

ROLE OF MEDIA IN SHAPING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND INFLUENCING JUDICIAL OUTCOMES REGARDING DOWRY AND RELATED CRIMES IN INDIA

Dr.Keval Govardhan Ukey^{1*}

^{1*}Associate Professor, School of Law, Sandip University, Nashik 9325592939
Email: keval.ukey@sandipuniversity.edu.in

Mr.Sanjay Kumar ShivramSingh^{2*}

^{2*}Ph.D. Scholar, School of Law, Sandip University, Nashik 9594188156
Email: Sanjaysingh.311277@gmail.com

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Keval Govardhan Ukey,&Mr. Sanjay Kumar Shivram Singh

INTRODUCTION

The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception and influencing judicial outcomes regarding dowry and related crimes in India. The media wields a profound influence in shaping public perception and molding judicial outcomes concerning dowry and related crimes in India. Through diverse platforms such as newspapers, television, and social media, the media plays a pivotal role in disseminating information, fostering awareness, and catalyzing discussions surrounding the prevalence and consequences of dowry-related offenses. Its ability to set the agenda is evident in the selection of specific cases or aspects for coverage, thus directing public attention and influencing policy priorities. Media narratives contribute significantly to shaping public opinion by framing the severity of the issue, assessing the efficacy of existing legal frameworks, and emphasizing the need for reform. Moreover, media coverage can extend its impact into judicial proceedings, potentially subjecting high-profile cases to public pressure that may either enhance the pursuit of justice or introduce biases into judicial decisions. As a powerful advocate for change, the media can contribute to campaigns against dowry-related crimes, using journalistic investigations and documentaries to mobilize public support and push for legal reforms. However, the media also faces challenges in maintaining ethical reporting standards, emphasizing the need for responsible journalism to avoid perpetuating stereotypes and to foster a more nuanced understanding of the issue.

Furthermore, the media's influence extends into the intricacies of judicial processes, potentially shaping the behavior of those involved, including judges, lawyers, and witnesses. High-profile cases receiving extensive media coverage may experience heightened scrutiny, impacting the judicial system's response to such crimes. The media's role in advocacy is particularly evident in its power to not only highlight the challenges but also champion the cause for change. Responsible reporting becomes paramount as media outlets navigate the delicate balance between raising awareness and avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. The power dynamics between the media, public perception, and the judiciary underscore the need for a thoughtful and conscientious approach to reporting on dowry-related crimes. In essence, the media serves as a double-edged sword, capable of fostering positive societal change through informed reporting or inadvertently perpetuating harmful narratives that may impede progress in addressing these deeply ingrained social issues. As a catalyst for both awareness and potential transformation, the media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing judicial outcomes remains a crucial aspect of the ongoing discourse surrounding dowry and related crimes in India. Here are some key aspects of this influence:

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SENSITIZATION

Media, through various platforms such as newspapers, television, and social media, contributes to creating awareness about dowry-related crimes. It disseminates information about the prevalence of such crimes, their consequences, and legal measures to combat them. Sensationalized or in-depth coverage of specific cases can draw public attention and sympathy, leading to increased awareness and understanding of the issue.

Public awareness and sensitization regarding dowry-related crimes in India are significantly shaped by the media's multifaceted presence across newspapers, television, and social media platforms. The media serves as a crucial information conduit, disseminating knowledge about the prevalence of dowry-related offenses, elucidating their consequences, and detailing the legal measures in place to combat them. Through comprehensive reporting, the media plays a pivotal role in educating the public about the social, legal, and human implications of such crimes. In particular, when specific cases are highlighted through sensationalized or in-depth coverage, the media has the power to capture public attention and evoke empathy. These cases become focal points for public discourse, fostering increased awareness and understanding of the complex issues surrounding dowry-related crimes. By shedding light on individual stories and the broader societal impact, the media contributes to a more informed and engaged public, laying the groundwork for potential social change and advocacy efforts.

