

# VULNERABLE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL

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**ABSTRACT:** This article provides an overall picture of crimes committed against women in the district of South 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The rate of crime against women is quite startling in South 24 Parganas district in comparison to other districts of West Bengal. The paper intends to reveal the impact of illiteracy, poverty and societal customs upon the increasing rate of crimes against women in this district. By using official crime data, we analyzed general crime trend and characteristics of crimes and also highlighted the crime control practices. The seriousness of crime problems in South 24 Parganas is also examined from a comparative perspective by engaging in a inter district comparison. The findings of the paper indicate that crime against women in South 24 Parganas is present in various forms and the preventive measures of crimes are not satisfactory.

**KEY WORDS:** Post marital violence, Rape, Molestation, Dowry death, Sexual harassment, Domestic violence, Crime control.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

**T**HE issue of the status of the women in society has been a matter of intense scrutiny and debate all over the world. This is equally true of India as well as West Bengal, an essentially patriarchal society, where the goal of equality between men and women is actually guaranteed by the country's constitution. Women are said to be the **better half of the society** and supposed to enjoy all privileges and comforts, at par with men. But the reality shows some other picture which is very depressing. Despite of all sloganeering, tall claims and official schemes, women in our social fabric are very much vulnerable to all sorts of threats, dangers and even fatal assaults (Uday Veer, 2004).

## 2. Condition of Women in West Bengal:

In terms of personal security, West Bengal is generally considered to be a comparatively safe state in the all-India context. In 2001, for example, the number of cognizable crimes per one lakh population in West Bengal (76.7) was less than half of the all India average (172.3), with only Meghalaya and Mizoram reporting a lower rate. But here the chief concern is one crucial component of the total security scenario in any civilized society; violence against women.

Perhaps the most painful devaluation of women is the physical and psychological violence that stalks women's lives 'from cradle to grave. It can scar the early life of a woman in the shape of child abuse, incest and sexual harassment; it can threaten marriage and domestic life, sometimes culminating in murder or suicide, as so tragically evident in the rising number of such atrocities recorded in crime statistics. According to the report of National Crime Records Bureau West Bengal accounted for nearly 12.7% of total crime against women by reporting total 29,133 cases in the year 2011.

### **3.CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS:**

In fact, so far as crime against women (CAW) is concerned South 24 Parganas had a remarkable high share in the State. In the year 2000 and 2003 it holds the first position in terms of Crimes against Women (CAW).

**TABLE: 1 DISTRICT WISE INCIDENTS OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN (CAW) IN WEST BENGAL IN 2000 AND 2003**

DISTRICT	TOTAL NO. OF IPC CAW CASES	
	2000	2003
BANKURA	194	264
BIRBHUM	353	367
BARDHAMAN	727	739
COONCHBEHAR	336	369
DARJEELING	133	146
HOOGLY	583	567
HOWRAH	267	237
JALPAIGURI	297	376
PASCHIM MEDINIPUR	904	530
PURBA MEDINIPUR	N.A.	402
MURSIDABAD	440	814
MALDA	213	275
NADIA	595	600
24 PARGANAS NORTH	843	1128
24 PARGANAS SOUTH	975	1214
PURULIA	259	187
UTTAR DINAJPUR	225	170
DAKSHIN DINAJ PUR	242	227
KOLKATA	602	679
TOTAL	8188	9551

(SOURCE: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT, SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL, 2009)

According to Indian Penal Code (IPC) crimes against women can be classified as:

- Rape( section 376 IPC)
- Kidnapping and Abduction for different purposes ( section 363-373 IPC)
- Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths and their attempts ( section 302/304B IPC)
- Torture or cruelty both physical and mental ( section 498A IPC)
- Molestation ( section 354 IPC)
- Sexual harassment or Eve-teasing (section 509 or 294 IPC)
- Importation of girls up to 21 years of age ( section 366B IPC)

For the first time a large body of national level and state level data related to domestic violence against women has been compiled by the second National Family Health Survey conducted during 1996-98. Some of its findings are summarized. According to the revelations of this very large all-India survey (addressed to ever-married women of child-bearing age), domestic violence appears to be 'democratic' cutting across age, religion, community, rural- urban divide, even women's employment status.

