

these people that the law was used to take out revenge or grudge by the wife/daughter-in-law upon them, while the real reason for their conflict with her was something else. Wayward behaviour, not attending to cooking and care of children, as she should be doing, visiting friends and parents often and spending too much time with them, depriving her children of their care, coaching during exams, or attending to their ill health.

Before looking into the above matters, let us understand the social and economic profile of older people (in-laws) of the respondents:

a) Caste Profile

The caste profile of the in-laws is as follows (see Table 1). Out of the total sample of 30 each from each taluk, there were 60 respondents from the in-laws' category).

Table 1. Caste & Gender

	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	6	25.0	3	50.0	9	30.0	8	32.0	3	60.0	11	36.7
Female	18	75.0	3	50.0	21	70.0	17	68.0	2	40.0	19	63.3
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Given the social profile of the study area—Taluk Two district—the majority are from the OBC category, mainly Vokkaligas. Out of the 30 in Taluk One taluk, 24 in-laws and 25 out of 30 in Taluk Two taluk were from this category. The remaining were from SCs.

Most parents-in-law were above 50 - 65 years of age (73.3%).

Table 2. Age

Age	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
50 to 65 Years	16	66.7	3	50.0	19	63.3	22	88.0	0	0.0	22	73.3
66 and Above Years	8	33.3	3	50.0	11	36.7	3	12.0	5	100.0	8	26.7
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Agriculture, the chief economic activity in the sampled district's rural areas, was expected to be the occupation of most of the sample. However, only 16.7 per cent of those from the OBC communities mentioned it as their occupation (when they were adults). While this is in Taluk One taluk, it is still less (at 8%) in Taluk Two. The parents-in-law from SC and ST groups have mentioned it as their occupation but only in Taluk One (50%) and nil from Taluk Two. What, then, were their occupations? Table 3 shows that it refers to only the father-in-law, while 46 per cent and 60 per cent of mothers-in-law from Taluk One and Taluk Two have never worked. Twenty-five per cent and 12.5 per cent were in business/self-employment and government service (some still working and others retired) in Taluk One, while 16 per cent were in similar professions in Taluk Two.

Table 3 Occupation

Occupation	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agriculture	4	16.7	3	50.0	7	23.3	2	8.0	0	0.0	2	6.7
Business/ Self Employee	6	25.0	0	0.0	6	20.0	4	16.0	0	0.0	4	13.3
Govt. Service (In & Retd.)	3	12.5	0	0.0	3	10.0	4	16.0	0	0.0	4	13.3
House Wife/ Not Working	11	45.8	3	50.0	14	46.7	15	60.0	5	100.0	20	66.7
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Income is an essential indicator of self-sufficiency after retirement or in old age. However, 50 per cent of our respondents (parents-in-law) in our study, across caste categories, reported having no income. It is highest in the case of those from SC and ST groups (83.3% in Taluk One&100% in Taluk Two). Others have reported obtaining a modest income of Rs.15000 (about 30 % and 16% of those from OBCs in Taluk One and Taluk Two), while it is about 20% for those obtaining above that amount. The parents-in-law from SC and ST groups.

Table 4 Income

Income	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No Income /Zero	12	50.0	5	83.3	17	56.7	16	64.0	5	100.0	21	64.0
Up to Rs. 15,000	7	29.2	0	0.0	7	23.3	4	16.0	0	0.0	4	16.0
Rs. 15,001 & Above	5	20.8	1	16.7	6	20.0	5	20.0	0	0.0	5	20.0
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Residence

Conflicts and misunderstandings erupt between people when there are more numbers and variety in relationships. This is reflected in the findings, where we find that barring 12.5 per cent and 8.0 per cent in Taluk One and Taluk Two taluks that too among the OBCs, the remaining 87.5 per cent of in-laws are staying with their son or sons and their families. Such staying together is 100 per cent in the case of our in-laws hailing from SC and ST communities.

