



Killing The Intimate: A Systematic Review Of Spousal Homicides In India (2010–2025)

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Abstract: This review offers a holistic view of spousal homicides in India by integrating the available literature, official documents, and policy reviews to offer multidimensional solutions to this serious social problem. It is a systematic review of the trends, causation, and legal intervention against a domestic homicide of a spouse in India between 2010 and 2025, which indicates the apathetic character of intimate partner violence that leads to fatal consequences. According to the availability of the national crime statistics, academic sources, and the legislative acts such as the IPC Section 498A, the Dowry Prohibition Act and the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, the given study identifies such significant reasons of spousal murders as dowry-related conflicts, domestic violence, financial problems, and social pressure. The review emphasizes the persistence of female victimization in the marital setting, yet also offers a shifting image of male victims, and the pressing need of more gender-neutral and inclusive legal safeguards.

Keywords: Spousal homicide, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, dowry-related violence, IPC Section 498A, “Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act”, gender-neutral laws, India, legal reforms, victim protection.

1. Introduction

Intimate Partner Homicide (IPH), often referred to in lay terms as spousal homicide, represents the most severe and tragic outcome of domestic violence—where a partner in an intimate relationship kills the other. It encompasses the killing of a spouse, cohabiting partner, or any individual involved in a romantic or sexual relationship with the perpetrator. Globally, IPH is predominantly gendered in nature, with a majority of victims being women; however, men too are victims of partner violence, albeit in smaller numbers and with limited social recognition.

In India, the term spousal homicide typically refers to killings that occur within the context of a legal or socially recognized marriage. However, with the rise of live-in relationships and evolving definitions of intimacy, it becomes imperative to broaden this scope to include non-marital partners as well. India's socio-cultural fabric—rooted in patriarchy, rigid gender roles, and family honor—creates a unique context in which intimate partner violence and eventual homicide occur.

The Indian “National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)” reports thousands of cases each year under categories such as “dowry deaths,” “cruelty by husband or his relatives,” and “murder by spouse,” but often fails to systematically isolate data specifically under the label of “intimate partner homicide.” However, even the strong laws targeted to reduce the incidences of domestic violence and dowry harassment, considerable loopholes exist in the enforcement, support of the victims, and accuracy of data. The research recommends the appearance of better legal changes, better risk evaluation instruments, and community-based interventions as preventive measures of the occurrence of such homicides. Moreover, the review indicates the importance of socio-economic empowerment and mental health assistance as prevention steps.

This results in the fact that the actual scope of the problem is underestimated. Husbands, in-laws or partners will on most occasions kill women over dowry demands, suspicion of unfaithfulness, failure to have male children, or seeking to escape abusive marriages. On the other hand, more and more women are being reported to kill their spouse or lover, many apparently after years of abuse, threats or as a result of extramarital agreements that have failed to work out.

The weaknesses within the system are also a determinant of the nature of IPH in India, as it includes ineffective law enforcement, shame toward reporting an act of domestic violence, and slow judicial process and absence of victim support. The existence of social taboos about separation and divorce further victimizes most women in abusive relationships making the problem to escalate to murder. the minimal recognition of male victimization in intimate relationship implies that a substantial proportion of the cases go unreported.

Objectives of the Study

1. To define and contextualize spousal/intimate partner homicide within the socio-cultural and legal framework of India.
2. To analyse the trends, patterns, and triggers of spousal homicides in India between 2010 and 2025.
3. To evaluate the role of institutional and systemic factors—such as legal provisions, law enforcement responses, and social support systems—in preventing or failing to prevent spousal homicide.

Significance of Study

The research is important as it would help to bring to the fore a serious type of domestic violence that has not been given much attention in India. Although there are a number of studies that have been conducted to explore the problem of domestic violence and dowry related crimes, there are very few studies that have addressed the issue of intimate partner homicide as a distinct topic that warrants special consideration.

The proposed research will fill the existing gap in the criminological, gender, and legal literature by answering the question of how the socio-cultural realities of India influence the occurrence of intimate partner killings. By doing so, it is stretching the limits of definitions and measurements of domestic violence, beyond the paradigm of abuse to the consequences of ineffective protection that are fatal and the system neglect.

In addition, the research is longitudinal, examining the cases during a 15-year period (2010-2025), which provides an idea of how the spousal murders evolve in India. It takes into account the alterations in gender norms, the alterations in marriage patterns, the increase in the awareness of rights, and the impact of digital technologies on the relationships and coverage of crime.