#### 4. MAJOR FORMS OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR SPATIALITY:

##### 4.1 POST MARITAL VIOLENCE:

For the Bengali women life is divided in two main sections: the period spent in her *baper bari* or father's house, and that spent in her *sasur bari* or father in law's house. But early years, though few, often leave a strong mark on a girl's life, and she carries with her into her married state ideas and prepossessions which make her relation to her new home either conflict or harmonize with her former one (M.M. Urquhart,1987).

If we look at the various types of crimes that has been taking place in South 24 Parganas it will be clearly evident that torture or cruelty tends to account for the highest share in total CAW in the district. This torture or cruelty is most often happens in post marital period of a girl. For example we can show the situation of year 2000 and 2003 which shows that 71% and 73% of CAW is caused **due to torture by husband** respectively. Human Development Report of the district reveals that 65.49% of married population in the age group of 10 to 14 in rural areas is girls, where as in urban areas this is only 6.5%. This occurrence of underage marriage makes the girls more vulnerable of torture. 5% and 4% of the total CAW is the cases of **dowry death** in the year 2000 and 2003 respectively which also a crime which occur in the post marital stage of a women. It is very interesting to note that the trends of dowry deaths are showing a fluctuating pattern. In case of this particular district dowry is established as a common social norm and the torture for dowry seems very normal. The level of dowry lies generally in between Rs. 20000 to 40000 (Human Development Report West Bengal, 2009). Cases of torture by husband and relatives went up by 5.2% than the previous year in entire West Bengal (19772 cases, source: NCRB Report, 2011).

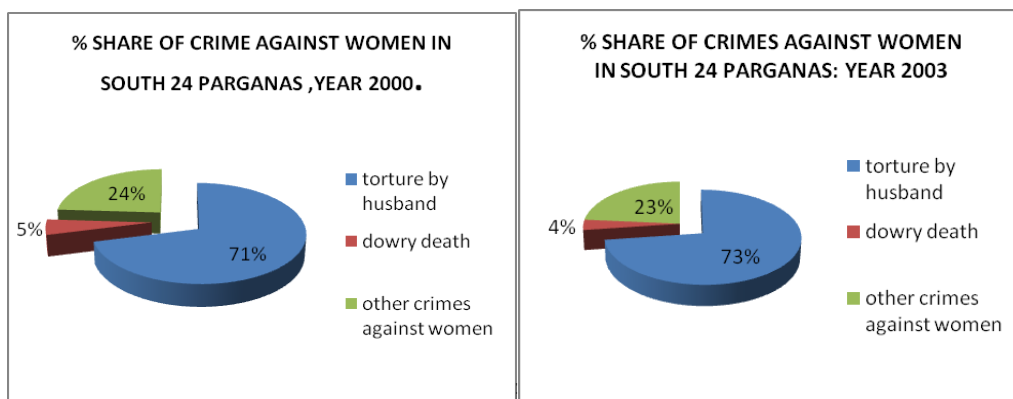
**TABLE: 2 NUMBER OF DOWRY DEATHS IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS FROM 1997 TO 2005**

YEAR	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005 (upto March)
	49	25	47	42	11	47	43	NA	15

(Source: Sexual Violence and Law, WEST BENGAL COMMISSION OF WOMEN, 2005)

**TABLE: 3 INCIDENTS OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN AND NUMBER OF PEOPLE ARRESTAD IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS**

DISTRICT	NO OF CASES OF TORTURE HUSBAND RELATIVES / BY			NO OF DOWRY DEATHS			NO OF ARRESTS FOR CAW	
	1995	2000	2003	1995	2000	2003	2000	2003
SOUTH 24 PARGANAS	469	692	884	2	49	44	930	1759