Table 6 Residence

Residence	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Son and his family	12	50.0	3	50.0	15	50.0	12	48.0	0	0.0	12	40.0
Sons and their families	8	33.3	3	50.0	11	36.7	11	44.0	5	100.0	16	53.3
Sons, their families and unmarried daughters	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	3.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
With spouse only	3	12.5	0	0.0	3	10.0	2	8.0	0	0.0	2	6.7
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Relationship with Daughter-in-Law

The respondents described their relationship with their daughter-in-law as cordial, having a working relationship or as bad. The relationship with the daughter-in-law was reportedly ' bad ' for 33.3 per cent and 52 per cent of those in-laws from OBC groups in Taluk One and Taluk Two. A majority (62.5% and 50% of OBC & SC/ST in Taluk One and 44% and 60% from Taluk Two) reported having a 'working relationship'. Thus, friendship was less than 3.5 per cent for all (refer to table 7).

Table 7 Quality of relationship with Daughter-in-law

Quality of Relationship	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cordial	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	3.3	1	4.0	0	0.0	1	3.3
Working Relationship	15	62.5	3	50.0	18	60.0	11	44.0	3	60.0	14	46.7
Bad	8	33.3	3	50.0	11	36.7	13	52.0	2	40.0	15	50.0
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

By 'bad' relationships, the in-laws meant many things, but what emerged important from the point of view of this paper is filing false complaints about harassment from in-laws. Taluk One has more cases (25%) than Taluk Two (7.7%), but among the OBCs, it is much less among those from the SC/ST groups.

The mother-in-law has accused the daughter-in-law of lousy behaviour, having a boyfriend in a pre-marital affair and even after marriage (12.5% in Taluk One and 15.4% in Taluk Two and among OBCs), filing a false case against the in-laws extended to many reasons such as not heeding to her (daughter-in-law's) demands for location of new house to be built. However, the important ones are related to her caste and economic background. In the case of 66.7 per cent from Taluk One and 50 per cent from Taluk Two, the daughters-in-law hailing from SC communities have alleged harassment and ill-treatment on caste grounds (that she is an SC). Another significant allegation issue this time from the mother-in-law was that the daughter-in-law, who hails from a wealthy family, does not care about nor show respect towards them (in-laws). The complaints against them are supposed to have originated from her arrogance here.

Table 8 Details of 'Bad' Relationship with Daughter-in-law

Quality of Relationship	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
False complaints about harassment	2	25.0	0	0.0	2	18.2	1	7.7	0	0.0	1	6.7
Having a boyfriend	1	12.5	1	33.3	2	18.2	2	15.4	0	0.0	2	13.3
Demand to build house in Blore, when not heeded, court case filed	2	25.0	0	0.0	2	18.2	1	7.7	0	0.0	1	6.7
Not giving proper care towards in-laws	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	7.7	0	0.0	1	6.7
Inter-caste marriage teases and humiliates our son as being useless; she should have married someone else	0	0.0	2	66.7	2	18.2	2	15.4	1	50.0	3	20.0
They never stayed with us and our husband for more than two years and filed a case 8 years ago	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	9.1	1	7.7	1	50.0	2	13.3
She is from a wealthy family, is very arrogant and disrespects her husband	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	9.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Filed false complaint about harassment	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	9.1	5	38.5	0	0.0	5	33.3
Total	8	100.0	3	100.0	11	100.0	13	100.0	2	100.0	15	100.0

Source: Field Data

Giving Respect to the Family

Regarding giving due respect to the in-laws, the respondents have no issue. However, 8.3 and 6.7 per cent of responses (from only OBCs) about lack of respect are substantiated by a philosophical notion that 'nobody wants old people today'. There is also no force or compulsion to do housework as expressed by the in-laws (see tables below).

Table 9 Respect in the family

Respect Given	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	22	91.7	6	100.0	28	93.3	24	96.0	5	100.0	29	96.7
No	2	8.3	0	0.0	2	6.7	1	4.0	0	0.0	1	3.3
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table 10 If no respect, details

No Respect	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Nobody wants old people	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0
Total	2	100.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0

Source: Field Data

Compulsion about Household Work

Despite their old age and health-related disabilities, the parents-in-law (mothers-in-law) have accused their daughters-in-law of compelling them to do household work, such as washing utensils and cooking. They have added that it is a clear example of how the law is being misused.