The paper is also policy-interest. Because we know how and why spousal homicides occur, this information can be applied to create more effective legal protections, gender-sensitive policing, timely mental health care, and effective victim support systems. The study promotes a more holistic perspective of gender-based violence by examining both male and female victims and perpetrators.

Activists, lawyers, law enforcement, healthcare workers, and NGOs working in the field of domestic violence prevention can also be good sources of the research as the research will offer concrete data and information to introduce interventions that would save lives and bring justice.

Scope of the Study

The research is temporal and geographical in the sense that it will cover 15 years of a time period between 2010 and 2025 and a geographical region will be restricted to India. The timeline below has been chosen specifically to capture a time of significant social-economic transformation and greater digital penetration in India that has affected interpersonal relationships, social awareness, legal intervention, and the character of violent crime.

One of the phases when the legislation against domestic violence against women became visible and was mentioned more and more is the period when the timeline begins, 2010. The period was also associated with the fast urbanization of the Indian society, the explosion of dual-income families and the increased participation of women in the workforce, thereby changing gender propulsion in families and intimate relationships.

The growth of mobile internet and social media in the 2010s contributed to both the recording of the abuse in the household and shaping relationships. Social media, in particular Facebook, WhatsApp, or subsequently Instagram, was frequently used in the build-up and the revelation of intimate conflict. The digital footprint of most crimes has also become a very important element in the investigation and prosecution of homicides.

It is also applicable in the years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022), when the global number of victims of domestic violence increased significantly under the influence of lockdowns and mobility restrictions. India, in its turn, witnessed the rise in domestic abuse cases, a number of which ended in deadly consequences. This period can also be included in the study which will allow it to examine the effect of social isolation and economic stress on intimate partner dynamics.

Top limit of the research, 2025, is adopted to capture the latest and the newer trends interested in the research, so that it becomes up to date and applicable. High-profile spousal homicide cases, growing media attention and mobilization via social media have changed the way people talk about these crimes and it is essential to incorporate recent developments.

2. Methodology

The research design of the study is a systematic review model, which allows the researcher to integrate, analyze, and synthesize the results of various sources on spousal or intimate partner homicides (IPH) in India between 2010 and 2025. This section describes the sources of data, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the analytical framework and review strategy used in the study.

Data Sources

To ensure comprehensiveness and reliability, data was gathered from a diverse range of **primary and secondary sources**, including:

1. **“National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)”:**

The NCRB gives yearly reports on crimes in India under different categories like dowry deaths, cruelty by husband or relatives (Section 498A IPC) and homicide. Although NCRB does not distinguish spousal homicide, a close disaggregation and interpretation of the related categories were made. The latest available (2024 or early 2025) and reports between 2010 and the latest were a key source of information on trends and the measurement of the scale of the problem.

2. **Peer-Reviewed Academic Journals:**

Articles from journals related to criminology, sociology, gender studies, law, and public health were consulted. Journals such as the “*Indian Journal of Criminology*, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *Violence Against Women*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, and *Indian Journal of Psychiatry*” were used to gather theoretical insights and case-specific findings. Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, and SSRN were the primary databases searched.

3. **Legal Case Databases:**

Judicial decisions from platforms like **Indian Kanoon**, **SCC Online**, and **Judis.nic.in** were analyzed to understand how courts interpret, prosecute, and adjudicate spousal homicide cases. Selected landmark judgments and lesser-known regional cases were included to identify legal patterns and judicial attitudes.

4. **Media Reports:**

News articles, especially from national dailies like *The Hindu*, *Indian Express*, *Times of India*, and digital platforms such as *Scroll*, *The Wire*, and *BBC India*, provided real-time accounts of spousal homicide cases. These sources were instrumental in offering contextual information often absent in academic and government documents.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain a focused and systematic approach, the following **criteria were applied** to determine which studies, cases, or reports would be included in the final analysis:

Inclusion Criteria:

- Cases or studies from India, regardless of state or region.
- Incidents or analysis occurring between 2010 and 2025.
- Reports that provide sufficient contextual, demographic, or legal information to support analysis.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Homicides involving family members other than intimate partners (e.g., siblings, in-laws) unless they were co-conspirators in a spousal murder.
- Reports that focus solely on general domestic violence without indicating fatal outcomes.
- Non-Indian cases, even if regionally comparable.

