



Dowry Deaths in India

For Prelims: [National Crime Records Bureau](#), Dowry Death, [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#), [Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana](#)

For Mains: Dowry Deaths in India, Legal provisions under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita related to dowry

[Source: TH](#)

Why in News?

A surge in [dowry-related deaths](#) across states like Uttar Pradesh, Chandigarh, and Tamil Nadu shows the persistent grip of this illegal practice. Women continue to face harassment, assault, and suicide over dowry, while investigations drag on and convictions remain rare.

Dowry Death and Cruelty

- **Dowry Death:** According to the Section 80 of [Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita \(BNS\)](#) A woman's **death by burns, injury, or in unnatural circumstances within 7 years of marriage** is considered dowry death if she faced cruelty or harassment over dowry soon before her death.
 - **Punishment:** Minimum 7 years imprisonment, extendable to life.
- **Cruelty:** Under Section 86 of the BNS, cruelty is defined as any willful conduct likely to **drive a woman to commit suicide or cause serious harm to her physical or mental health.**
 - It also includes harassment intended to force her or her family to meet **unlawful demands for money or property**, or harassment due to their failure to meet such demands.

What are the Reasons for the Persistence of Dowry-related Deaths in India?

- **Cultural Entitlement and Deep-rooted Traditions:** Dowry, though illegal since **1961 under the [Dowry Prohibition Act](#)**, continues to be treated as a social practice.
 - Many families still see it as an essential part of marriage, **often disguised as "gifts."** In some sections of society, a **girl's worth is judged not by the life she builds, but by the dowry she brings.**
 - Cultural and societal pressures push families to meet rising dowry demands, which often leads to harassment, abuse, and even deaths.
- **Extent of the Dowry Problem in India:** Between 2017 and 2022, India saw an average of 7,000 dowry deaths annually, based on reports from the [National Crime Records Bureau \(NCRB\)](#).
 - The NCRB data is conservative, as many dowry deaths go unreported, underscoring the

extent of the issue.

- A [World Bank](#) study covering 40,000 marriages in rural India from 1960 to 2008 revealed that dowry was paid in **95% of marriages**. This shows how deep-rooted the practice remains.
- **Gender Discrimination and Patriarchal Practices:** Dowry is often used to **assert control over women**, who are perceived as a burden upon marriage. The demands from husbands and in-laws for additional dowries are rooted in patriarchal attitudes that value women as commodities.
- **Normalizing Abuse:** Laws like Section 80 and 85 of the [Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023](#) make dowry-related deaths and harassment criminal offenses. Yet, the practice of dowry has **normalized abuse in many households**. Such violence often goes unreported, dismissed as a **private family matter**.
 - Between 2017 and 2022, dowry was the main motive in **over 6,100 murders across India**.
 - Over 60% occurred in **West Bengal, Odisha, and Bihar**. Together with Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana, these States accounted for 80% of all dowry death cases during this period.
 - This lack of awareness and ineffective implementation of laws makes it **harder for women to break free from abusive relationships**.
- **Role of Economic Factors:** Rising economic pressures contribute to the demand for higher dowries. The growing **consumerism, social media influence, and the desire for a 'grand wedding'** create an environment conducive to dowry expectations.