**Fig.2** (SOURCE: WEST BENGAL COMMISSION OF WOMEN, SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS, 2003)

## 4.2 RAPE AND MOLESTATION:

Another type of crime which occurs very frequently that is sexual offence like rape, molestation and sexual harassment. According to Commission of Women's situational analysis South 24 Parganas is showing a very high frequency of occurrence of rape. In this particular issue most of the victims are teenagers. School and college going girls are the prime target groups of these kinds of offences. If we go through the meticulous case studies then it will be seen that these kinds of offences are often taking place outside of homes. Just for example in Diamond Harbour a middle aged person raped a 14 years old school girl while she was returning home from school (source: The Times of India, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2012). If we look at the situation of 2003 it can be clearly seen that molestation and rape (gang rape and other type rape) is having a larger percentage share than the other forms of harassments. Sometimes these incidents become so heart rendering when mentally or physically challenged girls are being victimized. In Baruipur area of South 24 Parganas a physically challenged girl was raped by his neighbour (source: **The Times Of India, 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 2012**).

## 4.3 EVE- TEASING:

It is a form of sexual aggression that ranges in severity from sexually suggestive remarks, brushing in public places and cat calls from outright groping. In South 24 Parganas the problem of eve-teasing is growing day by day. Eve-teasing has been notoriously difficult crime to prove, even though eve-teasing occurs in public places, streets and public transports. Due to some kind social taboos, fear of future harassment victims are afraid to lodge complaint. For example, in Baruipur at least seven people were beaten up by the eve-teasers for protesting against eve-teasing. The victimized girl took poison and committed suicide (source: **The Times Of India, April 9, 2008**). The data shows (fig. 3) that eve-teasing has almost negligible percentage share among all other sexual assault in this district. But according to the opinion of the common people of this district security of women from the eve-teasers is a big issue.

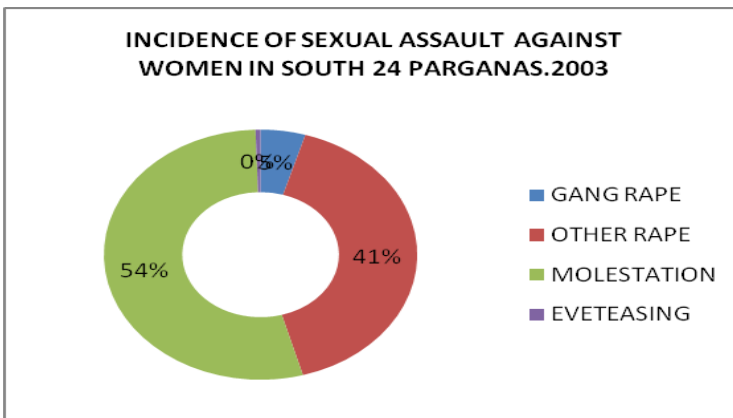


Fig.3 (SOURCE: WEST BENGAL COMMISSION OF WOMEN, SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS, 2003)

#### 4.4 WOMEN TRAFFICKING:

Now let's move on to another women associated offence that is trafficking of girls which takes place in South 24 Parganas at a very high rate. These incidents of trafficking happen for various motives like: forced prostitution, making of pornographies, sex tourism, forced marriage etc. the root causes behind these trafficking in South24 Parganas are poverty, lack of employment opportunities, child marriage, false promises, social stigmas ( widowed, divorced, unwed) etc. Most of the women go to other places in search of work and ultimately rescued from the brothels of Delhi, Mumbai, Hariyana and even Kolkata. West Bengal falls under huge criminal network where South 24 Parganas acts as a major sending point. Trafficking and consequent white slavery with sexual exploitation is a multibillion dollar business. Extensive consultation verified that there is a severe lack of data by which a concrete picture of the scope of trafficking can be drawn. The blocks like Kultali, Canning I & II, Baruipur, Gosaba, Falta, Magrahat, Diamond Harbour I & II are identified as more migration and trafficking prone areas.