Moreover, the media's role in public awareness extends beyond mere information dissemination to influencing societal attitudes and perceptions. By framing narratives around dowry-related crimes, the media can contribute to shaping public opinion on the severity of the issue and the urgency for collective action. The emotive impact of media coverage, especially in highlighting the human stories behind the statistics, can foster a sense of empathy and solidarity among the audience. This emotional connection has the potential to galvanize public support for initiatives aimed at preventing dowry-related crimes, advocating for legal reforms, and challenging entrenched social norms. As a result, the media not only acts as a conduit for factual information but also as a powerful agent of change by leveraging its influence to mold public attitudes, ultimately playing a pivotal role in the broader societal response to dowry-related issues in India.

AGENDA SETTING

Media has the power to set the agenda by deciding which issues to cover and how to cover them. By highlighting specific cases or aspects of dowry-related crimes, the media can influence public opinion and policy priorities. In the realm of dowry-related crimes in India, the media exercises a profound influence through agenda setting. This power lies in its ability to determine not only which issues warrant coverage but also the manner in which they are presented to the public. By strategically selecting specific cases or aspects related to dowry offenses for coverage, the media can significantly shape public opinion and influence the priorities of policymakers. The deliberate choice of what to emphasize can lead to heightened awareness and understanding of particular facets of the issue, steering public discourse in specific directions. Media-driven agenda setting can trigger societal conversations, prompting a reevaluation of the severity of dowry-related crimes and influencing the urgency for legal and social reforms. In essence, the media acts as a gatekeeper, molding public perceptions and contributing to the prioritization of issues within the broader societal and policy landscape related to dowry in India.

Additionally, the media's role in agenda setting extends beyond individual cases to broader themes and systemic challenges associated with dowry-related crimes. By consistently covering certain aspects of the issue, such as the socio-economic factors contributing to the persistence of dowry practices or the gaps in the legal framework, the media can prompt a deeper understanding of the root causes and complexities involved. This sustained coverage has the potential to influence not only public opinion but also the policymaking process. Policymakers, influenced by media-driven public sentiments, may prioritize legislative reforms and social interventions to address the

highlighted issues. As such, the media's agenda-setting function becomes a dynamic force that not only reflects the societal landscape but actively shapes the narratives and responses to dowry-related crimes, playing a crucial role in the ongoing discourse and efforts towards positive change.

INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION

Public perception of dowry-related crimes is often shaped by media narratives. Media coverage can influence how people perceive the severity of the issue, the effectiveness of existing laws, and the urgency for legal reforms. The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion on dowry-related crimes in India. Through its narratives and coverage, it influences how people perceive the gravity of the issue, the efficacy of existing legal measures, and the urgency for comprehensive reforms. By framing stories, highlighting specific angles, and providing context, the media shapes the lens through which the public views dowry-related offenses. Sensationalized or empathetic portrayals of victims can evoke strong emotional responses, leading to heightened concern among the audience. Conversely, nuanced and well-researched reporting can contribute to a more informed understanding of the complexities surrounding dowry-related crimes. The media's influence on public opinion has ripple effects, potentially mobilizing communities to advocate for change, influencing public discourse, and placing pressure on authorities to address the issue more effectively. As a result, media narratives become integral in molding the collective consciousness and attitudes towards dowry-related crimes, ultimately impacting the societal response and potential avenues for reform.

Furthermore, media's influence on public opinion goes beyond just presenting facts; it contributes to the construction of societal norms and values. The framing of dowry-related crimes in news stories, documentaries, and other forms of media shapes the broader cultural narrative around these issues. Media coverage can either challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes and cultural attitudes, playing a crucial role in either dismantling or perpetuating harmful norms associated with dowry. This influence on cultural perceptions not only affects how individuals view specific cases but also shapes societal expectations, potentially influencing behavior at both the individual and community levels. Therefore, the media's role in influencing public opinion is not only about disseminating information but also about actively participating in the ongoing social discourse and contributing to the evolution of societal attitudes towards dowry-related crimes.

