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Explaining Crime against Women in the Districts of West Bengal: An Analytical and Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Crime against women has been a major social problem originates from our patriarchal socio-cultural system. The present study estimates the district specific crime rate against women in West Bengal using the data drawn from the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) in 2021. There exists a wide range of variability of the crime rate across the districts. Cruelty by husband shares the maximum percentage (viz. 74.73) whereas the least percentage (viz. 1.93) is found in dowry death in total crime against women. The maximum crime rate is found in Darjeeling and the minimum is found in Purulia district. We try to understand the association between crime against women and selected socio-economic and cultural parameters of the districts in West Bengal. It is observed that crime against women is positively associated with female education and urbanization whereas it varies negatively with the multidimensional poverty. Our findings go against many studies highlighting the facts that female education reduces the crime against women and it aggravates with the incidence of poverty; thus our results reignite the issue of the determinants of crime as well the under-reporting cases of crime against women in West Bengal.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Crime against Women, Gender Discrimination, Regional Variations.

I. INTRODUCTION

In ancient time Indian women were placed in a high place in the society and respected as mentioned in the Vedas and other scriptures but during pre-British and British rule, women were facing problem like child marriage, sati pratha, parda pratha, restriction to widow remarriage, widow exploitation, dev dasi system etc. However, almost all the old traditional inhuman social problems have been disappeared gradually from the Indian society but new social problems have been emerged over time. We first try to understand the theoretical backdrop of crime against women from the lens of social studies.

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Women are considered as weaker section of the society than men and given less importance. Girls children are becoming real victims of this discrimination. There are also discrimination of power and work between men and women because of the patriarchal system families in India.

Often the most commonly referenced cause of crime against women, the patriarchy defined as a social system in which men are placed above women. In symbolic violence both men and women agree that women are less intelligent more unreliable. Symbolic violence was first defined by Pierre Bourdieu (1998) concerning a form of violence which is leading to marginalization, discrimination and stigmatization in an almost accepted manner. Symbolic violence does not only reside in outstanding events but in everyday life event.

Before studying the relationship between Indian hierarchal culture and violence against women, it is necessary to investigate from a higher level, the very notion of hierarchy. The paper seeks to study the theoretical framework of hierarchy through Louis Dumont(1949). The foundation of Dumont's work on the caste system defines hierarchy as the religiously inspired idea of the superiority of the pure over the impure. Extending the argument to the twenty first century Dumont's very idea of the hierarchy can be found in the social fabric of Indian society today through patriarchy.

The sociologist Sylvia Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominant, oppress and exploit women'. Walby notes that a feature of a patriarchal society is the threat of male violence against women. One of ways in which women are controlled by men is that men could use their physical strength to force them to comply. As a consequence of patriarchy the inequality faced by women and girls even results in their denied right to being born. In 1996, the World Health Assembly addressed female foeticide as an "extreme manifestation of violence against women". Declining sex ratio indicate that female foeticide and female infanticide are on the rise. Behind this cruelty the popular cultural understanding that son would be able to contribute to family's income, while birthing a daughter would result in heightened financial burden.

The system of dowry perpetuate of oppression and violence against women. A traditional social practice, dowry is the ritual of a bride's family giving cash and goods to the family of the groom, as an accompaniment to their giving away the brides. Though it is prohibited by Indians Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961. Dowry maintains the significant present in Indian culture (Sharma 2015). the prevalence of dowry violence persists in modern India for number of reasons. Perhaps foremost dowry continues to be patriarchal, Indian culture believe marriage to be a social necessity. An otherwise unmarried daughter is a social and financial burden on the family.

The status of women in India is influenced and determined by various factors like social, cultural, political and economic as well (Desai 1994; Prasad 1994; Patel 2002; Neider et al 2019).

Women are continuously facing new problems even after having self confidence, individuality, self respect, capacity, talent and efficiency like men. They are facing problems in their life even after they are given equal rights and opportunities like men by the Constitution of India; this is due to patriarchal nature of our society which is assumed to be a deep rooted social problem (Das Gupta 2019).

Constitution of India, 1950 played the important role in reducing discrimination. Constitutional provisions for Women in India are:

- Article 14 confers on men and women equal right and opportunities in political economic and social sphere.
- Article 15 prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste and sex.
- Article 16 provides for equalities of opportunities matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state.
- Article 39 (a) (d) mentions policy security of state equality for both men and women the right to a means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work for both men and women.
- Article 42 direct the state to make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.