After discussing about the various forms of crimes committed against women let's take a glance of the overall trend of crime against women (fig.4) in South 24 Parganas. From the trend analysis it is evident that in last ten year (2000-2010) the number of crimes committed against women has been shown an uprising trend except 2009-2010. The highest numbers of crimes were occurred in between 2008-2009. One of the most dominant reasons of this situation was the political turmoil of that time being all over the West Bengal and South 24 Parganas is always politically sensitive district. The political rivalries very often culminated into immoral offences against innocent girls and women.

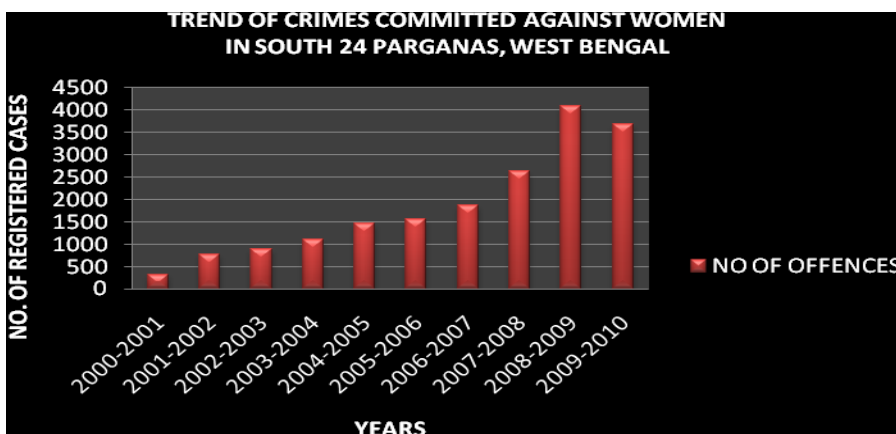


Fig.4

(SOURCE: SUPERINTENDENT OF POLICE SOUTH 24 PARGANAS)

### **5. INFLUENCE OF SOME SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS ON CRIME AGAINST WOMEN:**

Crime is a multi faceted problem which grows out of various socioeconomic tribulations. There are some pre-conceived notions that lack of literacy, lack of work participation, poverty, and social customs are some of the major factors which elicit the crimes against women. But in case of South 24 Parganas some interesting features have come out.

**TABLE: 4 BLOCK WISE FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATE, LITERACY RATE & NO. OF CAW.**

BLOCK	FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATE(%) 2001 CENSUS	LITERACY RATE(%) 2001 CENSUS		NO. OF CRIME AGAINST WOMEN		
		MALE	FEMALE	2005	2006	2007
THAKUR PUKUR-MAHESHTALA	12.45	82.62	67.64	134	142	184
BUDGE BUDGE I	6.68	82.05	66.28	33	35	48
BUDGE BUDGE II	8.35	80.98	64.94	24	47	42
BISHNUPUR I & II	10.71	82.66	63.05	80	69	91
SONARPUR	9.20	80.47	61.4	109	125	219
BARUIPUR	8.34	78.79	60.09	31	38	53
BHANGAR I & II	7.86	72.23	55.30	87	100	190
FALTA	9.85	81.98	62.05	31	29	55
DIAMOND HARBOUR I & II	6.71	78.54	59.86	38	36	81
MAGRAHAT I	7.69	78.49	57.5	38	36	81
MAGRAHAT II	7.73	78.38	56.32	52	52	46
KULPI	6.79	79.85	56.16	48	42	59
MANDIR BAZAR	10.60	78.27	53.68	29	28	24
CANNING I & II	11.9	68.83	44.4	98	170	215
BASANTI	12.35	70.12	45.48	22	52	66
GOSABA	20.40	81.39	57.43	17	14	21
JOY NAGAR I & II	12.62	75.5	50.30	60	82	118
MATHURAPUR I	5.60	77.88	53.19	28	30	44
MATHURAPUR II	10.92	81.03	55.85	20	43	34
KULTALI	9.75	74.9	56.16	79	80	105
PATHAR PRATIMA	29.60	84.99	61.31	35	46	88
KAKDWIP	16.24	82.22	59.86	51	90	78
NAMKHANA	29.03	89.55	68.69	20	49	46