ROLE IN JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS

Media coverage can influence the way legal cases are perceived by the public and can impact the behavior of those involved in the judicial process, including judges, lawyers, and witnesses. High-profile cases that receive extensive media coverage may face public pressure, which can, in turn, influence judicial decisions. This could either lead to heightened scrutiny and a more rigorous pursuit of justice or potentially biased judgments.

The media's role in judicial proceedings concerning dowry-related crimes in India is multifaceted and can significantly influence both the perception and behavior of key stakeholders in the legal system. As media coverage brings legal cases into the public domain, it can shape public perceptions of the accused, the victims, and the overall circumstances surrounding the crime. This public scrutiny has the potential to influence the behavior of those involved in the judicial process, including judges, lawyers, and witnesses.

High-profile cases that garner extensive media attention may be subjected to public pressure, creating an environment where judicial decisions come under increased scrutiny. This heightened attention can lead to a more rigorous pursuit of justice, with judges and legal professionals being acutely aware of the public interest in the case. On the positive side, this increased scrutiny can ensure that due process is followed meticulously, and justice is served transparently.

However, there is a flip side to media influence on judicial proceedings. The intense public focus can sometimes lead to biased judgments, as legal professionals may feel compelled to align their decisions with prevailing public sentiment. This pressure can potentially compromise the impartiality and objectivity of the judicial process, impacting the fair dispensation of justice.

In essence, the media's role in judicial proceedings is a delicate balance between fostering transparency and accountability and the risk of introducing external pressures that may compromise the integrity of legal decisions. Legal systems must navigate this terrain carefully to ensure that media coverage contributes positively to justice rather than unduly influencing the outcomes of dowry-related cases.

The media's role in judicial proceedings concerning dowry-related crimes in India is multifaceted and can significantly influence both the perception and behavior of key stakeholders in the legal system. As media coverage brings legal cases into the public domain, it can shape public perceptions of the accused, the victims, and the overall circumstances surrounding the crime. This public scrutiny has the potential to influence the behavior of those involved in the judicial process, including judges, lawyers, and witnesses.

High-profile cases that garner extensive media attention may be subjected to public pressure, creating an environment where judicial decisions come under increased scrutiny. This heightened attention can lead to a more rigorous pursuit of justice, with judges and legal professionals being acutely aware of the public interest in the case. On the positive side, this increased scrutiny can ensure that due process is followed meticulously, and justice is served transparently.

However, there is a flip side to media influence on judicial proceedings. The intense public focus can sometimes lead to biased judgments, as legal professionals may feel compelled to align their decisions with prevailing public sentiment. This pressure can potentially compromise the impartiality and objectivity of the judicial process, impacting the fair dispensation of justice.

In essence, the media's role in judicial proceedings is a delicate balance between fostering transparency and accountability and the risk of introducing external pressures that may compromise the integrity of legal decisions. Legal systems must navigate this terrain carefully to ensure that media coverage contributes positively to justice rather than unduly influencing the outcomes of dowry-related cases.

Some landmark judgments related to dowry harassment and violence that were significant in shaping legal perspectives:

Mohammed Hoshan vs. State of A.P. (2002)

This case clarified the definition of “cruelty” in the context of Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with dowry harassment. It is yet another unfortunate case of a young girl of 18 years whose all hopes and aspirations to live a happy married life were burnt and destroyed by the burn injuries caused by herself to end her life when the appellants subjected her to cruelty and abated the commission of suicide by her within 11 months after marriage.

Arnesh Kumar vs. State of Bihar (2014)

This judgment emphasized the need for caution and care in the arrest of individuals under Section 498A, highlighting that arrest should not be made hastily and without proper investigation. The marriage between the Petitioner hereinafter referred as (Arnesh Kumar) and Respondent Sweta Kiran was solemnized on dated 1st July 2007. Arnesh Kumar was arrested under the provision of Section 4 of Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 after his wife Sweta Kiran affirmed that the petitioner has requested/ demanded dowry from her.

