**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND CRIME AGAINST WOMEN IN DHUBRI DISTRICT**

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Domestic violence means any form of violence suffered by a person from others in general and it is the violence suffered by a woman by male members of her family or relatives. Domestic violence is violence committed by someone in the victim’s domestic circle.It includes partners, immediate family members, other relatives and family friends. Domestic violence is a violence or other abuse that occurs in a domestic setting like marriage.In its broadest sense, domestic violence also involves violence against children, parents or the elderly. It assumes multiple forms including physical, verbal, emotional economic, religious, reproductive, financial abuse or sexual abuse. Not only so, it can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and other violent physical abuse, such as choking, beating, female genital mutilation, and acid throwing resulting in either death or disfigurement and also includes the use of technology top harass, control, monitor, stalk or hack. Domestic murder includes stoning, bride burning, honor killing and dowry death etc.

Even if we justify the matter worldwide, the victims of domestic violence are overwhelmingly women, as women tend to experience more severe forms of violence. In some countries, domestic violence may be seen as justified or legally permitted, particularly when an actual or suspected infidelity takes place on the part of the woman. A research-based fact is that there always exists a direct and significant correlation between a country’s level of gender inequality and rates of domestic violence, where it is found that countries with less gender equality experience higher rates of domestic violence.

In the past, domestic violence was mostly associated with physical violence. Terms like – ‘wife abuse’, ’wife beating’, wife battering, and battering of women are connected with domestic violence. But now, domestic violence commonly includes all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence , may be committed by a family member or intimate partner.

The definition of domestic violence, given on the basis of the declaration by UM on the Elimination of Violence against Women is that -Domestic violence, is a physical, sexual and psychological violence that includes battering,sexual abuse of female children at home, violence relating to dowry, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other practices that are harmful to women, violence related to exploitation etc.

**FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE :-**

Domestic violence may be of many forms \_ physical aggression or assault like- hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, beating up, etc. or threats, sexual abuse, controlling or domineering, stalking, passive abuse(like neglect) and economic deprivation. It also includes – endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment and harassment. However, some of these forms are discussed as follows :-

**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE** :- The most visible form of domestic violence is physical injury including slapping, pushing, kicking, biting, hitting, throwing objects, strangling, beating, threatening with weapon etc. Physical abuse is done to cause fear, pain, injury, other physical suffering or bodily harm. Physical violence is found to be the culmination of other abusive behavior such as threats, intimidation through isolation, manipulation and other limitations of personal freedom.

Strangulation is the domestic violence that has received significant attention. Homicide is another form of domestic violence where a female homicide occurs generally by her male partner. During pregnancy, a woman

is found to be at higher risk to be abused causing in negative health effects to the mother and fetus. The risk of domestic violence may be seen in greatest percentage immediately after the childbirth of a pregnant woman basically when the woman gives birth to a female child.

Another form of physical violence is acid attacks are done generally as a result of taking revenge against a woman or girl for rejecting marriage proposal or sexual advance. In some parts of the world, a strong social expectation for a woman to be a virgin prior to her marriage is must, In that case, a bride found not to be a virgin on her wedding night due to the absence of blood may be subjected to extreme violence including an honor killing.

Again burning or dowry killing is a form of domestic violence in which a newly married bride is killed at her father-in-law’s home by her husband or husband’s family in case they are not satisfied by the dowry provided by her family. Dowry violence is most common in India.

**SEXUAL ABUSE AND HARASSMENT** :-

According to the definition given by WHO sexual abuse is a sexual act, an attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances or acts of traffic etc., also including obligatory inspections for virginity and female genital mutilation. Sexual abuse or harassment may also occur if a person is verbally pressured into consenting for some sexual desires of another person and in case of a woman by a man.

Again, victims of rape, in many countries are considered to have brought dishonor to their families often resulting in honor killings especially when the victim is found to be pregnant.Female genital mutilation and incest, or sexual relation or contact between an adult and a child, who are relatives is found to be another form of sexual violence. Sometimes, child sexual abuse takes place with the knowledge and consent of the family, where children are engaged in sexual acts with adults, in exchange for money and goods.

Marital rape is considered to be an another form of sexual violence. Though it is legal in many countries, feminists have worked systematically since the 1960s to criminalize marital rape internationally. In 2006, marital rape was found to be a prosecutable offence in at least 104 countries. Once ignored by law and society, marital rape is now considered by international convention as increasingly criminalized.

**EMOTIONAL ABUSE** :- Emotional abusebeing a common force of domestic violence has been gaining more and more recognition in recent years. Psychological abuse attacks or touches woman’s sense of self-worth and is also harmful to the overall mental and physical well-being of a woman. Emotional and psychological abuse may be of various forms or types – harassment, threats, verbal abuse like – name-calling and blaming; stalking ; and isolation. Stalking is a form of psychological intimidation. Victims feel their partner has total control over them, empowering the and disempowering the victim. Victims often experience depression in some cases the victims are found to take shelter of drug and alcohol.