Besides Constitutional provisions, various Laws have been implemented to protect women against crimes in India and these are:

1. The Indian Penal Code 1860;
2. The Sexual Harassment of women at work place (prohibition, prevention and redressal) act 2013;
3. Protection of women from domestic violence Act 2005;
4. The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961;
5. The Indecent Representation of women (prohibition) Act 1986;
6. The immoral Traffic (prevention) Act 1956;
7. The commission of sati prevention Act 1961.

The above affirmative and protective measures in favor of females undertaken by the Government of India could not improve the conditions of females rather the status of females have been deteriorating over the decades if we consider the child sex ratio in India. The child sex ratio is found to be declining over the decades in almost all the states in India which clearly manifests gender bias; from the early childhood female child is discriminated. Women are getting affected by various types of violence almost every day which is disrupting the society. Women are being victim of violence at huge level day by day because of increasing crime against women. According to the Report of National Crime Report Bureau, women are getting kidnapped at every 44 minutes, raped at every 47 minutes 17 dowry deaths every day. They face violence within the family (dowry related harassment, death, marital rape, wife –battering, sexual abuse, deprivation of healthy food female genital mutilation etc.) or outside the family (kidnapping, rape, murder etc.).

The meaning of crime against women “is direct or indirect physical or mental cruelty to women and in which only women are victims are characterized as crime against women.” (Goel 2004). The World Human Rights Conference in Vienna, first recognized gender based violence as a human right violation in 1993. In the same year United Nations Declaration (1993) defined violence against women as “ any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to a women including threats of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” Numerous sub-national studies have already been undertaken in India towards explaining the determinants of crime against women. Crime against women increases with higher income inequality, low level of income, higher unemployment rate, inter cast marriage (Prasad 1994; Cui and Hazra 2017; Rashid and Sharaf 2017; Dang et al 2017; Vicente et al 2019). Domestic violence against women reduces if the spouse is entitled to inheritance (Prasad 1994; Amaral 2017, Powers et al 2017); female work force participation and presence of police station significantly reduce the dowry death (Bhattacharya et al 2022). Recent findings suggests that states exhibiting higher incidence of molestation experience higher incidence of rape, torture and dowry death and crime against women is spatially correlated (Vicente et al 2019; Bhattacharya et al 2022). We could not find any sub-state study in West Bengal using the NCRB’s rich data on crime against women. However, a household level study on violence against women is carried out in West Bengal by Biswas, Pal and Bharati (2022); their study confirms that most of the Bengali women face some sort of violence in their married life and dowry has been emerged as an important factor towards violence against women. The present study is structured as follows. The scope and objectives of our study is mentioned in section 2.

Section 3 deals with data and methods. We analyze the data in section 4. Concluding observations are mentioned in section 5.

(A) Scope and Objectives of the Study

The present study is distinct from earlier studies in the following grounds. District level crime rate (based on NCRB data) against women in West Bengal was not carried out earlier. The present study tries to understand the spatial variations of crime against women. Crime against women is different types and we try to understand their proportion to aggregate crime against women. How far and to what extent the multidimensional poverty, urbanization, female literacy rate, female schooling exceeding 10th level are associated with crime rate across the districts in West Bengal? The review of literature suggests that crime against women is spatially correlated. Is it true in case of West Bengal? This can be assessed by using spatial distribution map of the districts in West Bengal.

(B) Data and Methodology

The data pertaining to different types of crime against women are drawn from NCRB, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Government of India. We consider 19 Districts of West Bengal. The following components of crime against women are considered in our study:

- Dowry Death(Section 304 B IPC)
- Abetment to suicide(Section 305/306 IPC)
- Cruelty by husband(Section 498A IPC)
- Kidnapping and abduction (Section 336 IPC)
- Rape(Section 376 IPC)

The study is confined to the violation of IPC 1860. Only 5 selected crimes have been taken into consideration in the analysis of crime against women under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in West Bengal. Since Census was not conducted in 2021, therefore, the Census data (viz. District Census Handbook) of 2001 and 2011 have been used for the projection of male population of 2021, urbanization. The female literacy rate and female who have completed 10th level of schooling are drawn from National Family Health Survey-5 and district level multidimensional poverty (viz. Head Count Ratio(HCR)) is drawn from an unpublished PhD Dissertation of Economics Department, Jadavpur University. The district level HCR is related to NFHS-4 (2015-16). Due to very limited number of observations, we could not use any inferential statistics; however, the scatter diagrams clearly portray the relationship between socio-cultural variables and crime rate.