Table 11 Compulsion to do HH work

HH work	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	4	16.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	3	12.0	0	0.0	3	4
No	20	83.3	6	100.0	26	86.7	22	88.0	5	100.0	27	20
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	24

Source: Field Data

Favouritism and Prejudices

The daughters-in-law have expressed that the in-laws are biased towards them and favour their daughters and, at times, distinguish between daughters-in-law. They also know that it is natural to show greater affection and favour one's daughter than a daughter-in-law, but they consider it a source of injustice in certain day-to-day activities and relations with the in-laws. These accusations cut across caste: for, e.g., 66.7 per cent of in-laws from both categories (OBC & SC/ST) in Taluk One and 72 per cent and 20 per cent in Taluk Two have opined like this. About 21 per cent and 17 per cent of OBC and SC/ST in Taluk One and 20 and 40 per cent in Taluk Two have gone further to express that their daughter-in-law accuses them of favouring other daughters-in-law (see table below).

Table 12 Accusation of favouritism

Accused of favouritism	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Daughters	16	66.7	4	66.7	20	66.7	18	72.0	1	20.0	19	63.3
Other daughters-in-law	5	20.8	1	16.7	6	20.0	5	20.0	2	40.0	7	23.3
Daughters and Other daughters-in-law	3	12.5	1	16.7	4	13.3	2	8.0	2	40.0	4	13.3
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

Now we come to analyze our findings about threats by daughter-in-law to their in-laws that they (former) would file a court case of harassment against them (in-laws). Though not very dominant and limited to less than 20 per cent on average, it is considered annoying by the old parents-in-law, who said they had to live in that fear for no fault of theirs (refer to table for details).

Table 13 Threat about Filing False Complaint

The threat of Filing a False Complaint	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	4	16.7	0	0.0	4	13.3	7	28.0	2	40.0	9	30.0
No	20	83.3	6	100.0	26	86.7	18	72.0	3	60.0	21	70.0
Total	24	100.0	6	100.0	30	100.0	25	100.0	5	100.0	30	100.0

Source: Field Data

What was the type and nature of such threats and false complaints? The table below presents the details. In about 25 per cent of cases (only in Taluk One and among OBCs), the daughter-in-law allegedly filed a harassment case against the in-laws besides attempting to kill her husband (their son). No such incident was, however, reported from Taluk Two. In the following allegation, the in-laws complained to the researcher that the daughter-in-law was carrying false tales about harassment and murder. 25 per cent and 50 per cent of respondents in Taluk One and Taluk Two stated as above. In the latter taluk, about 43 per cent of accusations were levelled against the sister and brother-in-law of her husband (i.e., the daughter and son-in-law of her in-laws) as interfering and instigating the in-laws to torture her. The in-laws were also upset that the daughter-in-law carried wrong information about harassment to her father (refer to the table).

Table 14 Details of Threat and False Complaints

Details of Threat and False Complaint	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Santwana's case filed; she tried to kill her husband	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Daughter in law carrying tales against me, threatening to kill	1	25.0	0	0.0	1	25.0	1	14.3	1	50.0	2	22.2
False accusations about our daughter and son-in-law	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	42.9	0	0.0	3	33.3
Tutoring by her father	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	14.3	0	0.0	1	11.1
No Response	2	50.0	0	0.0	2	50.0	2	28.6	1	50.0	3	33.3
Total	4	100.0	0	0.0	4	100.0	7	100.0	2	100.0	9	100.0

Source: Field Data

What precautionary arrangements were undertaken by the in-laws instead of the wrong accusations and harassment from their daughter-in-law? Keeping a 'will' ready about property distribution was an important one. However, many of them expressed that their son is 'good' and they do not need to fear any negative consequences; moreover, they had minimal property to fear misuse or losing – jewellery or immovable assets.