SAGAR	27.66	88.87	68.31	50	53	86
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(SOURCE: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT OF SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL, 2009)

From the table: 4 it can be depicted that blocks like Sonarpur, Thakur Pukur-Maheshtala, Bhangar I & II, Joynagar I & II, Kultali and Bishnupur I & II, Canning I & II are exhibiting quite higher number of offences committed against women. It is often thought that working women

**CORRELATION BETWEEN FEMALE WORK PARTICIPATION RATE AND CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN**

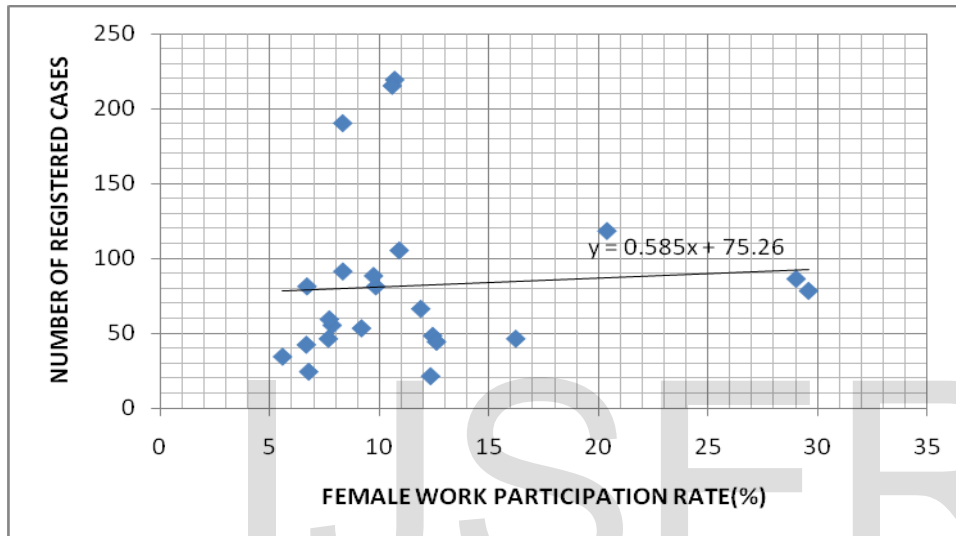


Figure 5

**CORRELATION BETWEEN FEMALE LITERACY AND CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN**

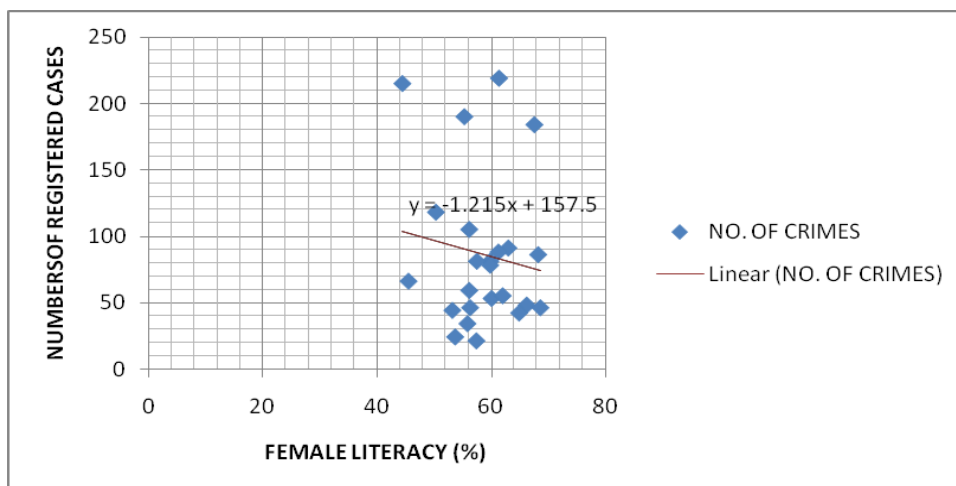


Figure 6



are independent, so they are less vulnerable to crimes. In case of this particular district we can get a mixed relationship between these two variables i.e. crime and female work participation rate. Namkhana block, Gosaba have higher positions in female work participation (**Census 2001**) and the blocks are also showing a lesser number crimes. But Patharpratima and Sagar also hold upper ranks in terms of female work participation, interestingly showing quite high frequency of crimes against women. Blocks like Sonarpur, Thakur Pukur-Maheshtala, Canning I & II are showing lofty number of crimes with moderate work participation rate. On the other hand despite of having low female work participation rate blocks like Kulpi, Mathurapur I are showing evidence of lower number of crimes against women than the other blocks. Sonarpur or Thakur Pukur-Maheshtala are urban centers that is why the female work participation rate is low but as the nature of jobs there women has to go faraway places for the sake of jobs. So there are more occurrences of sexual offences in the work place or on the way to work place. Namkhana and Sagar are rural islands, the agricultural sector involves more female workers but the chances of occurring crimes are lesser in these areas. If we the correlation between these two variables they are showing slightly positive correlation (Figure 5). That means more exposure to work place often increases the chance of being victimized for women. These two blocks are showing highest percentage of literacy also. So it can be thought that spread of literacy may be responsible for reduction in crime against women. Correlation between literacy and crime against women is also showing a negative relation (Figure 6). But the urban centers like Sonarpur and Thakur Pukur-Maheshtala is showing bulk number of cases though the percentage of literates is quite high here also. On the other side Canning I & II, Bhangar these areas are displaying low percentage of literacy and high rates of crimes. These two areas are economically and socially backward areas. Most of the women of poor families from these two blocks commute daily to Kolkata for their job as a housemaid because in most of the cases their husbands are unemployed or alcoholic. So it can be said that as urban and rural centers have different kinds of economic, demographic as well as spatial nature they influence the incidents of crime in different ways.