Coercive control is an act of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim. Coercive control also can occur physically, for example, through physical abuse, harming or frightening the victim. It is often found that the victim’s human rights are shattered when they are deprived of their right to liberty and reduced ability to act freely. Abusers often dehumanize, make threats, deprive basic needs and personal access, isolate and track the victim’s daily schedule etc. Victims are often found to feel anxiety and fear that affects their personal life, financially, physically and psychologically.

Women experiencing domestic violence may find themselves in great emotional distress and mental trauma and also as a result of it high occurrences of suicidal thoughts and attempts may occur to them.

**HONOR KILLING** :- Honor killing is the practice of killing an individual by one or more family members especially when the individual is believed to have brought shame on the family. A number of reasons may arise behind such shame, for example – refusing to enter an arranged marriage, having sex outside marriage, being involved in such relationship disapproved by the family, to begin a divorce proceeding, or engaging in homosexual relations.

**ABUSE AND DEATHS BASED ON DOWRY** :- The ritual of dowry has caused a serious problem in most of the Hindu families, especially when a newly married bride doesn’t bring sufficient dowry with her in her in-law’s home after her marriage. As a result of it, a newly married bride suffer from domestic violence, in the form of harassment, physical abuse etc., even sometimes leading to her death, the result of which may be suicides by hanging, self-poisoning or by fire.

Not only in Hindu religion, but also in case of some other religions like Islam, Sikhs and others, the dowry deaths can be seen in India. The ritual of giving and taking dowry is considered as an important one ritual in the traditional Hindu marriage in Hindu religion as in other religions.

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The request, payment or acceptance of a dowry is prohibited in the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961,as dowry is defined as a demanded gift that is given as a precondition for a marriage. According to the Act, gifts given

without precondition are not considered dowry and are legal. Taking or giving of dowry can be punished by a fine or either by an imprisonment of six months. As a result of dowry, murder and suicide under compulsion of it are addressed by India’s criminal penal code. Even the law was made more strict with Section 498a of Indian

Penal Code( enacted in 1983). Not only so, a woman seeking help against dowry harassment can directly

approach a domestic violence protection officer on the basis of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005(PWDVA)

**ECONOMIC ABUSE** :- Economic abuse is a legally recognized form of domestic abuse and is defined in the Domestic Abuse Act. Economic or financial abuse occurs when one intimate partner controls the other partner’s access to economic resources. Economic abuse involves preventing a spouse from resource acquisition in marital affairs limiting the usage of resources by the victim or by exploiting the economic resources of the victim. The victim’s capacity to support themselves is diminished in economic abuse resulting in increasing dependence on the perpetrator and also thereby reducing their access to education, employment, career advancement and asset acquisition etc.

Some forms of the economic abuse are examples of forcing or pressuring a family member to sign documents, to sell things or to change a will etc. Another example of economic abuse is disagreements about money spend that can result in further additional physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Economic abuse have more severe consequences especially in those parts of the world where women depend on husband’s income for survival and India can be an apt example for this.

Official data are available for the highest rate of crimes against women among all states and union territories for the last three consecutive years as reported by Assam. An increase in three categories of crimes against women--domestic violence, kidnapping and molestation--from 2016 to 2019 has been seen according to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) [data](https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india).

The increasing of crimes against women in Assam is also noted in gender-based violence data as reported by [National Family Health Survey-5](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/FactSheet_AS.pdf) (NFHS) 2019-20, that was released in December 2020. More than 30% of spousal violence of women in Assam as reported in NFHS-5, crossing 24.5% in NFHS-4 (2015-16), and 8% of sexual violence of young women were reported even more than 5.8% in NFHS-4.

However, now, due to increased empowerment of women in the stateof Assam ,it is possible for Assam police to attribute the increase in crimes to higher reporting. Very fewer crimes against women have been reported in rural Assam ,due to the fear and financial dependence of women on their spouses, as said by the police.

The witch-hunting, sexual violence on women and girls, domestic violence, intimate partner abuse, acid attacks, trafficking, cyber­crimes and marriage of minor girls are on the rise in the state as issued by the [North East Network](https://northeastnetwork.org/nen-team-assam/) (NEN), [Purva Bharti Educational Trust](https://www.pbetassam.org/)/Women in Governance, [Women's Leadership Training Centre](https://www.wltc.in/) and [Xobdo](http://www.xobdo.org/) . Thus as women are unsafe in both private spaces including their homes and workplaces, and public spaces including public transport, roads and markets etc.,so there should be the establishment of women's safety committees at the panchayat, district and state levels; extension of the reach of the 181 women's helpline to the remotest corners of all Assam districts etc. Not only so there should also be an effective implementation of the [Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005](https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/2021?locale=en), [The Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018](https://assam.gov.in/sites/default/files/dms/The%20Assam%20Witch%20Hunting%28Prohibition%20Prevention%20and%20Protection%29%20Act.%202015.pdf) and [Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013](https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/2104?locale=en), and of the revised state [Victim Compensation Scheme](http://bongaigaonjudiciary.gov.in/schemes/victim_compensation_2019.pdf) for the sake of girls and women.