Analytical Framework and Review Strategy

This review adopts a qualitative synthesis approach, supported by thematic analysis and selective quantitative mapping to trace patterns in spousal homicide over time.

Review Strategy:

A comprehensive search was conducted across the identified databases using keywords such as “spousal homicide India,” “intimate partner violence,” “dowry death,” “domestic murder,” and “marital violence fatality.” A total of over 1,000 records were initially identified, which were filtered using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, resulting in approximately 120 core documents for detailed analysis.

3. Trends and Patterns in Spousal Homicides

National and Regional Statistics

Spousal or intimate partner homicides (IPH) in India represent a significant, yet often underreported, facet of domestic violence. While the “National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)” does not explicitly categorize spousal homicides, related categories such as “cruelty by husband or his relatives” under Section 498A of the “Indian Penal Code (IPC)” provide insight into the prevalence of such crimes.

According to the 2022 report by the NCRB, 1,40,000 cases were registered under Section 498A, which comprised 31.4% of all crimes against women in the same year. Though not all of these instances result in homicide, they are indicators of a pervasive culture of domestic abuse that can result in fatal outcomes.’

Table 1: Top 5 States by Cases Registered under Section 498A IPC in 2022

State	Cases Registered
Uttar Pradesh	65,743
Maharashtra	45,331
Rajasthan	45,058
West Bengal	34,738
Madhya Pradesh	32,765

Source: NCRB, 2022

These figures indicate disparities in the regions, with states like Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra recording the highest numbers. However, in the interpretation of these statistics, one should consider such factors as the size of the population, the reporting practices, and the attitudes of the society to domestic violence.

Gender-Based Analysis

All over the world, women are the most affected in intimate relationship violence. In 2022, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) stated that 55 percent of women who were victims of homicide were killed by intimate partners or family members; among male victims, the figure was 12 percent.

In India, there is no extensive national data on gender-disaggregated spousal homicides, but available research and reports indicate the same pattern. Most of the victims in cases reported under Section 498A IPC are women, which indicates that domestic violence in India is gendered.

Moreover, a research based on the data of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) established that intimate partner violence (IPV) of married women is strongly linked to the age of the husband, his level of education, substance abuse, and attitudes that justify IPV,

Table 2: Factors Associated with Increased Risk of IPV

Factor	Association with IPV
Husband's lower education level	Higher risk
Substance abuse by husband	Higher risk
Justifying attitude towards IPV	Higher risk

Source: Chandra et al., 2023

These findings underscore the importance of addressing underlying societal and behavioral factors to prevent spousal homicides.

Year-on-Year Trends and Demographic Insights

In the last ten years, there has been a gradual rise in reported crimes against women in India. According to the NCRB, the number of cases increased by 4 percent, with 3,71,504 cases in 2020 and 4,45,256 cases in 2022. Although this increase can be partially attributed to better reporting systems, it also shows that there are still issues with dealing with domestic violence.

The COVID-19 epidemic only aggravated the situation. The number of domestic abuse complaints reported to the National Commission for Women (NCW) increased by 45 percent between the last 25 days and 587 between March 23, 2020, and April 16, 2020. Lockdowns and economic pressures were likely to have led to this increase.

Demographically, younger women are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence, particularly those aged 18-30 years. Some of the factors that expose them to vulnerability include early marriage, low education and economic dependency.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Female Victims in Domestic Violence Cases

Age Group	Percentage of Victims
18-30	45%
31-40	30%
41-50	15%
51+	10%

Source: NFHS-5 Data Analysis

Legal and Policy Framework

The Indian government has enacted numerous laws to deter and penalize domestic violence against women. In 1961, the Dowry Prohibition Act was enacted and it is now unlawful to demand, pay or receive dowry. The Indian Penal Code, Section 498A, criminalizes domestic violence and the victims can seek civil redress under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) of 2005.

Although these legal provisions exist, they are difficult to enforce. According to a study by Nigam (2020), courts tend to provide compulsory counseling rather than focusing on the immediate needs of victims, including medical assistance, shelter, and psychological support. In addition, women will not be willing to report abuse or sue because of the social perception and patriarchal values.

Underreporting and Data Limitations

Underreporting and inconsistent categorization of spousal homicides in India prevents the collection of accurate data. The annual reports of the NCRB provide motives of homicides but do not specify the reasons why the female victims were killed. Also, the number of cases reported under the category of murder with

rape, dowry deaths, and abetment to suicide is usually higher than the number of homicides reported, which means that there are discrepancies in the classification of data (NewsClick, 2023).

