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## SOCIAL STIGMA AS WEAPON: CRIMES ROOTED IN GENDER INEQUALITY

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### ABSTRACT

‘Crimes against women’ is unquestionably a continuous and burning issue; this prompts the question why does the society tend towards gender inequality? Why are terms like social stigma, shame, fear, cultural attitudes, community biases, negative social labeling all are associated with only women? This “social stigma is emerging as weapon in crimes against women, considering that women are the only segment that is perpetuated by societal structures. The violence against women is further questioned on what she wears? Why she goes that place at that late night? Why the society is always unjustified for women? Why women are insisted to have community- centric approach? This stigma manipulates through social factors, victim blaming, patriarchal mindset and burden of shame from societal pressure to victims. In the eyes of law, this stigma not only challenges dignity and equality of women rather it acts as hurdle in justice. This depicts a major loop hole where silence of victims providing protection to offenders. The study behind this blog, explores the root cause attached to mechanism of this stigma by exploring the role of law, judicial interpretation and reforms in policy frameworks. The research also explores the measures need to be improve by strengthening legal awareness and transformation in attitude of society towards gender inequality. With the integration of legal action, institutional policies and collective change in mindset of society can make a bold move forward to this concerning issue!

**Key Words:** - *Gender Inequality, Social Stigma, Patriarchy, Victim Blaming, Legal Reforms*

## **HOW SHAME IS HURDLE TO CONTROL AND ISOLATE OFFENCES AGAINST WOMEN?**

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 'crimes in India 2022' report (released in late 2023) stated that total reported cases are 4,45,256 which were registered in 2022. But surprisingly this is the data which ones got registered what about another portion of violence that remains as dark figure of crime that evades official statistics. The official records 2022, registered under National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5) supports that 32% of ever married women deal with physical or sexual violence but most of them remain unregistered. This shame or social stigma paves the way to control and isolate offences against women. The act of victim blaming by society arises the responsibility as the social stigma which blames the victim more than the offender. The root cause of the victim blaming is patriarchal mindset of society, as orthodox approach can't bear the offences against men. The conservative thinkers are stick to their social norms believing women to follow their societal rules so strictly and violation of these norms held to liable to women's only. This society's outdated mindset creates the silence in the mind of victim and leads to birth of more criminal offences against them, but why the society is not having any social norms for men? Another underlying cause for continuation of this conservation thinking in the world of modern era is lack of education. Because the education is molding clay for the society, it reflects through attitude, belief and values of mindset in people. Not just the society, rather family also shapes themselves according to the mindset of societal norms as how the society will react over this matter? Instead of raising voice against the crime, families blame the victim itself and pressure them to remain quiet. This creates psychological barrier in the mind of victim and leads to outrage against society. The non-reporting of crimes not only triggers social and emotional detrimental consequences but also aggravates the weakening of justice system; if the societal pressure remains the hurdle in approaching legal redressal it will facilitates failure of justice system.

This burning issue requires shift of societal mindset, which can be attained through reforming in multiple dimensions that are root cause for this grave concern. The foremost attention is required to be on the revamp of mindset of patriarchal approach which can be executed through power of education. Education is catalyst for change that built awareness in women

to stand against society and challenge the orthodox behavior and fight for justice. The media is another facet that perceives to raise voice for justice irrespective of gender, media are also a transformative key for mindset of society and contributing solution to this highlighted issue. Importance of legal awareness is vital as knowing about legal rights and redressal strengthens justice system and reduces oppression. Apart from this major Acts and legal enactments are there to overcome this issue of non-reporting due to mere societal pressure such as Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Sexual harassment of women at workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2005 and additionally others but without having awareness to these legal legislations doesn't make sense at all! The awareness campaign can also contribute by gender sensitization; challenge the victim-blaming attitude and support communities. Apart from these measures, men are required to bring equality in society as they can fight against discrimination and challenge this patriarchal thinking but this evolution can make through revolution in education. The bystander intervention has the responsibility to raise the voice and not to suppress the issue, and the participation of communities like NGO's and other awareness drivers. This matter remains unaddressed until the society, legal system, media, educational and awareness authorities would not integrate their efforts to resolve it. The initial step would be from within the family itself, if all the families or societal relations supports to raise the voice against injustice the gap of gender inequality can overcome. This is not empathy or humanity demanded by women rather it's their social and legal right to live in society and community without any gender biasness.

## **CONCLUSION**

Addressing this burning issue, requires multidimensional approach that embeds legal phenomenon and societal factor, as laws and Judicial provisions play vital role in enhancing protection towards societal ill causes. Moreover, the elimination of this social taboo is essential for upholding faith towards justice and prioritize dignity, equality in the society. The suggestions to overcome from this challenge is being explored through research and it supports the legal awareness, encouragement from institutions and policies reform through education and mindset of societal review to abolish orthodox thinking! The existence of stigma, questions the legal justice system which guarantees equality, dignity and personal liberty. Providing law provisions and enactments is not sufficient, it requires a bold and strict

implementation to protect safeguard of legal environment. The more impacting point, the whole sole responsibility is not only on the legal justice system but also to educational institutions, media platforms and policymakers. In the concluding, it is fair to state that it is a collective commitment to pave the way for this concerning issue! The ultimate justice will remain uncovered until and unless the society stop weaponizing this social stigma and encouraging the empowerment of dignity, fairness and equality. The battle of this societal taboo begins with the orthodox mindset of society and will ends up over transformation of integration of factors highlighted in the study research. As the conclusion states “Justice begins where the social taboos ends”.

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