Table 15 Precautionary Arrangements

	Taluk One						Taluk Two					
	OBC		SC/ST		Total		OBC		SC/ST		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Prepared a Will on my property	1	100.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0
My children are good and are not forcing	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	50.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not much property except the house we live in, Plus some land	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	1	100.0	1	100.0	2	100.0	0	0.0	1	100.0	1	100.0

Source: Field Data

Action taken about False Complaint

The study has found that the parents-in-law in the study area have taken action regarding the false accusations filed by their daughter-in-law against them about dowry and inflicting violence and harassment on her. Often, they were not alone but included their son (her husband on whom she had filed similar and more severe allegations). The significant highlights of the action taken are discussed below:

(a) Bail and Nyaya Panchayat

The parents-in-law have taken bail. Some of them approached the traditional Nyaya Panchayat after a complaint was withdrawn, and they started to live with their son. But not all of them. After their daughter-in-law filed an atrocity case against them (with no reason, according to the in-laws), more than 10 per cent have expressed dejection in life, and they have moved out of their son's house and are living separately.

(b) Tutoring by paternal family

The following significant response that we must bring here is the interference by the natal family in the marital affairs of their daughter. The father and other relatives of the daughter-in-law interfere and influence her mind/thinking, instigate her to pick up quarrels and conflicts, and influence her to file a police case, take the in-laws to the court of law, and get imprisoned.

Impact of Inter-caste Marriage

Marriages across caste groups are common in the present times, and this is also true of our universe of study. However, instead of indicating social transformation and conquer over social stratification in the context of dowry-related violence and allegations by in-laws and the daughter-in-law, the responses to our study have indicated a continuation of caste-based animosities and biases. The table below shows some reactions in this direction.

(c) Economic Influence

The gap in affluence between the daughter-in-law's natal home (father's richness) and her husband's home is an influential factor here. The daughter-in-law comes from a wealthy family background, and the daughter-in-law is accused of expecting an affluent life and, on account of it, harassing them.

(d) Intolerance about Visit/Stay by Sisters-in-law

A common cause in domestic litigations and conflicts is the non-cooperation to adjust or tolerate one's husband's sisters by the daughter-in-law and vice versa (where the former also creates trouble for the daughters-in-law through their gossip, teasing and interference. Here, the mothers-in-law have complained that their daughter-in-law does not tolerate the visit and stays by her daughter/s even on occasions like festivals and picks up quarrels. She also often visits her mother's place, much more so if it is in the same town or nearby village.

(e) Pre-marital and Extra-marital Love Affairs

There have been allegations by in-laws in our study that much of the violence, false allegations/accusations and filing of cases against them are also caused by the love affairs of their daughter-in-law. The study has come across accusations that, eventually, the daughter-in-law sought divorce and married again a man of her choice. In another case, this was supposed to have happened after their son (and daughter-in-law) returned from abroad. In yet another case, the daughter-in-law whom their son married against their acceptance as she was from a different caste, started to criticize and harass him as being a 'useless' person and how she wished she had married somebody else. Thus, marital dissatisfaction has led to considerable distrust and conflicts against one's spouse and their relationships with their parents-in-law.