## **6. CRIME CONTROL:**

Crime is such an issue which needs immense corrective measures of control. It is a general notion that Police and legal system are there to take the steps to control crime. But in case of women it is not only about the protection but about the dignity and self respect also. In South 24 Parganas we can see some steps have been taken which will give the women real empowerment and build up their self confidence to protect themselves from vulnerable conditions like:

- Greater amount seat reservation for the women especially belonging to SC and ST groups in Gram Panchayet and Panchayet Samity. In 2003 total 327 seats were reserved for SC/ST population out of which 122 were reserved for women in Panchayet Samity.
- Except the Bhangar I block, all the blocks of South 24 Parganas have undertaken vocational training programme for the girls between 11 to 18 years. This programme has been launched under Kishori Shakti Yojana(KSY) in 2006-2007. It is a component part of centrally sponsored ICDS scheme.
- 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1999 Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) has been launched for the economic development of the people living below poverty line (BPL). Under this scheme many Self Help Groups (SHG) were formed by females exclusively. Between 2003 to 2007 total 7787 numbers of SHGs were formed in different blocks of South 24 Parganas. Namkhana, Mandir Bazar, Thakurpukur Maheshtala are some best performing blocks in terms of formation of Self Help Groups.

Apart from these empowerment programmes many NGOs are doing tremendous job for protecting the girls from the curse of crime. Several government programmes and schemes have been launched for the development of marginal group especially poor women and adolescent girls.

## **7. Conclusion:**

In recent times our state West Bengal witnessed some developments in the status of women. This state produced reformers like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy who fought for the eradication of social stigmas against the women. Now a days woman are given all the rights like freedom of expression, right to get equal education that men can have. Women in our West Bengal are doing all those things that a man can do. But still problems like dowry, female infanticide, sex selective abortion, post marital violence are prevalent in our society. Several acts have been passed to demolish these problems. But illiteracy and lack of awareness are main obstacles in the path of women of Bengal to stand against these follies.

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