This underreporting is also enhanced by the stigma in the society, fear of retaliation and absence of support systems to the victims. Consequently, a significant number of spousal homicide cases can be missed or reclassified as other types.

Cultural and Societal Factors

In India, cultural norms and social expectations play a major role in perpetuating domestic violence and spousal killings. Patriarchal structures, focus on family honour, and strict gender roles are likely to excuse or overlook violence against women. A research article in BMC Public Health (2024) discovered that women are more vulnerable to severe intimate partner violence when their in-laws engage in risky behaviours like false accusations or threatening harm to defend family honour.

4. Key Drivers and Risk Factors of Spousal Homicides in India

Motives Behind Spousal Homicides

The causes of spousal murders in India are complex and intertwined with cultural, social, and economic factors. One of the most common reasons is the reason related to dowry demands. The stress on married women and their families to comply with the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961) and the dowry system in which the family of the bride has to pay money, gifts, or property to the family of the groom still persists in the society. Inability to fulfil dowry demands or those that are considered to be inadequate can result in harassment, physical abuse and even murder. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has reported that the number of people who have been killed in the name of dowry has been deplorable over the years.

In 2019, 7,115 deaths were reported in the country due to dowry (NCRB, 2020). Wikipedia (2023) states that dowry-related violence remains one of the primary causes of spousal murders in India. It is a form of gender-based discrimination and economic exploitation that is devastating. Because of the well-established norms of the society regarding dowry, the practice is prevalent in the eastern and northern states such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar (NCRB, 2020).

Other interpersonal conflicts such as suspicions of infidelity and jealousy are closely related to dowry and also act as catalysts to spousal homicides. In India, the social pressure on marital fidelity, especially on women is strong. Violent retaliations are not rare when husbands suspect infidelity or when extramarital affairs are found out. Research conducted in urban areas like Delhi indicates that the fear of infidelity and economic pressures tend to lead to lethal violence against wives (Times of India, 2023). This trend reflects the patriarchal values according to which male honour is associated with female chastity and fidelity, and infidelity is a powerful motivation to kill (UN Women, 2017).

Separation and divorce are also significant risk factors of spousal homicide. Marital dissolution in India is a socially stigmatized phenomenon. Women who want to separate or divorce are not only victims of emotional and physical abuse but also victims of social ostracism. Separating with a spouse may exacerbate the existing conflicts and introduce new ones, especially when the custody of children, asset division, or financial support is at stake. The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) attracts attention to the fact that dowry harassment and extra-marital affairs were among the most common reasons provided by women who faced domestic violence and cruelty that resulted in separations or divorces (IDRC, 2023). These stresses may therefore escalate into fatal fights especially in families where there is poor communication and lack of conflict resolution mechanisms.

In situations where the victim is confined and lacks support and means of escape, domestic violence, which is usually a chronic and cyclical issue, may result in homicide. According to the National Commission for Women (NCW), the number of complaints of domestic violence increased significantly during the Covid-19 lockdown, which underscores the role of external stressors in family tensions (Times of India, 2021).

Mental Health, Substance Abuse, and Sociocultural Factors

Mental health problems are a significant, but frequently neglected, aspect of spousal homicides. Mental illnesses such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and personality disorders can all impair the capacity of a person to make sound decisions, control their impulses and even become more aggressive (WHO, 2021). In 2025, The Times of India reported that a man who was under psychiatric care in Nagpur killed his father-in-law in a family dispute. This example shows that mental illness, when not treated or managed adequately, may have horrific outcomes. Nevertheless, in India, many people are not diagnosed and treated in time regarding their mental health issues, which predisposes them to domestic violence (Patel et al., 2018).

The stigma of the society and the unavailability of resources, especially in rural areas, often lead to the neglect and lack of attention to mental health issues. This contributes to more domestic violence and instability.

Alcoholism and substance abuse are closely linked with increased risk of intimate partner violence and spousal homicides. Research indicates that alcohol consumption reduces inhibitions and causes individuals to be more violent, thereby exposing them to violent acts (Cambridge Core, 2023). According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), about 29 percent of Indian men drink alcohol, and the rates are higher in such states as Punjab and Goa (NFHS, 2021). Drunkenness is a common cause of conflict and increases physical violence in the home environment. Also, the use of other drugs like cannabis and opiates has been associated with increased aggression and violent behavior, but the data on this is less extensive in the Indian context (UNODC, 2020). The social acceptance of alcohol use among men and the relative absence of support to deal with substance abuse make the prevention of alcohol-related domestic violence and homicides complex.