The crime rate against women across the Districts of West Bengal is calculated as follows:

$$CRW = \frac{TCW}{MP} \times 100000$$

(1) Where, CRW= Crime Rate against Women, TCW=Total Crime

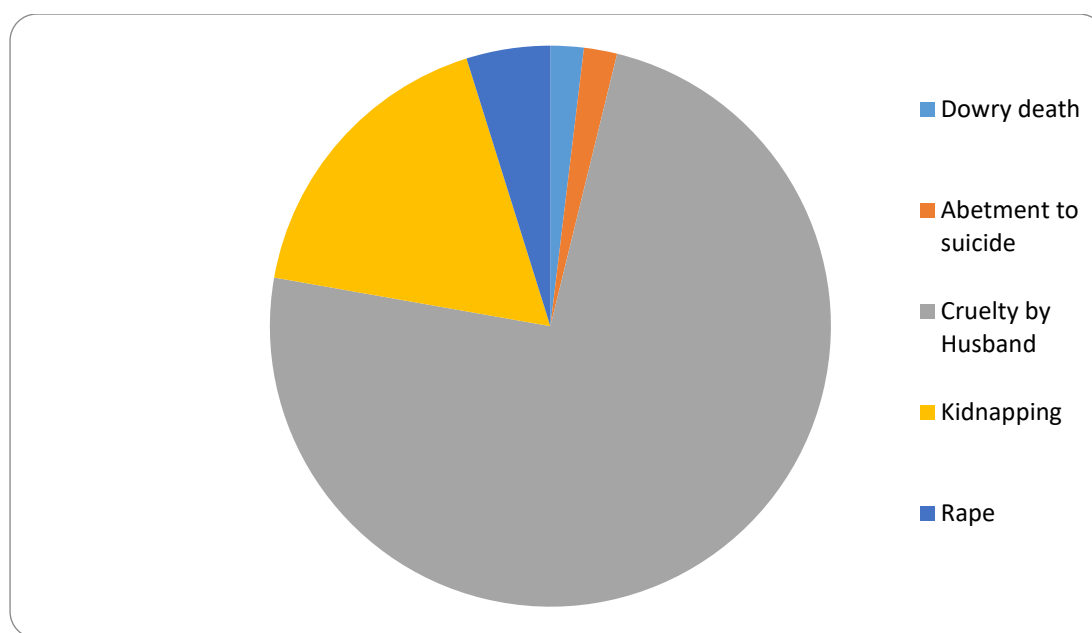
against Women=Sum of the crimes of dowry death, abetment to suicide, cruelty by husband, Kidnapping and abduction and rape for the year 2021; MP=male population which is assumed to be half of the total population of the respective district. We employ the scatter plots of crime rates against different socio-cultural variables across the 19 districts of West Bengal. We could not use any inferential statistics, rather scatter plots give sufficient hints towards examining the relationship between crime rate and socio-economic and cultural parameters of the districts. The spatial distribution of crime rate in 2021 is presented in a map using 4 quartiles of the value of crime rate. This helps to visualize the distribution and clustering of crime rates across 19 districts of West Bengal.

(C) Empirical Analysis

According to NCRB2021 data Table-1 and pie chart show that the highest reported crime in West Bengal is cruelty by husband or his relatives (74.73%). Kidnapping & Abduction is in the second position (17.58%) on reported crime. So, marriage is not the ultimate solution of the girl children; problem starts after marriage. Before marriage, education and financial independence are very important for women in our patriarchal society.

