

# A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, a significant concern has emerged regarding the protection of men and their families from the misuse of laws originally enacted to empower, protect, and safeguard women who have been aggrieved by violence in their marital homes. The laws governing the unreasonable demand of dowry by the husband and his family members were designed to protect married women from dowry-related harassment & cruelty perpetrated by their husbands, in-laws, and the relatives of their husbands. This research paper investigates the underlying causes of the misuse of dowry laws by women, finding the loopholes in the legal system, examining their impact on society and other family members, and evaluating the mental and economic stress experienced by husbands and their families as a consequence of the actions of a minority of women. In this study, the researchers assessed data collected from residents of Odisha using the Chi-Square test to assess the validity and reliability of the data used to construct the study. This paper emphasizes the need for a balanced approach to addressing the growing concern about misuse without compromising the original intent behind the enactment of these laws.

Keywords- Dowry, Chi-square Test, Misuse, Male victims, Legal, Odisha, Perpetrators, SPSS

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. General

India continues to be at the centre of global and domestic scrutiny concerning gender-based violence, with statistical evidence reflecting a grim reality. Incidents of sexual assault are reported at alarmingly frequent intervals, and demand for dowry remains a widespread and deeply rooted issue (NCRB, 2022). Dowry-related violence, including bride burning and dowry deaths, persists despite stringent legal measures (Sarkar, 2023). Similarly, the practice of female foeticide has significantly contributed to a skewed sex ratio, highlighting the systemic devaluation of the female child (Baxi, 2001). Women in India continue to face pervasive discrimination, social marginalization, and various forms of violence both within and outside the domestic sphere. Offences related to dowry are linked with the intersection of patriarchal society conditions, unequal fiscal system, few religious beliefs, and differences in development & justice delivery. Although the practice of dowry in the name of the security of the brides is completely prohibited by the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, the dowry-related harassment and fatalities still follow.

In order to strengthen the protection for women, in 1983, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) inserted Section 498A, which declares that any form of cruelty done by a husband and his family members or his relatives is a criminal offense. Section 86 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, has maintained this safeguard, indicating the state's continued commitment to ending dowry-related abuse. According to the reports published by NCRB, 2022 country still registers over 1,00,000+ cases of dowry abuse annually, whereas the conviction rate is below 33% (PIB, 2021). Over 60% of dowry harassment cases are from Odisha, West Bengal, and Bihar, pointing out the grey areas for critical analysis, evidentiary. stands, and vague complaints. Recent discourse, supported by judicial observations and empirical data, highlights instances where certain women, occasionally in collusion with legal or societal intermediaries, have misused protective statutes to maliciously implicate their husbands and in-laws (Chakraborty, 2018). The most misused laws among other women-centric laws are the anti-dowry provisions. The broad and open-ended definition of "cruelty" permits the scope of ordinary marital discord and

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

disagreements or financial disputes to be framed as dowry harassment. In light of this, the Supreme Court in the case of *Dara Lakshmi Narayana & Others Vs. State of Telangana & Another*, Special Leave Petition (Criminal) No.16239/2024, cited mere quarrel between husband and wife regarding the over-spending habit of the wife does not amount to cruelty under the dowry provisions. Moreover, the nature of the offence is cognizable and non-bailable, which makes this provision much accessible for misuse. The frequency of the complaint extends beyond the husband and his immediate family members; this includes distant relatives, married/unmarried sisters-in-law, and siblings. This pattern of harassment has been referred to in legal commentary as “legal terrorism,” emphasizing the perversion of anti-dowry laws into tools of coercion and retaliation (Law Commission Report, 2014). Notably, data published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) indicate a consistent rise in false or unsubstantiated cases filed under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), a provision originally designed to safeguard women against cruelty and dowry-related abuse. Moreover, multiple instances under Section 509 IPC, which criminalizes acts intended to outrage the modesty of a woman, have also been found to be baseless following police investigations (Chandra, 2022). These developments raise critical questions regarding the unintended consequences of well-intentioned legislation and signal an urgent need to re-evaluate existing legal safeguards to prevent their misuse (Wedge, 2014). This duality, the essential need for laws to protect women from systemic abuse alongside the emerging misuse of such provisions, lies at the heart of the present research inquiry (Panicker, 2023). The research paper explores this complex interplay through an empirical lens, focusing particularly on the socio-legal repercussions of false or exaggerated claims and their broader implications for familial and societal cohesion. The discourse surrounding women's rights and family law reforms in India has increasingly intersected with broader debates on political ideologies and minority rights. While it remains essential to acknowledge the historical and ongoing challenges faced by women across diverse communities, emerging concerns highlight the growing misuse of provisions in the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, or Section 498A, IPC/ Section-85, BNS for personal or strategic