The said Respondent i.e. Sweta Kiran alleged before the court and levelled allegations that petitioner family has made a demand of Rupees 8 Lakhs, a maruti Car, an Air-conditioner, television Set etc. When Sweta Kiran brought the fact in the petitioner notice he supported his family member and threatened to marry another woman if the demand was not fulfilled.

Sunita Kumari Kashyap vs. State of Bihar (2011)

This case dealt with the issue of unnatural death due to dowry harassment and examined the evidence required to establish the offense. The Appellant Sunita Kumari Kashyap got married to Sanjay Kumar Saini Respondent No. 2 herein, on 16.04.2000 as per the Hindu rites and ceremonies at Gaya. According to the Appellant, at the time of marriage, her father gifted all the household utensils, Almirah, Double Bed, Dining Table, Fridge, Television and an amount of Rs. 2,50,000/- in cash. In addition to the same, her father spent so much money to solemnize the marriage and for gifts to other family members of her husband. In spite of the same, immediately after the marriage, she was blamed for bringing less dowry by her in-laws and they started harassing and torturing her. Her husband also used to support his family members to torture her. It is her further grievance that her husband demanded an additional amount of Rs. 4 lakhs from her parents for renovation of their house at Ranchi. When she was pregnant, she was forcibly taken out of her matrimonial home at Ranchi and brought to her parental home at Gaya. After giving birth to a girl child the circumstances became even worse and everyone started blaming her that she had brought an additional burden on them. After some time, her husband came out with a new demand that unless her father gives his house at Gaya to him she will not be taken back to her matrimonial home at Ranchi.

Having continuous torture and unbearable nature of treatment by her husband and in-laws for years and years, having no other option, the Appellant lodged First Information Report (in short "FIR") being No. 66 of 2007 under Sections 498A and 406 read with Section 34 of Indian Penal Code (in short "IPC") and Sections 3 and 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (in short "D.P. Act") at Magadh Medical College Police Station, Gaya.

Satbir Singh vs. State of Haryana (2015)

The Supreme Court, in this case, stressed the importance of the prosecution proving its case beyond a reasonable doubt in dowry death cases. On 1st July 1994 accused (Satbir) was married. After 1 year of marriage, the girl dies. On 31 July 1995 around 4:00 pm- 4:30 pm, the father of the girl received the news on a phone call that her daughter is admitted to the hospital and is fighting between life and death. As soon as he comes to know about this he immediately with his wife and son reaches the hospital and sees that her daughter is dead due to fire burning. After that he files a case on the accused Satbir and his brother of IPC section 304b dowry death and 306 abetments of suicide. He did this because after marriage her daughter many times told him and his son that because she brought less dowry she was facing a lot of harassment and cruelty in her matrimonial home.

The case went to the court and trial court on 11 Dec 1997 convicted the accused Satbir and his brother under IPC sec 304b and sec 306 and was punished for 7 year of rigorous imprisonment under section 304b and 5 years of rigorous imprisonment under section 306.

ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNS

Media can be a powerful tool for advocacy and campaigns against dowry-related crimes. Journalistic investigations, documentaries, and public service announcements can contribute to mobilizing public support for legal reforms and social change. Indeed, the media serves as a potent catalyst for advocacy and campaigns against dowry-related crimes in India. Various forms of media,

including newspapers, television, and online platforms, play a crucial role in raising awareness, inspiring public engagement, and mobilizing support for legal reforms and societal change.

Media outlets often conduct in-depth investigative reporting to uncover the intricacies of dowry-related crimes. Such investigations can bring to light specific cases, highlight systemic issues, and expose gaps in the legal framework. Through comprehensive reporting, journalists can influence public opinion and garner support for reforms by providing a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by victims.

Documentaries have the power to capture the human stories behind dowry-related crimes. By presenting real-life narratives, emotions, and struggles, documentaries can evoke empathy and create a lasting impact on the audience. They provide a visual and emotional dimension to the issue, making it more relatable and compelling for viewers. Documentaries can be powerful tools in advocating for social change and legal reforms.

