

# Why are Indian Housewives Committing Suicide?

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**Abstract:** The third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations is to guarantee healthy lives and advance well-being for all ages. The suicide rate, or the number of suicides per one lakh people, serves as a crucial indicator for Target 3.4 of this aim, which calls for countries to work to reduce premature mortality through enhancing mental health and well-being. Unfortunately, this expectation has not been met by the trend in India in recent years. According to epidemiology, suicide fatalities are more common in males than in women around the world. But the suicide death rate among Indian women in 2016 alone was 2.1 times higher than the global suicide death rate for women and is still increasing in recent times while reducing it remains a pipe dream. We discovered that being a housewife alone increases an Indian woman's risk of suicide death from 0.013 percent to 2.74 percent (more than 200 hundred-fold). The country's societal response to this issue lies in preventing suicides among India's most outstanding yet under-appreciated population—housewives and homemakers. The high risk of suicide among these women is a serious public health concern that has to be addressed right away. Its complexity can only be addressed by a scaffolding approach across domains, community involvement, and awareness.

**Keywords:** Women suicides, Dowry, Mental health, Domestic violence.

## 1. Introduction

Shivani, who was 36 years old, had been married for 16 years. From the early years of the marriage, she had been depressed because her husband and his family treated her like a servant, these are not my words. Rather, they are Shivani's when she gave an interview to India spend, her husband would insult her continuously for being overweight or whenever she fell sick. She was Fed up with all this humiliation and in 2017, Shivani took an overdose of sleeping pills to kill herself. She was later taken to a nearby hospital, where the doctors improved her situation. Now the management of that hospital has fulfilled their duty by informing this case to the police, but Shivani and her family signed a letter stating that her husband was not the reason she tried to kill herself.

## 2. Methodology

The study's data and information were gathered from several papers and articles regarding the suicides of Indian housewives that were published by different governmental bodies, journals, websites, research papers and articles. Additionally, data is gathered from the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau Ministry of Home Affairs) yearly publications as well as other

reliable government sources.

## 3. Literature Review

According to the NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau Ministry of Home Affairs) 2020 data, more than 22,000 housewives tried to take their own lives in a single year, that's an average of 61 suicides every single day or 1 in every 25 minutes. Now we all are aware of Indian society and we also know that these numbers are underreported, because just like Shivani and her family, many people do not report their suicides. Deepa Narayan, a social scientist and author of the book "CHUP" written on Indian women Says that, "it is also considered a shameful thing in an Indian family if the daughter-in-law has killed herself, so families make up other reasons."

A 2018 Lancet report stated that "married women account for the highest proportion of suicides deaths among women in India." And there are several reasons for this. But out of all, there are three main reasons that we are going to discuss in this report.

### A. Domestic Violence

Domestic violence takes a huge toll on a women's mental health. According to a 2012 research paper, women who had experienced domestic violence had the likelihood of having suicidal thoughts up to 3 times higher. For instance, one of the women told in the interview that she tried killing herself twice due to her abusive husband. She claimed, "I drank pesticide the first time I tried to kill myself because my husband had severely beaten me the day before. in-laws rushed me to the hospital but later asked me to beg for forgiveness from my husband." on the other hand with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the domestic violence got even worse for the victims in the Indian households. Chaitali Sinha, a psychologist says, "typically housewives had a safe space in the form of their house after their men leave for the work." but even that safe space has disappeared during the Covid-19 pandemic. A lot of times, it also meant that the housewives were in a way trapped with their abusers all day long. And unsurprisingly, many other researchers have hypothesized how domestic violence may have increased during Covid-19.

### B. Dowry

The second main reason for these suicides is dowery. As of June 2021, three young women have committed suicide within 48 hours leaving behind suicide notes in which they have

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written about the ‘dowry harassment’ that forced them to take this extreme step of committing suicide. Donna Fernandes, who is associated with an NGO working for women's rights has said “At least 50% of all the suicides among women could be dowry related, but often these are underreported because the parents of the girl are also involved in dowry offering, and giving the dowry is also a crime.” So why will they report to the police? And in fact, the practice of giving the dowry has become more prevalent in our society in modern India than in the 1920s.