Judicial Interventions

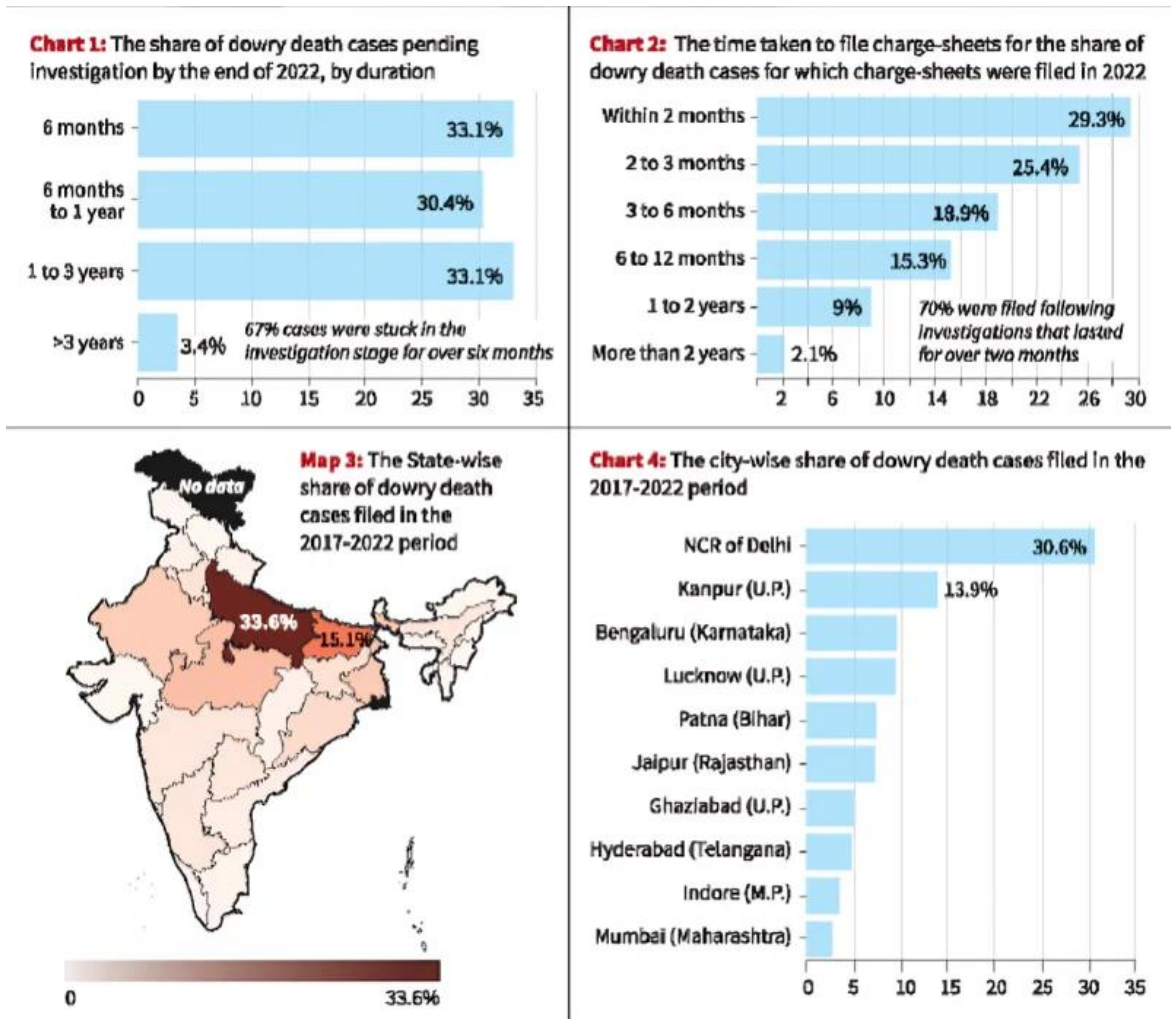
- **Sanjay Kumar Jain v. State of Delhi (2011):** The Supreme Court condemned the dowry system as a curse on Indian society and called for strong efforts to eliminate the rising menace of dowry deaths.
- **K. Prema S. Rao v. Yadla Srinivasa Rao (2003):** The Supreme Court stressed that stricter laws would only be effective if implemented seriously. It urged courts and enforcement agencies to act firmly to meet the intent of anti-dowry legislation.
- **Satvir Singh & Ors v. State of Punjab (1998):** The Punjab & Haryana High Court called dowry a stigma and social evil, stressing the urgent need for a shift in societal thinking and stronger laws to prevent dowry-related deaths.
- **S. Gopal Reddy v. State of Andhra Pradesh (1996):** The Supreme Court emphasized that the Dowry Prohibition Act targets both receiving and demanding dowry. Dowry, as a **quid pro quo for marriage, is illegal and reflects deep-rooted gender bias**.