Media platforms often collaborate with advocacy groups, NGOs, and government agencies to create public service announcements addressing dowry-related crimes. These short, impactful messages aim to educate the public, raise awareness about the consequences of such crimes, and encourage reporting. PSAs can also provide information about support services available to victims and emphasize the importance of community involvement in combating dowry-related issues.

Through these various media channels, advocacy campaigns gain momentum, reaching a broad audience and fostering a sense of collective responsibility. By leveraging the emotive power of storytelling and visual representation, the media contributes to a growing public consciousness that can be instrumental in driving both legal and societal changes regarding dowry-related crimes in India.

RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL REPORTING

Media outlets have a responsibility to report accurately and ethically. Biased or sensationalized reporting can contribute to misperceptions and undermine the credibility of the legal system. On the other hand, responsible reporting can contribute to a more informed public and constructive dialogue on the issue. Media laws and media ethics have always been a centre point of examination in any country. The fundamental objective of responsible journalism is to serve people with information, views and comments on matters beneficial to the public interest in an accurate, fair and unbiased manner.

The responsibility of media outlets in reporting on dowry-related crimes extends beyond the dissemination of information; it encompasses a commitment to accuracy, fairness, and ethical standards. Biased or sensationalized reporting has the potential to distort public perceptions, perpetuate stereotypes, and undermine the credibility of the legal system. Therefore, media outlets bear the responsibility of adhering to ethical reporting practices to ensure the integrity of the information they present.

- **Accuracy and Fairness:** Media outlets must strive for accuracy in their reporting, verifying facts and presenting a balanced view of the issues at hand. Fairness in coverage means providing all relevant perspectives and avoiding undue emphasis on sensational elements that might skew public understanding.
- **Avoiding Victim-Blaming:** Responsible reporting in cases of dowry-related crimes involves refraining from victim-blaming. Instead, the focus should be on the criminal actions and the societal factors contributing to such offenses. Media outlets should avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes that may stigmatize victims.

- **Respect for Legal Procedures:** Media plays a crucial role in respecting the legal process. Speculative reporting or prematurely passing judgment on individuals involved in legal cases can prejudice public opinion and interfere with the fair administration of justice. Journalists should be cautious about not compromising the presumption of innocence until guilt is proven.
- **Constructive Dialogue:** Media outlets have the power to foster constructive dialogue on dowry-related crimes. By providing in-depth analysis, contextual information, and expert opinions, they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the issue. Constructive reporting can encourage public engagement, advocacy for reforms, and community-driven initiatives to address the root causes of dowry-related problems.

In conclusion, media outlets serve as essential conduits in shaping public perceptions and influencing societal responses to dowry-related crimes. By upholding responsible and ethical reporting standards, the media can contribute to a more informed public, facilitate constructive discussions, and play a positive role in advancing legal and societal changes to address these pressing issues in India.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Media coverage may sometimes perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce cultural norms that contribute to the persistence of dowry-related crimes. It is crucial for the media to balance reporting with sensitivity, avoiding victim-blaming and perpetuating harmful narratives. While the media can be a powerful force for positive change, there are inherent challenges and risks in its coverage of dowry-related crimes in India. These challenges underscore the need for media outlets to navigate this sensitive terrain with utmost care and responsibility:

- **Perpetuation of Stereotypes:** Media coverage has the potential to perpetuate harmful stereotypes related to gender roles, marriage, and familial expectations. The portrayal of victims or perpetrators in a stereotypical manner can reinforce existing biases and contribute to a culture that tolerates or normalizes certain behaviors associated with dowry.
- **Cultural Reinforcement:** Media narratives may unintentionally reinforce cultural norms that contribute to the persistence of dowry-related crimes. If not approached with sensitivity, reporting can inadvertently validate traditional practices or beliefs that perpetuate inequality and violence within the context of dowry.
- **Victim-Blaming:** There is a risk of victim-blaming in media coverage, where the focus shifts from the criminal actions to scrutinizing the behavior or choices of the victims. This can contribute to a culture of silencing victims, making it difficult for them to come forward or seek justice.
- **Sensationalism vs. Accuracy:** Balancing the need for engaging storytelling with the imperative of accurate reporting is a constant challenge. Sensationalized reporting can distort facts, create unnecessary panic, and hinder the public's ability to critically engage with the issues surrounding dowry-related crimes.
- **Impact on Legal Proceedings:** Media coverage, especially in high-profile cases, can influence legal proceedings by creating public pressure or shaping perceptions that may impact the impartiality of the judicial process. This can lead to challenges in ensuring fair and unbiased trials.