Table-1 Crime against Women across the Districts in West Bengal, 2021

DISTRICT OF W.B.	Total crime against Women	Dowry death	Abetment to suicide	Cruelty by Husband	Kidnapping	Rape
Darjeeling	1019	7	20	672	294	26
Jalpaiguri	859	21	13	608	148	69
Cooch Behar	738	29	22	582	29	76
Uttar Dinajpur	494	24	11	369	45	45
Dakshin Dinajpur	343	7	17	164	134	21
Malda	1127	15	27	518	430	137
Murshidabad	1240	30	22	666	378	144
Nadia	1589	48	27	1395	29	90
Birbhum	509	14	28	357	85	25
Bardhaman	1989	38	44	1545	276	86
Hugli	1346	28	33	1092	161	32
Howra	1227	20	25	1008	338	36
Purulia	246	11	10	220	45	10
Bakura	352	19	17	287	12	17
Purba Medinipur	1295	23	20	833	365	54
Paschim Medinipu	1177	16	2	986	124	49
Kolkata	1105	5	20	841	228	11
North 24 Pargana	3475	46	59	2741	554	75
South 24 Pargana	3322	53	36	2643	448	142
Total	23452	454	453	17527	4123	1145
Percentage		1.93	1.93	74.73	17.58	4.88

Fig. 1 Pie Chart on Different Types of Crime against Women

Though it is prohibited by Indians Dowry Prohibition Act in 1961. Dowry maintains the significant present in Indian culture (Sharma 2015). The prevalence of dowry violence persists in modern India for number of reasons. Perhaps foremost dowry continues to be patriarchal, Indian culture believe marriage to be a social necessity. An otherwise unmarried daughter is a social and financial burden on the family.

From Table-2, we can see that the lowest reported crime rate is found in Purulia(14.8%) followed by Bakura(17.47%). These two districts female literacy rate are 61% and 68.3% respectively, also the schooling of female exceeding 10th level are found to be very low. So it is clear that only higher education of female make them aware about their rights and laws which ensure their protection and freedom to live, economically independence that is why women can seek justice without the help of male members of her family.

Table-2 Crime against Women and Socio-Demographic Variables among the Districts in West Bengal: 2021

Districts	Total Crime	Crim e Rate	HCR (MDP)	FLR	Schooling_Female >10 th level	Urbanization (Projected, 2021)	Population (Projected , 2021)
Darjeeling	1019	97.77	27	77	41.3	46.5	2084474
Jalpaiguri	859	39.54	41	73.6	33.9	36.9	4344519

Koch Behar	738	46.72	44	79.2	26.7	11.4	3159057
Uttar Dinajpur	494	27.65	56	65.4	29.3	12.5	3572474
Dakshin Dinajpur	343	37.09	41	74.3	30.5	15.1	1849374
Malda	1127	48.08	48	72.3	30	19.8	4687222
Murshidaba d	1240	29.73	45	67.6	24.2	27	8341045
Nadia	1589	55.45	28	76.2	28.3	34.4	5730373
Birbhum	509	25.51	50	70.8	25.8	17.1	3989386
Bardhaman	1989	46.58	40	73.3 5	32.2	42.89	8539612
Hugli	1346	44.89	33	77.4	37	43.7	5996314
Howrah	1227	45.21	37	80.5	40.1	76.4	5426959
Purulia	246	14.80	66	61	26.9	15.4	3323714
Bankura	352	17.47	50	68.3	27.9	9.33	4028274
Purba Medinipur	1295	44.19	34	77	30.9	13	5860256
Paschim Medinipur	1177	35.22	48	70.9	26.2	14.2	6682206
Kolkata	1105	49.99	28	87.6	55.4	100	4420512
North 24 Parganas	3475	59.98	27	85.5	40.7	60.2	11585276
South 24 Parganas	3322	70.55	42	85.6	34.9	35.4	9417233

Note: Crime Rate is measured per 100000 Male Population. Source: Crime against women is the sum of all types of crimes against women drawn from NCRB, India; the head count ratio (HCR) (of multidimensional poverty) is estimated from NFHS-4 (2015-16) using UNDP (2010) methodology developed by Alkire-Santosh. The FLR and females completing 10th level schooling are drawn from NFHS-5 District Fact Sheet (2019-21); population for the year 2021 is projected using 2001 and 2011 district census handbook.

The spatial distribution clearly suggests that five districts belong to upper quartile. All these districts belong to south Bengal except Darjeeling. It is interesting to note that urbanization and crime rate is positively correlated. The most surprising fact is that multidimensional poverty and crime rate is negatively associated. Further investigation is needed to explore the underlying reasons. However, we are not examining the reasons of crime rate across the districts, rather try to understand how is it related to general level of development.