What are the Key Legal and Judicial Challenges in Dowry-related Cases in India?

- **Inadequate Investigation and Slow Response:** Only around 4,500 out of 7,000 dowry deaths reported each year lead to charge sheets.
 - The rest remain stuck due to investigations being **delayed, mishandled, or disposed of** due to lack of evidence or false complaints.
 - More than **67% of dowry deaths in 2022** had investigations **pending for over six months**, indicating systemic delays.
- **Judicial Bottlenecks:** Even after charge sheets are filed, over **90% of cases face delays in courts**. With limited convictions (around 100 annually), cases often remain unresolved for years, leading to a sense of impunity among perpetrators.
- **Lack of Coordination Between Police and Judiciary:** Police often try to “resolve” dowry complaints through [mediation](#), especially in small towns or villages.
 - Additionally, the slow pace of charge sheet filing (70% after two months or more) and delays in court proceedings create a system where justice is not only delayed but sometimes denied.
- **Underreporting and Victim-Blaming:** Many dowry-related deaths go unreported due to **fear of**

stigma, lack of legal awareness, and pressure from both society and family.

- Many women **fear being disowned**, and victims' families often hesitate to pursue justice in close-knit communities.



What can be Done to Break the Cycle of Dowry-related Violence?

- **Economic Empowerment:** Empowering women financially is key to breaking the cycle of dowry violence. Laws like the [Prevention of Child Marriage Act, 2006](#) and [Right to Education Act, 2009](#) must be strictly enforced to keep girls in school and delay early marriage.
 - Schemes like [Beti Bachao Beti Padhao](#), [Sukanya Samridhi Yojana](#), [Mudra Yojana](#), and the [National Skill Development Mission](#) can give women the tools, savings, and skills needed for independence.
 - When women earn and control resources, they're better able to resist abuse and **build their own future**.
- **Make Dowry Reporting Easier and Safer:** Use tech-based platforms (apps, WhatsApp helplines) to allow **anonymous complaints** and track police response. Provide legal anonymity and protection for **whistleblowers within families or communities**. Safer reporting helps more women come forward.
- **Strengthening Law Enforcement:** Police must be trained to handle dowry-related cases with **greater sensitivity and urgency**. Timely investigation and stringent action against the accused must be prioritized.
 - Dowry complaints must be registered and investigated as **criminal offenses from the start**. Treating these cases seriously sends a **strong signal that dowry abuse isn't negotiable, it's a crime**.
- **Create Real Exit Pathways for Women:** Leaving abuse isn't an option without support. Every district needs **proper shelters with counseling, legal aid, and job help**. Direct cash or income

support must back women who walk out, so survival isn't the next struggle.

- **Judicial Reforms and Fast-Tracking Cases:** Setting up fast-track courts dedicated to dowry death cases would expedite trials and reduce the delay in the justice system.
- **Increase Awareness and Legal Support:** Victims of dowry harassment should be provided with easier access to legal aid and counseling.
 - Social awareness campaigns targeting the negative impacts of dowry could help change societal attitudes over time, reducing dowry-related violence.

Drishti Mains Question:

Q. Despite being legally prohibited, dowry continues to thrive in India.” Examine the socio-cultural and economic factors behind its persistence.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. Is the National Commission for Women able to strategize and tackle the problems that women face in both public and private spheres? Give reasons in support of your answer. (2017)

Q. We are witnessing increasing instances of sexual violence against women in the country. Despite existing legal provisions against it, the number of such incidences is on the rise. Suggest some innovative measures to tackle this menace. (2014)

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/printpdf/dowry-deaths-in-india>

