

## Crime Against Women: A Challenge To Women Empowerment

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### Abstract

Empowerment of women is necessary for the welfare of women and for the development of society. Initiatives are being taken up by the government and many non-governmental organisations to promote women empowerment. Various schemes and programmes are implemented for the welfare of women and to improve their status in the society. However, many crimes against women such as rape, molestation, eve-teasing, honour killing, sexual harassment, female infanticide, female foeticide, dowry, etc. are continuously happening and act as obstacles to the process of empowerment of women. These crimes equally affected the life of women without making any differentiation between educated, uneducated, rural, urban, developed, developing, underdeveloped, working, non-working women and equally make the victims of these crimes. These crimes make many women psychologically feel insecure both inside and outside home that directly or directly impact the process of women empowerment as psychologically insecure women will never be able to perform and contribute cent percent for their own growth and for the society. The paper discusses crime against women as a challenge to women empowerment using secondary sources of data.

**Key terms:** empowerment, women empowerment, crime against women, domestic violence

### Introduction

Women empowerment is essential for the welfare of women and development of the society. Initiatives are being taken up by the government and non-governmental organisations to promote women empowerment through schemes, policies and programmes. Through these policies and programmes efforts are being made to give socio-cultural, economic, and political empowerment of women. However, various crimes against women are continuously happening in the society and hamper the process of empowering women. These crimes not only assault physically and mentally the victims but also directly or indirectly affected women community as a whole psychologically and mentally to feel insecure and unsafe that hamper the working performance of women both inside and outside home. Feeling secure to work anywhere is essential to bring empowerment among women and this can lead to open up their mind and see and think vastly for themselves and for the society. The paper discusses crime against women as a challenge to women empowerment using secondary data.

### Women Empowerment

According to UN (2001), "empowerment is a process by which people take control of their lives or gain the ability to generate choices, exercise bargaining power, develop a sense of self-worth, and a belief in one's ability to secure desired changes." Kabeer (2001) defined it as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." Empowerment responds to difference, thrive on security, mobilise insecure communities to deal with conflict and is transformative in crating practical changes, including women's participation in decision-making across all levels of social, political, religious and cultural life (Elisabeth, 2013). UN definition of women empowerment has five components: i) women's sense of self-worth; ii) right to have and to determine choices; iii) right to have access to resources and opportunities; iv) right to have the power to control their own lives; both within and outside the world; v) ability to influence the direction of change to create more social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

Many schemes, policies and programmes are implemented by the government also. Some of the programmes undertaken for the empowerment of women in India may be mentioned as: Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY), Hostels for Working Women, Short-stay Home for Women and Girls, Mahila Samridhi Yojana (MSY), Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP), Training-Cum-Employment-Cum-Production Centres, Balika Samridhi Yojana. Policies for the welfare of the women in India are National Plan of Action for Women 1976, National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000 AD), Shram-Shakti-Report of the National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sectors, National Policy for the Employment of Women, etc. Some of the associations working for the empowerment and development of women in India are Central Social Welfare Board, Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, National Commission for Women, The Standing Committee on Empowerment of Women set up by the Parliament. All of these are working for the empowerment of women in India. Social, economic and political empowerments are the main concerned of the women empowerment. Social empowerment includes improving education, health, etc. Economic empowerment would improve the financial and economic conditions of the women. Many self help groups, micro-finance institution/associations are working on improving the economic conditions of women in India also. Political empowerment

means the participation of women in political activities and providing political and legal awareness. However, only social, economic and political empowerment could not bring empowerment among women as a whole. Economic development alone is insufficient to ensure significant progress in important dimensions of women's empowerment, in particular, significant progress in decision-making ability in the face of pervasive stereotypes against women's ability (Duflo, 2012).