Table 16 Action taken about False Complaint

Action Taken	Taluk One	%	Taluk Two	%	Total	%
OBC						
Took bail; later panchayat held, complaint withdrawn and living separately with our son	3	12.5	3	8.6	6	10.2
Atrocity case filed by daughter-in-law; Feeling dejected due to all this in old age, came out of home to live separately	2	8.3	1	2.9	3	5.1
The daughter-in-law is heavily tutored by her family, but we are not afraid	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
Her sister and her husband tutor her; we left home to live separately	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
Parents and relatives tutor her; the case is in court, and she is seeking bail, but we are not interested	4	16.7	1	2.9	5	8.5
The case is in the court of law	3	12.5	12	34.3	15	25.4
Inter-caste marriage; she used to quarrel and filed cases on MIL and SIL	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
DIL is mentally sick and was in NIMHANS; after coming back, she quarrels, and her parents filed a case of harassment against us	1	4.2	1	2.9	2	3.4
DIL is quarrelsome, wants a luxurious life, demands a separate house, a lot of shouting and neighbours used to hear	1	4.2	3	8.6	4	6.8
DIL is barren, so we tried to get our son married again	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
She wanted money for taking the case back; after we helped her, she divorced our son	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	1.7
DIL was pregnant even before marriage; filed a case accusing our son under POSCO demanded to marry our son and lives in a separate house	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
Case in court from 2012: FIL died in that worry; All are on bail-PIL, Husband, SIL, BIL	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
Filed murder case on us; son's life spoiled	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
After Nyaya panchayat, divorce sought, DIL has remarried; educated girls do not listen to elders	1	4.2	0	0.0	1	1.7
DIL does not like us; we are quiet and do not want to spoil our son's life	2	8.3	2	5.7	4	6.8
Son & DIL were abroad; After returning, she filed a harassment case&our son applied for divorce	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	1.7
DIL accused us of harassing her, filed a case, and left the house with our son, who is only visiting us	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	1.7
DIL withdrew the case	0	0.0	2	5.7	2	3.4
DIL has filed the case on FIL & MIL. Now we have moved to our daughter's house	0	0.0	3	8.6	3	5.1
Son has got a divorce	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	1.7

Does not like my daughter visiting or staying with us	0	0.0	2	5.7	2	3.4
Pre-marital love with someone	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	1.7
Total	24	100.0	35	100.0	59	100.0

Source: Field Data

Concluding Remarks

The study has shown that under the globalized climate, coupled with their high education (as engineers or double degree holders, wives (may be under the influence of relatives like brother or father or even influenced by partners in extra-marital or pre-marital relations) have used the law as a lethal weapon to settle personal scores, vendetta and marital conflicts with their husband and his parents/family. It makes one wonder if such women require the protection that the law aims to give as immunity against vulnerability as women and the age-old patriarchal norms operative in society for centuries.

While the Fundamental Rights of women as wives and daughters-in-law need to be certainly protected, male members should be unjustly made victims. Often, they are arrested when a case is filed against them, accusing them of harassing them for dowry. The arrest is non-bailable, non-compoundable and a non-cognizable offence. Any compromise to withdraw the case is not allowed. The net result is a lot of shame, humiliation, and lowered status in the extended family, kin, caste, and broader society (workplace, public life) (Sreenivas et al., 2023). Not only the husband but him his parents, unmarried sisters, and brothers staying in the same house or married brothers and their wives are often held guilty of harassing the wife for dowry. Calling it as 'victims of false complaints', Mukund Sarda has argued that it results from the wife's intention to cause shame and a personal grudge against her husband and his parents. He has labelled it as "legal terrorism", which is inflicted through "anti-male and anti-family laws"—arguing that married men are victims of this misuse of law, which needs reform. A husband-victim from Gazipur, Eastern UP, has called the law 'draconian', further arguing that not just the wives but twice as many Indian husbands also kill themselves, unable to bear the torture by wives. He further argued that "wife beating is a common issue, but there is a growing flip side to it".

Believe it or not, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has registered more than 90000 cases investigated annually, of which at least 10000 complaints are false. Can we conclude that the Anto Dowry Harassment Act is the country's most abused and exploited law? Despite women's organizations and feminists supporting every case filed as being genuine, some abuse of the law is bound to happen (Tariq, 2015).

Measures taken to Reduce Misuse of Law

Recognizing the rise in misuse of the anti-dowry law, the Government proposed a few amendments to Section 498-A. One is to make the offence 'compoundable' where the couple can recollect and settle, making the complaint bailable with the court's approval. This is expected to reduce abuse and exploitation. Even the Supreme Court of India recognized some abuse and called the Section a "dubious place of pride.... to be used

as a weapon rather than a shield by the disgruntled wives". It announced that there should be "no arrests under the anti-dowry law without magistrate's nod." It directed the state governments to instruct the police to take care of the situation by ensuring that all parameters provided under Section 498-A of IPC are met.

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