Map-1 Spatial Distribution of Crime against Women: 2021

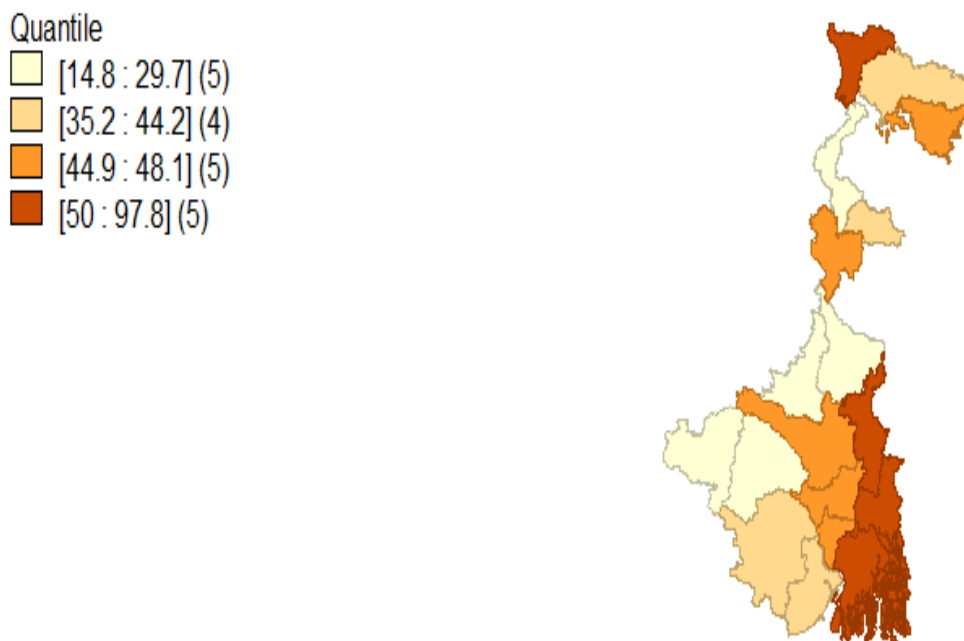
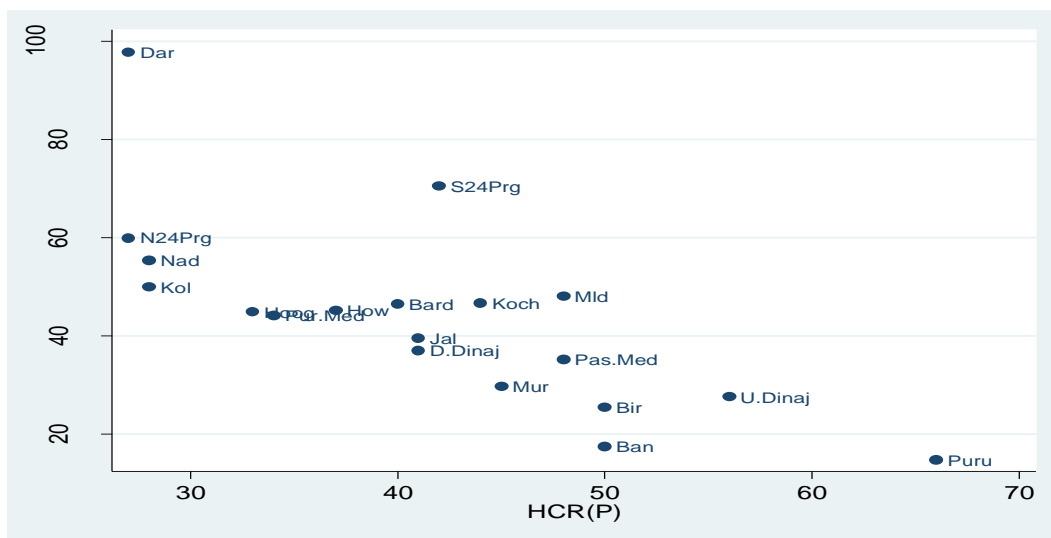