advantage. A troubling pattern has been observed wherein certain individuals exploit women-centric statutes, most notably, Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)/Section 85, BNS, to falsely implicate husbands and their relatives. Misuse of these laws often results in the arrest and detention of innocent family members, solely based on vague, unverified, and false allegations. In a few cases, such provisions are used as leverage in matrimonial disputes, particularly with the intent of securing financial benefits or asserting undue control over the spouse and his family. Thus, the resulting psychological, social, and financial toll borne by the accused is profound, unimaginable, and far-reaching (Vyas, 2021).

As marital discord increasingly translates into prolonged legal confrontations, a parallel discourse advocating for gender-neutral legal protections has gained momentum. Men, when falsely accused, often face significant social stigma and institutional indifference, which undermines their access to justice and emotional well-being (Gaur, 2024; Tshoane, 2023). These concerns are particularly acute in the absence of adequate safeguards for men entangled in frivolous or malicious litigation. While the rationale behind women's protective laws was grounded in the historical subjugation and marginalization of women (Mphatheni, 2024), changing socio-economic dynamics have significantly altered the gender landscape. While the contemporary Indian society has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the roles of women, modern women now have access to education and economic independence. However, the legislative framework has not evolved in tandem with these shifts in contemporary society. Incidents involving manipulative or vindictive use of protective laws have exposed a critical gap in the legal system, namely, its inability to respond effectively to instances where women themselves engage in coercive or criminal conduct (Tshoane et al., 2024). In such cases, the existing legal apparatus inadvertently empowers misuse, allowing individuals to weaponize statutory protections against spouses and their families. The consequences of such misuse can be severe, ranging from reputational harm and emotional trauma to financial ruin and, in some tragic instances, suicide.

This research aims to critically examine this evolving phenomenon, assessing the extent, patterns, and socio-legal implications of the misuse

# A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

of anti-dowry laws, particularly focusing on the state of Odisha. It further advocates for a balanced legal approach that preserves essential protections for women while introducing necessary safeguards against their exploitation.

## 1.2. Spatial background of Odisha

Odisha is situated on the eastern coastal part of India, sharing a border with Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand. The state is largely urbanised and has better infrastructure. Districts like Kalahandi, Kandhamal, and Malkangiri are reported to be Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste dominant. Odisha is rich in natural resources and major exporter of agricultural products. Odisha has a 73.3% literacy rate, higher than Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh (Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), 2023-24), and female literacy rate above 75%. Districts like Cuttack, Puri, Khorda, Ganjam, and Rourkela are more urbanised with better facilities and a higher literacy rate. The southern and western part of Odisha consists of districts like Kalahandi, Malkangiri, Phulbani, and Koraput are tribal occupied areas with limited evolution of life. Whereas districts like Bargarh, Bhawanipatna, Balangir, Sambalpur, Sonepur are based on a mixed agro-industrial economy with a moderate literacy rate and well-institutional connectivity. The Study observed that seasonal male migrations to established industrial places impact the stability of marriage and often lead to conjunction with dowry disputes (Mishra, 2010). CAW wing, Odisha statistics for 2019 show 6288 dowry torture cases were registered, out of which 70 were dismissed due to lack of evidence, vague accusations etc. In 2020, the number was 6912, and 209 were false & lacked relevant facts. The numbers were 9842 in 2021, 10,181 in 2022, 10,431 in 2023, out of which 456,785, 636 were picked as malicious without any corroborating evidence.

