
Post-Crime Impacts: Challenges in Realizing a Decent and Normal Lifestyle Among Victims of Sexual Offences in India

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DR PRADEEP B S¹, DR LOKESH M U², DR YASHASWINI B³

¹Professor In Social Work Department, Davangere University, Davanagere, India,

²Professor In Social Work Department, Davangere University, Davanagere, India,

³Assistant Professor In the Social Work Department, Managalore University, Mangaluru, India.

Correspondence: DR PRADEEP B S, pradeepwagonr@gmail.com

Abstract

Sexual violence constitutes a profound infraction of human rights, leaving deep-seated emotional, physical, and psychological scars. While legislative reforms in India have increasingly focused on stringent punitive deterrents, the post-crime socio-cultural landscape remains highly hostile for survivors. This paper examines the systemic challenges that victims of sexual offences face in India when trying to reclaim a "decent and normal" lifestyle. By analysing the intersection of psychological trauma, persistent societal stigma, institutional re-victimization, and structural economic displacement, this study highlights how deeply ingrained patriarchal structures obstruct successful rehabilitation. The paper concludes with recommendations for shifting from a purely punitive justice system toward a trauma-informed, comprehensive survivor-centric support ecosystem.

Keywords: Sexual Offences, Victimization, Societal Stigma, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), India, Rehabilitation

1. Introduction

Sexual violence remains a critical public health crisis and a structural barrier to sustainable human development globally (Serrano-Rodríguez et al., 2024). In India, high-profile cases over the last decade have catalysed sweeping legal transformations, resulting in stricter criminal codes and fast-tracked judicial pathways (Himabindu et al., 2014). However, a significant gap remains between legal adjudication and the socio-cultural reality that survivors face after a crime occurs.

For a victim of a sexual offence, the conclusion of a criminal trial does not equate to the resumption of normalcy. In many collectivist and patriarchal societies, the post-crime phase marks the beginning of a secondary, prolonged period of hardship. The concept of a "decent and normal lifestyle"—defined here as possessing personal autonomy, psychological stability, social integration, and economic security—is frequently compromised. Survivors must navigate a complex web of social isolation, psychological distress, and systemic discrimination that directly impedes their rehabilitation and socio-economic mobility.

2. Theoretical Framework: Secondary Victimization

This study relies on the theory of Secondary Victimization, which posits that a survivor’s trauma is frequently exacerbated by the negative reactions of social networks, community members, and institutional authorities. In the Indian context, this process is fuelled by deeply embedded patriarchal ideologies that disproportionately link a family’s or community’s "honour" to a woman’s bodily autonomy. Consequently, the survivor is often transformed from the victim of a localized crime into a cultural outcast, forcing them into cycles of self-blame, isolation, and systemic marginalization.

3. Dimensions of Post-Crime Challenges

3.1. Psychosocial Trauma and Mental Health Erosion

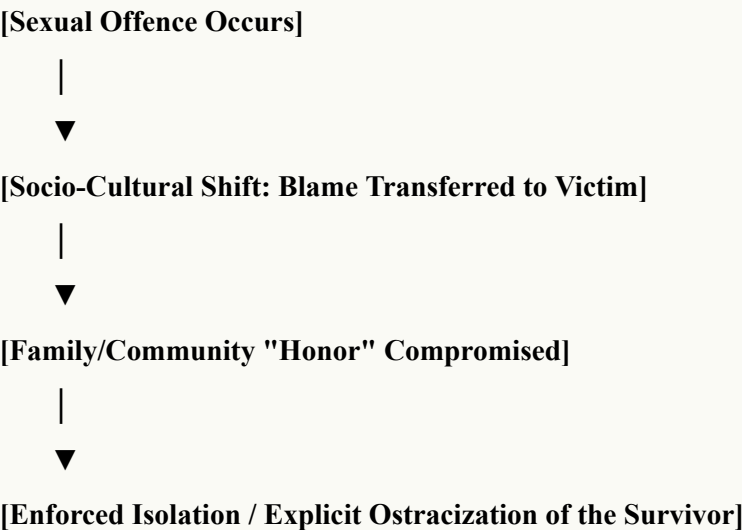
The immediate and long-term psychological impacts of sexual assault severely disrupt daily functioning and self-actualization. Empirical literature shows that survivors experience heightened rates of:

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD (CPTSD).
- Severe depressive symptoms and acute anxiety.
- Persistent suicidal ideation driven by an inability to process traumatic memories within unsupportive environments (J K et al., 2022).