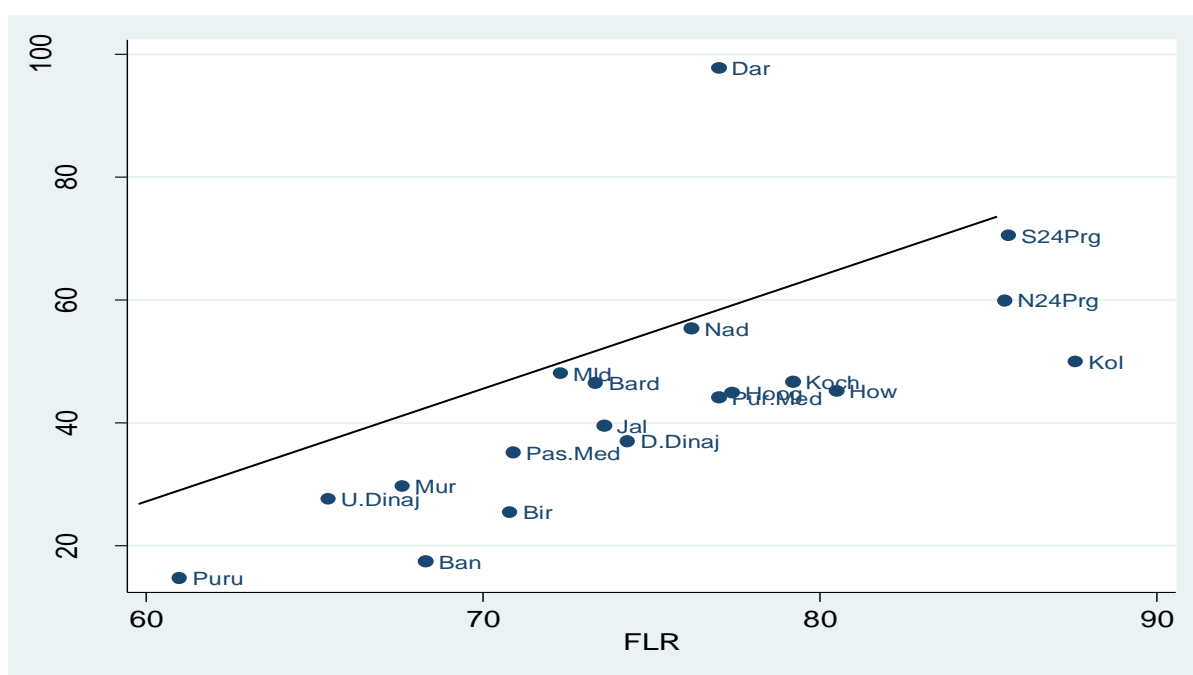
Fig.2 Scatter Diagram showing the relationship between Crime Rate and Head Count Ratio (HCR) of Multidimensional Poverty.



Bratz and Grigsby (1972) define “Poverty as a severe lack of physical and mental wellbeing