## 2. Scope of the study

This study critically examines the emerging phenomenon of the misuse of anti-dowry provisions in India, with a specific focus on the legal, social, and psychological ramifications for men and their families in Odisha. The study aims to explore how laws originally enacted to safeguard women's rights, particularly within the marital context, are increasingly being invoked with malicious intent, thereby distorting the very purpose of justice and social equity. The research

addresses the systemic bias embedded in Indian legislative frameworks that disproportionately favour women, often without due regard for the possibility of misuse. It interrogates the legal landscape where protective statutes such as Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971 are weaponized in marital disputes, leading to false accusations, reputational harm, and wrongful incarceration of men and their relatives. This study delves into how such misuse undermines the principles of natural justice and gender neutrality. It identifies recurring patterns and socio-legal factors contributing to such misuse, while also evaluating its cascading effects on careers, mental health, and the familial and societal fabric. Additionally, the study highlights judicial pronouncements and policy measures aimed at curbing frivolous litigation and ensuring balanced implementation of the law. Emphasis is placed on empirical data, case law analysis, and scholarly discourse that reveal the extent and nature of this legal anomaly. By anchoring its analysis in both doctrinal and empirical methods, the study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on legal reform and advocate for the development of gender-neutral frameworks that uphold justice for all, regardless of sex or gender.

## 3. Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to critically examine the misuse of anti-dowry laws in India with special reference to the state of Odisha and analyse their wider implications on the socio-legal aspect of the society. In alignment with this overarching aim, the study sets out the following specific objectives:

- To statistically determine whether a significant relationship exists between the increase in matrimonial disputes and the misuse of dowry prohibition laws in the state of Odisha.
- To analyze public and judicial perception regarding gender bias in such laws.
- To assess the societal impact on falsely accused men and their families in the state of Odisha.

## 4. Research questions

- 4.1. What are the social, emotional, and economic consequences on the victims falsely implicated under these provisions?

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

- 4.2. How have courts in Odisha responded to allegations of misuse of these laws? What legal precedents or guidelines have emerged as a result?
- 4.3. What role does the perception of gender bias play in the enforcement and interpretation of women-protective laws?
- 4.4. How can legal reforms or policy changes mitigate the misuse of these laws without undermining the genuine protection they offer to women?

### 5. Hypothesis

H1- The rise in the misuse of women-centric laws in the past few years has left a negative impact on society.

H2- Men falsely accused under these laws suffer considerable damage to their reputation, professional life, and mental health, which is often irreversible.

### 6. Methodology

A stratified random sampling method selects participants from urban and semi-urban regions across several districts of the state. A sample size of 140 respondents was targeted to ensure representativeness and adequate statistical power. A structured and pre-tested questionnaire was designed to collect factual and perceptual data. To analyse the associations between categorical variables, i.e, the effect of misuse of anti-dowry laws on society, the Chi-square test of independence is used to test the hypotheses about the associations between the variables.

### 7. Data Interpretation and Hypothesis Testing

**H1- The rise in the misuse of anti-dowry laws in the past few years has left a negative impact on society.**

Null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>): There has been no significant rise in the misuse of anti-dowry laws in the past few years, leaving a negative impact on society.

Alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>): there has been a significant rise in the misuse of anti-dowry laws in the past years, leaving an adverse effect on society.