This trauma manifests as profound emotional instability, generalized fear (particularly towards public spaces and unfamiliar individuals), and a severe erosion of self-esteem (J K et al., 2022; Serrano-Rodríguez et al., 2024). Without targeted clinical interventions, these psychological burdens hinder a survivor's ability to maintain personal relationships, pursue education, or retain stable employment.

3.2. Societal Stigma, Ostracization, and the "Honor" Paradox

In India, the socio-cultural narrative surrounding sexual offences frequently shifts accountability from the perpetrator to the victim. Survivors encounter pervasive social penalties:



This dynamic manifests as explicit social exclusion, regular verbal harassment, or implicit pressures to withdraw from community life to preserve familial reputation (J K et al., 2022). Furthermore, the rapid proliferation of unmonitored digital spaces and social media often leads to localized doxxing and public exposure, extending the boundaries of harassment and making privacy or a fresh start nearly impossible.

3.3. Socio-Economic Displacement and Financial Vulnerability

Reclaiming a stable lifestyle requires economic independence, yet survivors of sexual offences often face severe financial disruptions. This economic marginalization stems from multiple vectors:

Vulnerability Vector	Operational Impact on Survivor
Workplace/Educational Interruption	Prolonged legal proceedings, medical treatments, and acute psychological distress frequently lead to extended absenteeism, forcing survivors to drop out of school or resign from their jobs.
Systemic Employment Bias	Due to public exposure or ongoing legal involvement, survivors often face hiring discrimination from employers seeking to avoid perceived social controversy.
Resource Diversion	Families often exhaust their limited savings on legal fees and private security, depleting capital that could otherwise support the survivor's education, vocational training, or long-term welfare.

3.4. Institutional Barriers and Hostile Systems

The path to rehabilitation is further complicated by interactions with institutional frameworks that often lack trauma-informed protocols. During the pre-trial and trial phases, survivors frequently encounter skepticism from law enforcement, invasive medical examinations, and aggressive cross-examinations by defense counsel (Ur Rehman, 2026). This institutional hostility deters reporting, compromises the collection of forensic evidence, and leaves survivors feeling alienated by the very systems designed to protect them.

4. Discussion: The Indian Subcontinental Context

The challenges discussed above are amplified by distinct socio-legal dynamics unique to India. While frameworks like the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act of 2012 have introduced specialized judicial mechanisms for minors, structural implementation remains inconsistent due to infrastructural gaps and varying levels of stakeholder sensitivity (Kumar, 2022).

For adult survivors, the lack of institutionalized, state-funded, and long-term psychosocial support systems means that rehabilitation is largely left to the private sphere. Survivors must rely heavily on immediate family networks, which are themselves navigating social stigma and may lack the emotional or financial resources to offer constructive assistance (Talwar, 2025). This lack of structural support leaves many survivors highly vulnerable to chronic poverty, long-term mental health challenges, and social

displacement.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Enacting strict criminal laws is an important step toward deterrence, but it does not resolve the complex, long-term challenges survivors face after a crime occurs. To help victims of sexual offences re-establish a decent, normal lifestyle, India's policy framework must evolve from a strictly retributive model to a holistic, survivor-centric approach:

Institutionalization of Mental Healthcare: Integrate long-term, state-funded trauma counselling and psychiatric care into district-level public health networks to ensure survivors have accessible mental health services.

Economic Rehabilitation Programs: Develop targeted socio-economic support systems, including affirmative vocational training, educational scholarships, and workplace anti-discrimination protections tailored for survivors.

Trauma-Informed Sensitization: Implement mandatory, continuous training programs for law enforcement, medical professionals, and judicial officers to reduce secondary victimization within the legal system.

Community-Led De-stigmatization: Launch public awareness initiatives designed to challenge patriarchal notions of "honour" and shift the social burden of shame entirely onto the perpetrator.

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