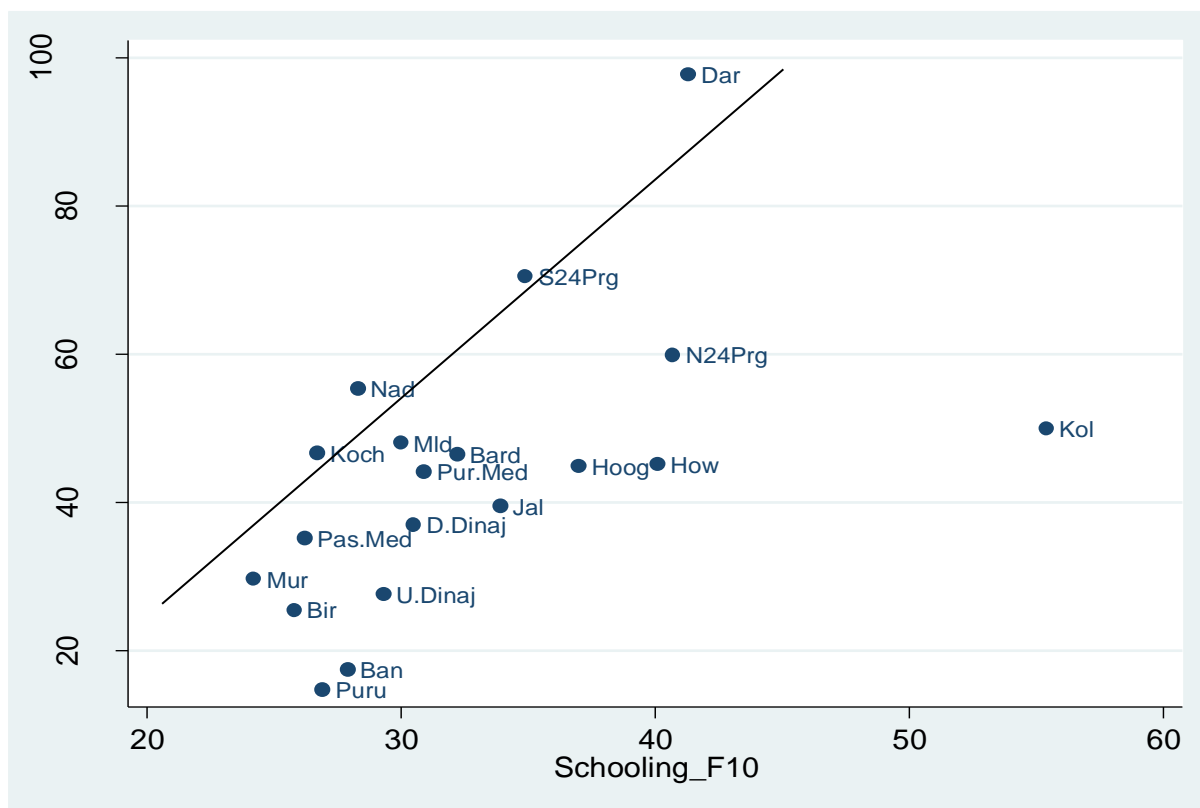
closely associated with inadequate economic resources and consumption”. According to Amartya Sen “poverty is not just a lack of money; it is not having the capability to realize one’s full potential as a human being”. Poverty can increase violence. Women and girls living in poverty are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation including trafficking. But Fig. 2 shows that reported crime against women is found to be decreasing with poverty. District Purulia (with higher HCR) reported least crime against. Because those who experience domestic or intimate partner violence have fewer options to leave violent relationships due to their lack of income and resources. Women do not have independence, nor do they have the freedom to pursue employment in many situations. Thus they are disempowered and dependent on their families. Studies show that poor girls are 2.5 times more likely to marry in childhood than those living in the wealthiest quintile. To address such issue UN Women runs programmes to empower women economically and lift them out of poverty and increase awareness of their rights.

Fig.3 Scatter Diagram showing the relationship between Crime Rate and Female Literacy Rate (FLR)