- **Lack of Context:** Incomplete or sensationalized reporting may lack the necessary context to fully understand the complexities of dowry-related crimes. A failure to provide comprehensive background information can contribute to a superficial understanding of the issue, hindering efforts to address root causes.

In light of these challenges and risks, media outlets must approach their coverage of dowry-related crimes with a heightened sense of responsibility, sensitivity, and a commitment to ethical journalism. By avoiding the reinforcement of harmful narratives and stereotypes, the media can contribute positively to societal awareness, advocacy efforts, and the pursuit of meaningful solutions to this deeply entrenched issue.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the media's role in shaping public perception and influencing judicial outcomes regarding dowry and related crimes is multifaceted. Responsible and informed media coverage can contribute positively to societal awareness, legal reform, and the pursuit of justice. However, there are also risks associated with sensationalism and bias, which can negatively impact public discourse and judicial proceedings.

In conclusion, the media's influence on public perception and judicial outcomes concerning dowry-related crimes in India is a double-edged sword. On one hand, responsible and well-informed media coverage has the potential to bring about positive change by raising awareness, fostering public engagement, and advocating for legal reforms. This type of media engagement can contribute to a more informed and empathetic society, promoting constructive dialogue around the complex issues surrounding dowry-related crimes.

On the other hand, the risks associated with sensationalism, bias, and the perpetuation of stereotypes highlight the need for media outlets to exercise caution and ethical responsibility. Sensationalized reporting can contribute to misinformation, shape distorted public perceptions, and even impact the fairness of judicial proceedings. Striking a balance between engaging storytelling and accurate, unbiased reporting is crucial to ensure that the media plays a constructive role in addressing the systemic challenges related to dowry and contributes to fostering positive societal change.

In moving forward, a collaborative effort involving the media, legal institutions, advocacy groups, and the public is essential to mitigate the risks and maximize the positive impact of media coverage on the issues surrounding dowry-related crimes. By fostering responsible journalism, promoting awareness, and encouraging informed public discourse, the media can be a valuable ally in the ongoing efforts to combat and eradicate dowry-related crimes in India.

REFERENCES

1. The media plays a significant role in shaping public perception and influencing judicial outcomes regarding dowry and related crimes in India, online available at <https://englishpluspodcast.com/the-power-of-media-how-it-shapes-public-opinion-and-society/#The%20Role%20of%20The%20Media%20in%20Shaping%20Public%20Opinion>
2. Dowry System as a Social Evil: A Study of India online available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358646801_Dowry_System_as_a_Social_Evil_A_Study_of_India
3. Dowry System in India online available at <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/dowry-system-in-india>
4. The Issue of Media Trials and Its Impact on Justice and the Indian Judiciary, *Jus Corpus Law Journal*, Indexed of Manupatra & Hein Online, ISSN(0): 2582
5. Mohammed Hoshan vs. State of A.P. (2002) <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/200402/>

6. Arnesh Kumar vs. State of Bihar (2014) <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-6196-arnesh-kumar-v-state-of-bihar-2014-8-scc-273-landmark-ruling-on-misuse-of-section-498-a-of-the-indian-penal-code.html>
7. <https://www.the-laws.com/Encyclopedia/Browse/Case?caseId=001102414000>
8. Law Bhoomi, <https://lawbhoomi.com/case-brief-satbir-singh-v-the-state-of-haryana/>
9. Deepshikha, Article, Media Ethics and Responsible Journalism, Published on 29 Apr 2020, <https://www.legalbites.in/media-ethics-and-responsible-journalism/>