#### 7.1. Table No-1: The correlation between the misuse of anti-dowry laws and their effect on society

|  |
|--|
| <b>PART I: Misuse of anti-dowry negatively impacts society and the victims of such misuse.</b> |
| <b>* Do you believe that women are favoured more in legal proceedings in India?</b>            |
| <b>Crosstabulation</b>   |
| Count  |

|  |                | Do you believe that women are favoured more in legal proceedings in India? |    |             |          | Total |
|--|----------------|--|----|-------------|----------|-------|
|  |                | Yes  | No | Some extent | Not Sure |       |
| Misuse of anti-dowry laws negatively impacts society and the victims of such misuse. | Strongly agree | 35   | 5  | 27          | 3        | 70    |
|  | Agree          | 20   | 2  | 36          | 1        | 59    |
|  | Neutral        | 3  | 1  | 2           | 3        | 9     |
|  | Disagree       | 0  | 1  | 1           | 0        | 2     |
| Total  |                | 58   | 9  | 66          | 7        | 140   |

**7.1. Table No. 2: Test results signifying the misuse of anti-dowry laws and their impact on society**

| Chi-Square Tests  |                     |    |                                   |
|---|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|   | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square  | 30.736 <sup>a</sup> | 9  | .000                              |
| Likelihood Ratio  | 20.667              | 9  | .014                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association  | 4.730               | 1  | .030                              |
| N of Valid Cases  | 140                 |    |                                   |
| a. 12 cells (75.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .10. |                     |    |                                   |

If the P value is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Because the test statistic is 0.000, the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>) is accepted.

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

| Chi-Square Test              | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 17.186 <sup>a</sup> | 6  | .009                              |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 12.748              | 6  | .047                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.297               | 1  | .255                              |
| N of Valid Cases             | 140                 |    |                                   |

6 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .40.

If the P value is less than 0.05, then the null hypothesis is rejected.

As the test value is .009, thus, the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected.

**7.1. Table No.-3: The correlation between gender-biased legislation and eroding public trust**

| PART II: Does the misuse of anti-dowry laws undermine public trust in the legal system? *<br>Do you believe the female gender is favoured more in legal proceedings in India?<br>Crosstabulation |          |  |    |                |          |       |
|--|----------|--|----|----------------|----------|-------|
| Count  |          |  |    |                |          |       |
|  |          | Do you believe that women are favoured more in legal proceedings in India? |    |                |          | Total |
|  |          | Yes  | No | To some extent | Not Sure |       |
| Does the misuse of anti-dowry laws undermine public trust in the legal system?   | Yes      | 50   | 6  | 52             | 5        | 113   |
|  | No       | 1  | 3  | 4              | 0        | 8     |
|  | Not sure | 7  | 0  | 10             | 2        | 19    |

|       |    |   |    |   |     |
|-------|----|---|----|---|-----|
| Total | 58 | 9 | 66 | 7 | 140 |
|-------|----|---|----|---|-----|

**7.1. Table No.-4: Test result significance on gender bias legislation eroding public trust**

In consideration of the aforementioned variables, the standard Phi is set at 0.05 & .009. The test result demonstrates .000 at a 75% confidence level, a value that is below the established standard Phi, leading to the conclusion that the alternative hypothesis is accepted while the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it is inferred that the legal framework in India grants specific powers and privileges to women. Legislation has been enacted to rectify historical gender-based inequalities. However, the implementation of such laws has resulted in greater legal protection for women compared to men. These legal provisions are exclusively designed to protect women, sometimes excluding men from similar forms of protection, prompting discussions regarding gender neutrality in law. The past few years have witnessed a rapid growth in the misuse of these laws by women, which is ultimately leaving a negative impact on society. In corroboration of the statement, the Odisha High Court in case of "*Biswaroopa Pari @ Mohanty Vs. State of Odisha (CrlMc No. 410 of 2020)*", quashed the criminal charges against the sister-in-law while being concerned about the misuse of Section 498A, IPC, where relatives who are not significantly involved are being dragged into the false cases and law is used as a weapon to harass and humiliate rather than obtaining justice. The respondents significantly agreed on the rise in the misuse of anti-dowry laws in Odisha, leaving an adverse situation of concern. Thus, the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

**H2- Men falsely accused under these laws suffer considerable damage to their reputation, professional life, and mental health, which is often irreversible.**

Null hypothesis: There is no significant association between false accusations under women-centric laws and damage to men's reputation, professional life, or mental health.

Alternative hypothesis: There is a significant association between false accusations under women-centric laws and damage to men's reputation, professional life, and mental health.