**DOMESTIC CRUELTY, KIDNAPPING AND MOLESTATION :**

Crimes against women have been increasing from 2005 to 2019 in Assam,as reported and shown by data from the state's [Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems](https://police.assam.gov.in/information-services/crime-data) (CCTNS).

Many cases of cruelty by husbands and/or his relatives, kidnapping and molestation are reported as have been increased between 2005 and 2019; the most reported cases of all three crimes are however was seen in the year 2019. The cruelty by husband or his relatives has been categorised as the largest increase for cases under [Section 498-A](https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_5_23_00037_186045_1523266765688&sectionId=46286&sectionno=498A&orderno=562) of the Indian Penal Code in the same year.

The NFHS, India's largest household health survey, which periodically collects nationally representative data on health and gender-based violence has also captured the increasing trend of violence against women as seen in the CCTNS data. The percentage of violence as reported by wives by their husbands increased from 24.5% to 32% in Assam in the four years between [NFHS-4](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/pdf/NFHS4/AS_FactSheet.pdf) (2015-16) and [NFHS-5](http://rchiips.org/nfhs/NFHS-5_FCTS/FactSheet_AS.pdf) (2019-20). Sexual violence of women aged between 18 and 29 years who reported increased to 8%, up from 5.8% in NFHS-4. Spousal violence (32.9%)of more rural women in Assam is reported than urban women (26.6%) in NFHS-5, and sexual violence of more rural women (8.1%) reported than urban (7.4%).

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As NCRB [data](https://ncrb.gov.in/en/crime-india-2019-0) shows crimes against women in Assam are growing at a faster rate than the national average. Assam's crime rate (per 100,000 female population) was almost thrice the national average in 2019. Even it

crosses the ratio of Delhi, which reported its infrastructure as firmed up after the 2012 Nirbhaya gangrape case.

According to [Census 2011](https://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/dchb/Assam.html), less than 3% of India's female population is accounted for Assam  but its share of crimes against women in 2019 was 7.4%, at its highest point since 2005. In contrast to Assam,Delhi, which accounts for 1.5% of the female population, whose share in crimes against women declines steadily since 2015.

Though government and several non-government agencies in the state of Assam, have taken several measures to minimize crime or domestic violence against women, the district of Dhubri witnesses an increase of rate in registration of cases against women in all its police stations.

As compared to 138 cases registered in police stations in 2016 on monthly average, 143 cases of crime against women were registered in the year 2017. In total, 1724 cases of murder, rape, kidnapping, abduction, dowry death, dowry suicide, molestation, immoral women trafficking, cruelty by husband and husband’s family were registerd in 2017, while 1657 cases in 2016 as mentioned by a police report.But most astonishingl, only 112 such cases were registered by the police in January, 2018.

Among the all kind of case, cruelty by their husband was mostly faced by the women of Dhubri district, as it was found that almost 1034 such cases of offence were found to be registered in 2017.Moreover, the police also kept records of 363 cases of molestation, 102 cases of rape, 192 cases of kidnapping and abduction etc.; though it was not the genuine record of crime due to the fact that many cases are even not complained to the police for various reasons.

Even many cases under Prohibition of Child Marriage Act ,2006 and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act(POCSO Act)2012,are informed to be registered where often a girl was found to be victimized. Even rate of child marriage is also very high in Dhubri district.

Author and women rights activist, Sultana Salima Ahmed targets illiteracy and poverty being the main reason for such rise in crime against women.She argues that most of the girl child of the poor families of the district were hardly sent to the school and even if they went to schools they could hardly study till class 4-5.They got married at their early stage and also were treated not more than a child producing machine.Under such conditions it was impossible to expect them to know their own rights, as they began to believe cruelty to them as natural under such a situation.

So, to improve their such condition women empowerment is needed to be focused more as confessed by Parvin Sultana, another women rights activist and Assistant Professor of P.B. College.Interestingly enough there is another method of victimization of women as told by her. For example, if there is a land related conflicts, families often try to take shelter under the umbrella of sexual harassment and molestation cases by often making women as victims, and it is a matter of grief that due to such actions of the families, the main focus is shifted from genuine cases of abuse and harassment to the false ones.

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