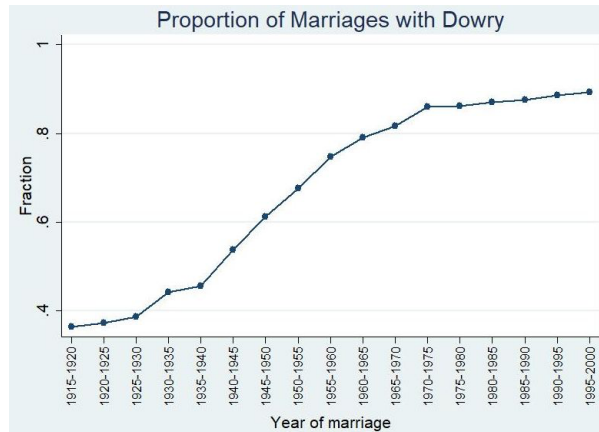


Fig. 1. Proportion of marriages with dowry

Take a look at this graph, while less than 40% of the marriages in India before the 1930s witnessed a dowry but in 2000, nearly 90% of all the marriages saw some form of dowry. The concept of the dowry is Stree Dhan (female wealth) wherein the dowry was given to the girl to Look after herself in her new household but now this concept has completely changed and taken a new form. Now, the dowry is retained by the boy and his family and more often than not, the groom and his family are unsatisfied with the dowry and problems begin to arise because of that. As we have seen before, the most unfortunate thing is that even if the girl wishes to escape that house, she’s forced to make a compromise. For instance, let’s take the example of Shweta from Mumbai. The mother claims that although Shweta's family gave the groom's family a couch, a bed, and a cabinet, their demands didn't subside. As a result, Shweta summoned her family once more, and they gave them a gold chain, pair of earrings, and gold anklet. However, despite all, the demands persisted. Shweta’s family then decided that they would not give anything anymore rather, they would ask her to come back home but her in-laws had called them to “settle the issue”. When Shweta informed her family that she did not want to resolve the matter and that she wanted to return home, they advised her to stay back and the same day, Shweta took her life.

This practice has proliferated although there have been many anti-dowry activists in India. For example, Satya Rani Chaddha led several campaigns against dowry. And even India has had a significant history of such activities in the past, for example, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who has not only spoke against dowry practice but also many such social evils like Sati system, Purdah system, Caste system, and Child marriage but unfortunately not many of us know about their life.

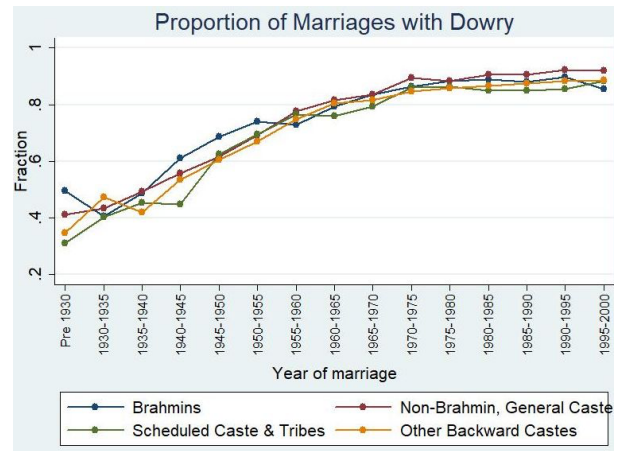


Fig. 2. Proportion of marriages with dowry

C. Economic Dependence

The third main reason is that most Indian housewives are completely economically dependent on their husbands, this leads to depression and helplessness, ultimately increasing the chances of committing suicide. When compared to India’s neighbouring countries, India performs very poorly in terms of women’s workforce participation. And even this workforce participation is declining every year. Indian women are not indulging in any paid work in the outside labor market because they already have to manage the household work.

In the 68th round of the NSSO survey done by the government, up to 64% of the women said they have no choice taking up the household work since there is “no other member to carry out the domestic duties”. Every day women devote around 5 hours to unpaid domestic services and around 2.5 hours to caregiving services whereas men devote only around 1.5 hours to both, combined. But according to research, when women earn their income, it gives them more bargaining power within their households. In the current scenario, since a lot of the women are not earning an income of their own, their decision-making power gets diminished and a lot of Times, they are unable to prioritise themselves. Most housewives with depression are not even able to access treatment for their depression. Tina Gupta, a psychiatrist says that since women are financially dependent on other members and being a group less aware of mental depression issues, usually are left to struggle with their depression and anxiety alone. This is why suicides rates also rise among Indian housewives.