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

**7.2. Table No.-1: Crosstabulation on public trust and psychological stress due to false allegations under the Dowry Prohibition laws**

| PART I: Does the misuse of anti-dowry laws undermine public trust in the legal system? *<br>False accusation also makes the accused go through psychological stress, resulting in loss of employment and professional as well as social reputation. Crosstabulation |          |   |       |         |          |       |
|---|----------|---|-------|---------|----------|-------|
| Count   |          |   |       |         |          |       |
|   |          | False accusation also makes the accused go through psychological stress, resulting in loss of employment and professional as well as social reputation. |       |         |          | Total |
|   |          | Strongly agree  | Agree | Neutral | Disagree |       |
| Does the misuse of anti-dowry laws undermine public trust in the legal system?  | Yes      | 84  | 27    | 2       | 0        | 113   |
|   | No       | 2   | 3     | 2       | 1        | 8     |
|   | Not sure | 6   | 10    | 3       | 0        | 19    |
| Total   |          | 92  | 40    | 7       | 1        | 140   |

**7.3. Table No.-2: Test result significance on public trust and psychological stress due to false allegations under the Dowry Prohibition laws**

|                         |
|-------------------------|
| <b>Chi-Square Tests</b> |
|-------------------------|

|                              | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 41.285 <sup>a</sup> | 6  | .000                              |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 27.155              | 6  | .000                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 20.315              | 1  | .000                              |
| N of Valid Cases             | 140                 |    |                                   |

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

**7.4. Table No.-3: Crosstabulation on women using protective laws as one of the means to gain financial advantages**

| PART-II: Misuse of anti-dowry laws negatively affects society and the victims of such misuse.<br>* Do you think financial achievements, such as gaining advantages in property disputes or financial settlements, contribute to the misuse of these laws? Crosstabulation |                |  |                 |                          |         |       |
|---|----------------|--|-----------------|--------------------------|---------|-------|
| Count   |                |  |                 |                          |         |       |
|   |                | Do you think financial achievements, such as gaining advantages in property disputes or financial settlements, contribute to the misuse of these laws? |                 |                          |         | Total |
|   |                | Yes, to a greater extent   | No, not exactly | Yes, but very negligible | No idea |       |
| Misuse of anti-dowry laws   | Strongly agree | 50   | 4               | 13                       | 3       | 70    |
|   | Agree          | 30   | 10              | 17                       | 2       | 59    |

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

|  |          |    |    |    |   |     |
|--|----------|----|----|----|---|-----|
| negatively affects society and the victims of such misuse. | Neutral  | 1  | 3  | 4  | 1 | 9   |
|  | Disagree | 1  | 0  | 1  | 0 | 2   |
| Total  |          | 82 | 17 | 35 | 6 | 140 |

**7.5. Table No. 4: Test result significance of women using protection laws as one of the means to gain financial advantages**

| Chi-Square Tests             |                     |    |                                   |
|------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|                              | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square           | 17.675 <sup>a</sup> | 9  | .039                              |
| Likelihood Ratio             | 18.472              | 9  | .030                              |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 7.794               | 1  | .005                              |
| N of Valid Cases             | 140                 |    |                                   |

a. 9 cells (56.3%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .09.

If the P value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

As the test result shows the value as .039, the null hypothesis is rejected.

The standard Phi value is taken as 0.05 & .000, and at a 56% significance level, the chi-square test shows the expected value of .039, which is less than the standard value, individually. The findings show significant associations across the categories, and the majority report long-term or irreversible damage, which can empirically validate the alternative hypothesis. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted, and the null hypothesis is

therefore rejected. Therefore, the second hypothesis that men who are falsely accused of dowry demands or torture suffer considerable damage to their reputation, professional life, and mental health, which is often irreversible, is proven.

### 8. Findings

The findings of this study substantiate the alternative hypothesis, demonstrating a statistically significant relationship between false accusations under women-centric laws and the severe, often irreversible damage experienced by the falsely accused husbands and their family members. This carries profound implications for the legal, social, and mental health domains.