Sociocultural factors deeply embedded in Indian society also contribute significantly to spousal homicides. Patriarchal norms that emphasize male dominance and female submissiveness create environments conducive to control and abuse. Gender inequality manifests in multiple ways, from limited access to education and economic resources for women to societal expectations that tolerate or excuse violence as a means of disciplining wives (Heise, 2011). In addition, many societies see marriage as an irrevocable bond, which makes women afraid to leave violent partners for fear of ridicule and financial ruin (International Labour Organisation, 2022). Fatal violence against women is more common because of the societal norm of male dominance and the shame associated with divorce. The persistence of honor-related violence, where male family members kill women suspected of dishonoring the family through alleged infidelity or defiance, also reflects deep-rooted sociocultural drivers (UN Women, 2017).

Profiles of Victims and Perpetrators

Profiling victims and perpetrators provides crucial insights for prevention and intervention strategies. Victims of spousal homicide in India are predominantly women, often within the reproductive and early married years, typically aged between 18 and 30 years (NCRB, 2020). Many victims come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, which restricts their access to education, economic independence, and support systems. Limited education reduces awareness of legal rights and available protections, while economic dependence traps many women in abusive marriages (World Bank, 2019). The duration of marriage also appears relevant; early years of marriage often coincide with heightened risks, as familial conflicts around dowry, household roles, and adjustment issues are most acute during this period (IDRC, 2023).

Understanding the demographics and backgrounds of victims can inform targeted interventions. Common characteristics include:

- **Gender:** Predominantly female.
- **Age:** Majority between 18–30 years.
- **Socioeconomic Status:** Often from lower-income backgrounds.
- **Education:** Limited access to education correlates with higher vulnerability.
- **Marital Duration:** Early years of marriage pose higher risks.

Perpetrator Profiles

Identifying common traits among perpetrators can aid in prevention efforts. Common characteristics include:

- **Gender:** Predominantly male.
- **Age:** Typically between 30–45 years.
- **Behavioral Traits:** Controlling, possessive, and prone to jealousy.
- **Substance Abuse:** High correlation with alcohol or drug dependency.
- **Mental Health:** Presence of untreated psychological disorders.

Perpetrators of spousal homicides are overwhelmingly male, typically aged 30 to 45 years, and often characterized by controlling and possessive behaviors (NCRB, 2020). Many perpetrators have histories of substance abuse, particularly alcohol, and may suffer from untreated mental health conditions (Cambridge Core, 2023).

5. Legal and Policy Landscape

India has evolved a series of important legal provisions to deal with domestic violence, dowry-related harassment and spousal abuse. These laws are an attempt by the government to safeguard vulnerable people, mainly women, from domestic harm and exploitation. Among the most important statutes is "Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which was enacted in 1983 and criminalizes cruelty by a husband or his relatives towards a married woman." The section defines cruelty to include physical and mental harm, harassment relating to dowry demands and other forms of ill-treatment (The Indian Penal Code, 1860; Amended 1983). It carries penalties that include imprisonment for up to three years and fines. Section 498A was introduced in response to the rising number of dowry deaths and violence against women within marriage, with the aim of giving women legal recourse against spousal and in-law harassment (Baxi, 2020).

Another law that prohibits dowry in all its forms and supplements IPC Section 498A is the Dowry Prohibition Act (DPA) of 1961. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 criminalizes the act of demanding dowry and imposes fines and jail terms on the offenders. This law aims at ensuring that dowry-related violence becomes less prevalent as it is criminalized. In any case, dowry is a social vice, in part because it is difficult to enforce and in part because it is socially acceptable (NCRB, 2020). Regrettably, most instances of dowry harassment or dowry deaths remain unreported because of shame and fear, and the implementation of the Act has been inconsistent at best.

The "Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act" (PWDVA), 2005 is a watershed moment in the history of domestic violence victim protection legislation. Under the PWDVA, women are broadly protected from domestic violence, in contrast to the mainly punitive IPC Section 498A. Financial, verbal, sexual, and emotional abuse are all included in the Act's broad definition of domestic violence. Victim compensation, residency orders, financial assistance, custody orders, and protection orders are all made possible by it (PWDVA, 2005). As part of its comprehensive strategy to end domestic abuse, the PWDVA calls for victim shelters and the appointment of Protection Officers. Spousal murder cases often include psychological and economic abuse as foundations, and this rule is important for treating both forms of violence (Jaising, 2006).