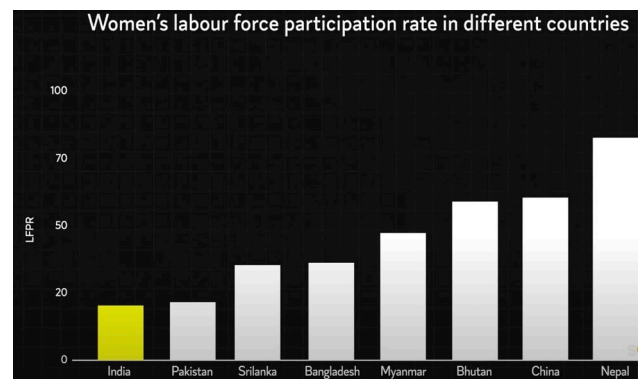


Fig. 3. Women’s labour force participation rate in different countries

#### 4. Solutions

Now let's also see some of the Solutions on how to alleviate this problem, for this, we can focus on two types of solutions. The first solution helps women recover from depression and other mental health issues. For example, our government can increase its spending on mental health. Although it doesn't address the underlying source of the issue, this approach is crucial because it helps when the problems start manifesting. To solve the root cause of this problem, we need to provide more women with paid work opportunities and how can we achieve that? By promoting rural manufacturing and improving transport infrastructure. Based on the survey, the construction of either a kutcha or pucca road in the villages has increased the odds of women's participation in non-farm work by nearly 50%. However, in addition to providing economic opportunities, changing people's attitudes including those of the women would also be necessary. According to a 2018 Oxfam India survey, 33% of the respondents from the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chandigarh, said that it was acceptable to beat women for failing to care for children and 41% said it was acceptable to beat women if she fails to prepare a meal for the men in the family. These statistics tell us why it is so important to change cultural attitudes. Even if the dowry gets banned by law, if the attitudes of the people do not change, they will always come up with some or other way to continue their social norms.

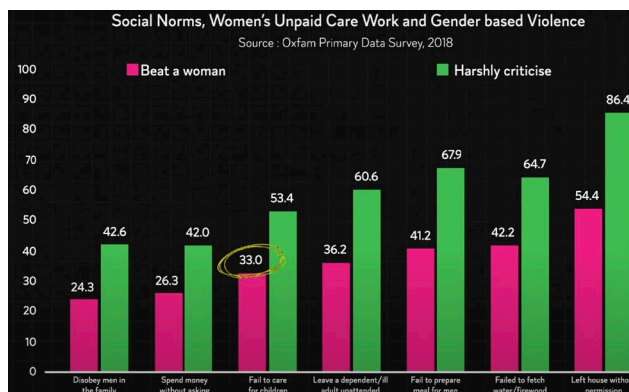


Fig. 4. Social norms, women's unpaid care work and gender-based violence

Let us consider one more example, A research paper showed that women who pay dowry have a greater say in their in-law's houses after marriage. Thus, putting in simple words, those that give dowry are more respected by their in-laws and husband so, say if you ban dowry, the respect these women get as well as their decision-making power get diminished, this is why it is essential to change attitudes as well. And to do that the government because what's called an "innovation-diffusion framework". According to this framework, to bring change within a community, you need to change the key leaders and their attitudes in that community so that these people can change their attitudes within their community.

#### 5. Conclusion

Each suicide is a personal tragedy that steals a person's life

too soon and has an ongoing ripple effect that affects the lives of family, friends, and communities. Each year, more than 100,000 people in our country take their own lives. Suicides have many different causes, including issues with one's job or career, loneliness, abuse, violence, family issues, mental illnesses, alcoholism, financial hardship, chronic pain, etc. However, it's important to remember that if you are experiencing severe emotional distress or suicidal thoughts, you should not hesitate to seek professional help. No matter where you live in the world, you may get information about where to find such aid.

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