#### 8.1. Societal Impact and Negative Stereotyping

The rise in false accusations has contributed to social polarization and gender mistrust. While laws related to women's issues were enacted to address historical oppression and violence, their misuse is now primarily targeting men and their family members, which has generated a novel form of victimization and terror among the public. This misuse undermines genuine cases of abuse and engenders a hostile environment wherein due process is compromised, leading to a presumption of guilt for men until proven innocent.

#### 8.2. Reputation Damage

In numerous responses documented, even unsubstantiated allegations have precipitated severe societal backlash against the accused. Media sensationalism, social media trials, and community ostracism contribute to enduring reputational harm, irrespective of acquittal. For many respondents in this study, the loss of reputation was immediate and irreversible, negatively impacting not only personal dignity but also familial relationships. For instance, the former Law Minister of Odisha, his son, and wife were held in false dowry torture allegations in 2013; the former minister and his family were immediately arrested, and the government asked the law minister to resign on an immediate basis. However, later that year, the falsely accused family was acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

#### 8.3. Professional Consequences

The study found that men who are wrongfully charged frequently experience career disruptions. Several respondents reported termination from their jobs, suspension, dismissal from promotions, difficulties, and challenges in securing future employment. The mere label of being accused, regardless of conviction, the shame of being associated with a criminal complaint, led to

institutional hostility and a professional distrust that was hard to overcome, particularly in fields such as education, law, government service, corporate sectors, and business.

### 8.4. Mental Health Repercussions

The significant psychological harm suffered by those who are wrongfully accused was one of the most alarming discoveries. Suicidal thoughts, anxiety, trauma, and depression were common among the participants. They received little to inadequate institutional support for the long-lasting damage to their mental health caused by the protracted legal disputes, financial hardship, media attention, and social exclusion. Where accusations were the result of marital or custody disputes, the trauma was compounded, and men and their families felt trapped by the very framework that was supposed to provide justice.

### 8.5. Judicial and Policy Response

Although the judiciary has occasionally acknowledged the abuse of certain provisions, as seen in cases like *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India* and *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P.*, the legal framework continues to lack comprehensive protections against false allegations. According to the study's findings, policy-level reforms must be implemented, such as: Gender-neutral laws must be enacted, stricter penalties shall be imposed for filing false cases, systematic mechanism must be followed to rehabilitate the victims of false accusations.

### 6. Broader Gender Discourse

This research does not intend to diminish the importance & need of safeguarding and empowering women from genuine dowry abuse. However, it highlights the crucially essential argument that the rule of law must be equal and impartial. The perpetuation of unilateral legal protections is maintained without adequate safeguards against misuse fosters a distorted gender narrative, compromising both women's rights and men's fight for justice.

## 9. Discussions

The empirical study results highlight an important and emerging dimension in the discourse on equitable gender representation in Odisha, which is the adverse consequences stemming from the abuse of dowry provisions. While the original purpose of this law was to protect women from societal violence and address the long-standing practice of demanding and taking dowry, their intended abuse of the law has led to an emerging form of

victimisation, especially among men. The data-driven verification of the alternative hypothesis that men falsely accused under these laws suffer severe and often irreversible harm to their reputation, professional standing, and psychological well-being has raised urgent concerns regarding the balance of rights and the integrity of procedural justice. Such a situation also raised urgent questions on the well-being of the men in Odisha. As the saying goes, "A Healthy mind and a healthy body greatest treasure to find". As the data recorded, false accusations have left the men in a state of depression and anxiety, and loss of job, leading to suicidal thoughts. This particular situation is very disadvantageous to be in. The cases of broken marriages, disintegrated families, and parental alienations are a few of the instances that the state of Odisha is struggling with. The respondents expressed that the only way to deal with such a situation is to re-examine the current socio-legal paradigms, and the enactment of new legislation is essentially necessary, which proves the alternative hypothesis 2, that men wrongfully accused under these rules suffer significant and frequently irreversible harm.