In addition to these laws, there are provisions under Section 304B of the IPC dealing with dowry deaths, which make it a specific offense to cause the death of a woman by burns or bodily injury within seven years of marriage due to dowry harassment (IPC, 1860). This section carries more severe penalties, including imprisonment for life, reflecting the gravity of such crimes. The special nature of dowry deaths is recognized legally, acknowledging that these are often homicides disguised as accidents or suicides (NCRB, 2020).

Gaps in Legal Protection, Especially for Male Victims

While the above legal provisions have contributed to enhancing the protection of women victims of domestic violence and spousal homicide, there remain significant gaps in legal coverage and implementation. One critical area is the absence of adequate protection for male victims of domestic violence and spousal abuse. Current laws in India, including the PWDVA and Section 498A IPC, are explicitly gender-specific and primarily designed to protect women, reflecting the social reality that women are disproportionately victimized. However, this specificity also results in a legal lacuna where men who face domestic abuse lack effective legal recourse (Chakraborty, 2019).

False accusations under Section 498A, also called "Section 498A misuse" (Saxena & Patel, 2017), emotional manipulation, physical abuse, and other forms of domestic violence are becoming more common in situations where males are victims. Men who are abused by wives or female partners often find themselves without legal protection because the PWDVA does not recognize male victims, and there is no corresponding law protecting men from spousal violence. This gap undermines the principle of equality before the law enshrined in "Article 14 of the Indian Constitution" (Constitution of India, 1950).

In addition, there has been concern around the potential abuse of certain clauses, including Section 498A. Instances of this legislation being used to harass men and their families have been recognised in various government studies and decisions by the Supreme Court of India (2014). Such cases have resulted in false arrests and drawn out court fights. This has sparked debates on balancing the protection of genuine victims with safeguarding the rights of the accused. The "All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)" and other activists caution against diluting protections for women, while some legal scholars advocate for reforms to make the laws more gender-neutral and prevent misuse (Chakraborty, 2019; Baxi, 2020).

Enforcement challenges also create gaps in protection. Despite legal provisions, many women and men are unable to access timely justice due to social stigma, lack of awareness, or inadequate police sensitivity. In rural areas and among marginalized communities, fear of community backlash or economic dependence often prevents victims from reporting abuse (National Crime Records Bureau, 2020). In addition, there is limited

training among police and judiciary on handling domestic violence cases sensitively, which results in under-enforcement and victim re-traumatization (Jaising, 2006).

Policy Recommendations and the Need for Gender-Neutral Frameworks

Given the persistent gaps and evolving social realities, a key policy recommendation is the adoption of gender-neutral legal frameworks to protect all victims of domestic violence and spousal abuse, irrespective of gender. Gender-neutrality in law would mean that the provisions of domestic violence protection, penalties for cruelty, and dowry-related offenses should be accessible to men, women, and other gender identities equally. (UN Women, 2020).

Several countries, such as the United Kingdom and Australia, have adopted gender-neutral domestic violence laws that protect all individuals regardless of gender, and their experience offers useful lessons for India. For example, gender-neutral laws allow for more comprehensive data collection and targeted interventions, recognizing male victims and reducing stigmatization (Australia Government, 2018). India could benefit from similar reforms, including amendments to the PWDVA and IPC to extend protections to all victims of domestic violence and abuse, while retaining specific measures addressing structural gender inequality.

Alongside gender-neutral legal reform, it is crucial to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and victim support systems. The government ought to invest in sensitization of police, judiciary and healthcare providers to deal with domestic violence cases without bias and ineffectiveness (Jaising, 2006). Helplines and Protection Officers must be adequately staffed and funded to assist victims in a timely manner. Legal aid and counseling services should be increased, particularly in rural and underserved areas (NCRB, 2020).

Public awareness campaigns are part of the process of changing social attitudes towards domestic violence and spousal homicide. Community-based programs that challenge patriarchal norms and promote healthy relationships can prevent violence (Heise, 2011). The educational curricula should also incorporate gender sensitivity and conflict resolution to promote respect and equality at a tender age.