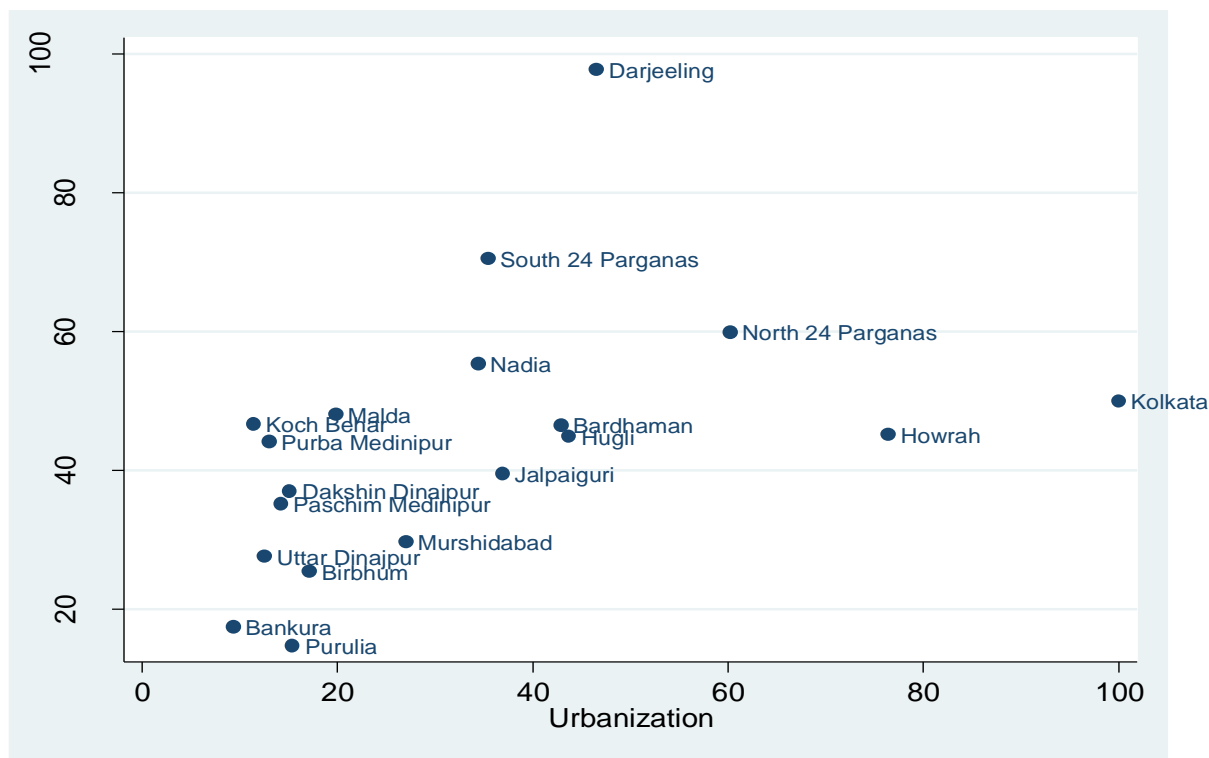


Women education in India plays a very important role in overall development of the country. It is not only helps in the development of the half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside (Sauna 2011). Improving girl’s education levels has been demonstrated to have clear impacts on the health and economic future of young women which in turn improve the prospect of their entire community.

Fig.4 Scatter Diagram showing the relationship between Crime Rate and Schooling of Female exceeding 10th level of education.



After the Universal declaration of Human Rights, Basic education is more than end in itself, it is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development (Ramachandran1998). According to latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) a significant portion of the Indian population is reported to have little to no form of education. Data illustrates that a lack of education is much more prevalent in females than males as 41.5% of women of all ages reported having received no education, while the same parameter reported for men was 21.9%. Both Fig.3 and Fig.4 scatter diagram are showing that reported crime against women is increasing with female literacy rate. But the schooling of female exceeding 10th level is more high reported crime than only literate female. So lower education and literacy rates for women lead to a reluctant to seek help, decreased awareness of their rights and laws and a dependency on male family members, particularly relating to sexual violence. The WHO claims sex education promoting safer sex reduces sexual activity early on life (sharma2015). India's avoidance of the institutional sex education due to conservatism and political alliance lead to sexual curiosity and lack of knowledge.

Fig.5 Scatter Diagram showing the relationship between Crime Rate and Urbanization.

Criminologists have discussed the urban tendency toward crime for decades. WIRTH (1938) discussed the observed connection between crime and urbanization and argues that this connection is evidence for his theory of “urbanism as a way of life”.

Social scientists such as Thomas Jefferson and Jean Jacques Rousseau had argued that there exists a connection between cities and immoral behavior (Bettencout 1999). Urban areas are highly heterogeneous in all its socio cultural and economic ramifications where various good and deviances can be found.

Urbanization is a double edge sword for women. While in one hand it brings a bag full of opportunities- economic, political, social liberty equality, it also brings along unwelcome outcomes such as struggle for rights like, transport safety, the deep rooted patriarchal outlook of the society, commoditization of women etc.

Urbanization in India is unplanned and random. This leads to crowding and development of slums, when it comes to public safety especially ‘safety of women’, present infrastructures in urban spaces are extremely inadequate to deal with it. It is generally assumed that bigger cities having higher crime against women but Fig .4 shows that Kolkata is much safe district compared to other districts in West Bengal. Perhaps this credit goes to Kolkata Police department because they are highly efficient and performing their duties honestly. We also note that urbanization

and crime rate more or less move in the same direction.

II. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Crime against women in West Bengal is spatially related. Majority of the crime is under reported except dowry death. Due to societal barriers and patriarchal nature, females do not report crime. They are treated as surrogate proletariat. We find that districts manifesting higher incidence of poverty and low literacy report less crime- this means that the females are extremely less empowered and therefore we need to give focus on female empowerment.

Educate everyone about the gender based violence. The mass media and news papers certainly play an important role. We should evaluate our rich cultures and traditions. This needs to be done from the family.

Every case related to women should be tried in fast track courts. Cases related to crime against women should be on top of position of the lists. More and more fast track courts should be established. Fear of punishment prevents the law breaker from violating the law. Punishment should be strict for every culprit. Most offences should be categorized under non-bailable offences. Women should be aware about their rights, initiative should be taken by the State Govt. to educate women about the laws. Need of women empowerment is also required. Police department plays an important role in implementation of the existing laws. They should be more cooperative with the victims. Police should encourage women to report crimes.

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