Unquestionably, the constitutional objectives of gender equality and dignity serve as the foundation for the protective intent of laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, and Section 498A IPC. However, as evidenced in this study and supported by judicial precedents such as in the case of *Rajesh Sharma v. State of U.P. (2017)*, such misuse undermines the principle of justice, turning a redressal framework into a weapon for personal vendetta or coercion. The repercussions of such misuse challenge the very legitimacy of these statutes and erode public confidence in the judiciary (Kumar & Singh, 2020). Respondents in this study consistently reported social alienation and stigmatization as immediate consequences of being falsely accused. These accusations frequently lead to trial by media and public opinion, wherein acquittal offers little respite from reputational ruin (Roy, 2016). In Indian society, having a reputation and maintaining it is more than just a personal factor. A well-reputed person is a sign of an indexed social capital and familial standing. Therefore, false accusations engender a lasting moral injury that is beyond the scope of legal remedies. Another aspect of the study shows that false accusations often result in professional prejudice, suspension, or occupational

displacement. For many men, it becomes extremely difficult to reinstate themselves in their prior positions or obtain new employment, as the institutions highlight a structural absence of support for those who are falsely accused. The consequences for one's career are extremely severe in the case of public servants when accused (Gupta & Choudhary, 2017). In addition to this, this scenario not only results in economic hardship but also calls into question the fundamental principles of fair procedure. Perhaps the most concerning is the psychological toll reported by the respondents. False charges often precipitate anxiety disorders, depressive episodes, and suicidal ideation, exacerbated by never-ending legal battles, disintegrated families, and lack of social acceptance (Dutton & White, 2013). The discussion on such misuse should not be misinterpreted as a dismissal of genuine victimization among women, but rather an appeal for a more balanced and gender-symmetric legal framework (Sinha, 2015). The idea that laws shouldn't be used as tools of oppression has been emphasized by judicial observations, such as those made in *Sushil Kumar Sharma v. Union of India* (2005). The research supports:

- Institutional mechanisms should verify prima facie credibility of the complaint received, before arrest or prosecution,
- Gender-neutral provisions in selected legislature, and
- Strict penalties shall be imposed for establishing malicious prosecution, following the principles of natural justice.

The repercussions of unchecked misuse of legal provisions have encompassed the erosion of trust in the justice system, the devaluation of genuine cases of abuse, and have fuelled the rise of repressive gender movements (Senthil, Vajiram & V, 2019). To ensure that laws administer justice without turning protective provisions into tools of social vendetta, policymakers must engage in evidence-based reform that recognizes the diversity of victimhood.

### 10. Conclusion

The present study has critically examined the socio-legal ramifications arising from the misuse of anti-dowry laws in India, particularly focusing on Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, the Dowry Prohibition Act, and other related legal provisions. It discussed the social reputation harm, economic strain, financial losses, and, more importantly, the level of being a harasser. While this takes a major toll on the mental and physical health of the victim

and his family, Indian legislatures are inadequate to protect them against must false accusations.

Moreover, this not only inflicts personal suffering on the accused but also lowers the public confidence in the legal system; therefore, the broader goals of gender justice and equality are weakened. In order to maintain fairness in the justice delivery systems, root-level work must be encouraged. Therefore, it is essential to meticulously examine the applicability of these laws to implement countermeasures to prevent their misuse, such as mandatory preliminary investigations, heavy penalties for proven false accusations, and the implementation of a gender-neutral approach while deciding such cases. This recalibration would not strengthen the legitimacy and equity of the legal system overall rather weaken the very essence of such legislation in genuine cases.

To sum up, the study supports a jurisprudential shift from a gender-based dichotomy approach to a rights-oriented framework that guarantees equality before the law for all, irrespective of any gender. Only through such calibrated reforms, the Indian legal system develop into a more balanced, sensible, and constitutionally sound adjudicatory structure.

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### Author contributions

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of Interest

### Ethical approval

## A Socio-Legal Analysis of False Dowry Cases in Odisha Using Chi-Square Test

This study was conducted following ethical standards, with approval and consent obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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