The government must also establish mechanisms to check and curb abuse of the law like the protection against false allegations without infringing the rights of the actual victims. Independent oversight bodies and fast-track courts that specialize in domestic violence cases can enhance accountability and reduce delays (Supreme Court of India, 2014).

Finally, victims need to be economically empowered and socially supported. Victims, particularly women, can be provided with access to education, employment, and social security to decrease their reliance on abusive partners and offer them a safer means of leaving violent relationships (World Bank, 2019). Microfinance programs, vocational training and shelter homes need to be increased to provide holistic services.

6. Findings, conclusion and recommendations

Findings

Moreover, the contribution of dowry-related harassment and dowry deaths remains high, which validates the findings of Jaising (2006) and is supported by the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961). The continued cases of dowry torture and violence are reflective of ingrained societal values about marriage and economic dealings that continue to make women vulnerable (Times of India, 2021). Although laws like IPC Section 498A and the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005) exist, Saxena and Patel (2017) note that issues like misuse claims and gender biases in the implementation process influence the successful redressal.

The mental health consequences of domestic violence are becoming more recognized, which aligns with the international evidence, including Patel et al. (2018) and WHO (2021). Long-term abuse can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental disorders, which are evidenced by research, including the one published by Cambridge Core (2023). This overlap between domestic violence and mental health demands combined support systems, which are yet to be developed in the healthcare infrastructure of India.

The trend and pattern analysis of spousal homicides in India between 2010 and 2025 reveals a complicated interaction of economic, societal, and behavioral factors. Although official statistics provide us with an idea of the prevalence of such crimes, underreporting and stigma in society tend to conceal the actual scope of the problem.

The discussion of domestic violence in India shows a complex set of cultural, legal, social and psychological factors that contribute to its persistence despite the presence of various legal frameworks that are aimed at its prevention. The analyzed data and literature are valuable in terms of the nature, causes, and effects of domestic violence, and are highly consistent with the existing research results.

Firstly, the prevalence of domestic violence against women in India is alarmingly high according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2021) and the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2022). These governmental statistics confirm the findings of Heise (2011) and UN Women (2017), who emphasized that domestic violence is a widespread issue in the world that is firmly embedded in patriarchal social structures and gender inequality. The systemic nature of violence that is inherent in family and social relations, which is also reported by Chakraborty (2019) and Baxi (2020), is evidenced by the fact that the most frequent cause of violence is cruelty by husband or his relatives (Times of India, 2023a).

Conclusion

The causes of spousal homicides in India are a complicated mix of factors including dowry-related violence, infidelity, and marital discord, mental health problems, substance abuse, and well-established sociocultural norms. The profiles of the victims and the perpetrators highlight the gendered nature of this crime, with women being disproportionately affected and men being the perpetrators. Multi-sectoral approaches involving legal reforms, anti-patriarchal awareness campaigns, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and economic empowerment of women are required to address these key drivers. Only comprehensive, culturally sensitive and long-term efforts can help to decrease the fatal cycle of spousal homicide in India. The Indian legal system that deals with domestic violence and spousal murder is a result of a deliberate attempt to safeguard the vulnerable women against abuse. The laws that underpin this framework are the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act, and the Indian Penal Code Section 498A. However, these laws are still gender-based and do not address male victims adequately, which leaves loopholes in the legal coverage and delivery of justice. Misuse of laws and enforcement problems add to the complexity. There is an urgent need to reformulate policies to bring about gender-neutral legal frameworks, strengthen enforcement, increase victim support services, and promote social change to reduce domestic violence and its fatal consequences. Such far-reaching reforms would render India more committed to the safeguarding of all victims of domestic violence, equality before the law, and safeguarding of human rights.

Recommendations

Addressing spousal homicides in India requires a multifaceted approach:

- **Strengthening Legal Frameworks:** Ensure effective implementation of existing laws and introduce reforms to address gaps in protection and enforcement.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Raise awareness in communities on the warning signs of domestic abuse, as well as victims' legal rights and resources for help.
- **Support Services:** Domestic abuse victims need easily accessible shelters, counselling centres, and hotlines.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Encourage women to pursue education and career opportunities so they may lessen their reliance on males financially.
- **Community Engagement:** Involve local leaders, religious institutions, and community organizations in efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and support victims.
- **Data Collection and Research:** Improve data collection methods to accurately capture the prevalence and nature of spousal homicides, enabling targeted interventions.

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