### **Crime against Women as a Challenge to Women Empowerment**

Many challenges are being faced in the process of women empowerment. Some of the major challenges may be mentioned as crime against women, gender discrimination or inequality, lack of education and awareness, economic dependency, etc. Illiteracy, sex-stereotypes, rivalry among women, insufficient need for power, religious belief, discriminating attitudes of male, low participation of women in politics, poor economic base are the challenges of women empowerment (Nahaya, 1999). Crime against women is one of the major important obstacles towards women empowerment. The meaning of crime against women is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty to women. And the crimes which are directed specifically against women and in which only women are victims are characterized as Crime against Women. Violence is also known as abuse that includes any sort of physical aggression or misbehaves. Domestic violence i.e. violence committed at home, may involve different means such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, throwing objects. It includes threats, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, controlling or domineering intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse and economic deprivation, rape, abduction, kidnapping, murder (all cases of criminal violence, dowry death, wife battering, sexual abuse, maltreatment of a widow and for an elderly women (all cases of domestic violence) and eve-teasing, forcing wife/daughter-in-law to go for foeticide, forcing a young widow to commit sati, etc (all cases of social violence), are issues which affect a large section of society (Singh and Choudhury, 2012).

The United Nations defined "Violence against Women" in 1993, 'as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life' (Naidu, 2011). Many types of crimes i.e. sexual harassment, rape, molestation, eve-teasing, honour killing, dowry death, female infanticide, etc. are happening against women every-day. 'Rape' is the rapid growing crime in the country today and as many as 18 women are assaulted in some form or the other every hour in India. According to the National Crimes Records Bureau of the Government of India, there were over 32,000 murders, 19,000 rapes, 7,500 dowry deaths and 36,500 molestation cases in the country in the year 2006. Further, there has been an increase of 5.7% in crimes against women in India in 2008 as compared to 2007. In 2011, 24,206 rape cases were registered in India. A new case is reported every 20/22 minutes. The rate of crimes against women in India increased by 12.9% between 2018 and 2022. The crime rate per lakh women population rose to 66.4 in 2022 from 64.5 in 2021. The psychological pressure of all this can easily lead a woman to quit her job (Ranjana).

Both educated and uneducated women are the victims of crimes/violence against women. In a study done by George, Jayasheela (2011) it has been found that one of the IAS officer respondents who married to an IPS officer faced the problem of dowry and wife beating. Her husband suspected her for extra-marital affairs and even threatens her to death and did not want to continue her job. Mumbai journalist case, Tehelka rape case, and many other sexual harassment cases are also the example of unsafe for educated women. Social evils like female foeticide and infanticide; domestic violence, dowry deaths, trafficking and sexual harassment are still part of the Indian reality. An often stated fact is that these activities are confined to rural and backward sections of the society, which is grossly untrue as dowry and female infanticide are still practiced in educated, respected and upper class family too. Much of the discrimination is to do with cultural beliefs and social norms. These norms themselves must be challenged if this practice is to stop. Therefore, crime against women has directly or indirectly affected every section of women in the society and these crimes make them feel unsecured while performing any activities both inside and outside home. It should not be possible to make women empowered if they feel unsafe psychologically. Preventing and abolishing crimes against women is necessary to enhance the process of empowering women.

### **Conclusion**

Promoting women empowerment is a necessary step for the welfare of women in the society. Women can live freely in the society without any fear if they are socially, psychologically, economically and politically empowered and many government and non-governmental organisations acted on it. However, crimes against women has directly or indirectly affected women psychologically and mentally, not only the victims but women in general. Psychological empowerment among women will be an important step to be taken up to empower women. Crimes against women make women psychologically feel unsecured and unsafe in carrying out their life activities. To empower women, they should feel free and secure while doing activities, whether it may be doing jobs, business, going outside home, shopping, travelling or learning, etc. Women will be more active, if they are feeling free, secure, and safe both inside and outside home and it will help in bringing social, economic and political empowerment of women. To make women psychologically feel secure, crime against women should be prevented and abolished from the society. Until and unless women feel psychologically secure and free in doing any activities, the concept of self worth mention in the first component of UN definition of women empowerment does not have any value and meaning at all. Only when women feel that they are respected and valued by men and women in the society, they will feel that they have self worth. The role of men in preventing and abolishing crime

against women is very important and huge. Apart from men, women should also need to respect their own women community. Neither legal action nor punishment of the accused can stop crime against women totally from the society. Only humanity, rational thinking and awareness can control, prevent and abolish crime against women. There is a need to respect others whether it may be men or women as human being and need to treat as human being equally to bring equality and empowerment of women in every society.

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