

SHIELDING THE ELDERLY: THE DETERRING IMPACT OF ENHANCED POLICE CHARGE SHEETING IN CURTAILING CRIME AGAINST SENIOR CITIZENS - INSIGHTS FROM GUJARAT (2017-2022)

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ABSTRACT

Sociology provides important insights into the social norms, social processes, social institutions and structures that build the theoretical base to uncover the assault patterns and criminal behaviour against elderly in society. Sociology with its consistent emphasis upon social control has underlined the issues of deviance and anomie which have gradually turned into crime to become the subject matter of criminology. Studying crime with the bifocals of age and society at large, allows for a deeper comprehension of how social attitudes, policies, and injustices interact to mould older people's experiences while they try to navigate in the social ecosystem. Physical frailty, mental and emotional vulnerabilities, economic dependence and social isolation have pushed the elderly prey to various forms of abuse. Demographic shifts across the world have changed the population dynamics significantly where elderly have increasingly been occupying spaces in terms of their numbers. In the given scenario, the convergence of crime, sociology and experiences of senior citizens have emerged as pertinent field of research.

Considering the fact that senior individuals are more vulnerable to a variety of criminal activities, such as financial exploitation, physical abuse, and neglect, this paper examines how the proactiveness on part of Gujarat Police with one of the highest rates of charge sheeting in the matters of elderly abuse and victimization have led to consecutive decline in cases of crime against elderly between 2019-2022. Utilising statistical information, qualitative analysis, and case studies, this study evaluates the relationship between the adoption of these tactics and the noted decrease in crimes against the elderly throughout the given time frame.

Keywords: *Enhanced Police Charge Sheetting, Curtailing Crime, Senior Citizens, Insights from Gujarat (2017-2022)*

INTRODUCTION

Transition of societies from pre-industrial to industrial led to a shift from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity where consensus, uniformity and moral unison did not come automatically which was the case when there prevailed mechanical solidarity in the pre-industrial society. In the industrial world of sharp consumerism, stark division of labour and growing American Dreams as stated by Robert Merton, solidarity declined in the society, in community and in families too. Elderly became the worst sufferers of this growing intent of individualism and loosened ties of moral regulations and social control. The modern age survivors of Durkheimian and Mertonian 'Anomie' can be seen in the old age homes across the length and breadth of the nation. Anomie and disintegration of joint family system in India accompanied with individualism, consumerism, urbanism, westernization, and migration led to the miserable state of elderly people in India. Elderly today are facing a range of victimizations like physical abuse, mental agony, cybercrimes, humiliation, isolation and various other forms of criminal intimidation.

Given the current circumstances, elder welfare must be taken very seriously, with particular attention paid to their socioeconomic, financial, health, housing, and emotional requirements. It is true that, with homes becoming more crowded, modern survival is stressful, particularly for joint and extended families. A longer life expectancy, physical and functional impairments requiring care, generational differences, and other problems are posing a threat to the country's elderly population. The dimensions of care giving need expansion and it should go beyond food and shelter to safety, security, and emotional support along with occasional recreation. Unfortunately, lack of care giving and society's apathetic attitude has landed our senior citizens in all sorts of trouble. This paper tries to give a serious heed to this issue in order to enable our elderly population lead a respectful life with safety.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the possible factors that led to a steep rise in crimes against senior citizens in Gujarat between 2017-19.
- To understand the role of proactiveness on the part of Gujarat police in understanding the decline in crimes against elderly since 2020.
- To understand the victim-offender connection.

METHODOLOGY

The present paper is a culmination of secondary data acquired from the National Crime Records Bureau website and State Crime Records Bureau website along with primary data collected from the police personnel working in Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot and Vadodara.

Literature Review

Mishra, A.B Patel in **The Role of 'Weak Social Bonds' in Perpetuating Fear of Crime: An Investigation of the Aged in Lucknow** opined that the concerns regarding fear of crime among the elderly are real and worth attention, yet this aspect remains underexplored in Indian gerontology. This paper delves into this phenomenon by examining primary data obtained through a mixed-methods approach from 220 participants in Lucknow district, Uttar Pradesh. Key factors contributing to fear of crime among the elderly include past victimization, societal incivility, and susceptibility. The study also interprets its findings through the perspective of the "social bond theory," which highlights how the disintegration of traditional social structures and loosened social bonds have compounded the fear of crime among the elderly. To mitigate this issue, recommendations include social initiatives such as fostering age-friendly communities, implementing neighbourhood watch programs, establishing helpline services in each district, and forming Elderly Policy Councils.

M. Sarkar, M.S Madhumita Acharjee in **Crime Against Senior Citizens in India: A Glaring Reality** threw light upon the nationwide prevalence of crime against elderly in India. Ever since the evolution of human civilization, various concepts emerged parallelly, including society, family, property, and crime. Crime, defined diversely by scholars, generally refers to acts violating public law, punishable by the state. It encompasses offenses against the human's biological self, property and wealth, state, public order, and more. Notably, the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) in India has added a category since 2014, focusing on crimes against senior citizens, shedding light on the vulnerability of elders. While this addition suggests a recent surge in reported cases, it doesn't imply the absence of such crimes before. Rather, it pinpoints towards a stark increase in documented incidents. This paper aims to analyze the

landscape of crimes against senior citizens through NCRB statistics spanning five years and scrutinizing select newspaper articles highlighting elder abuse.

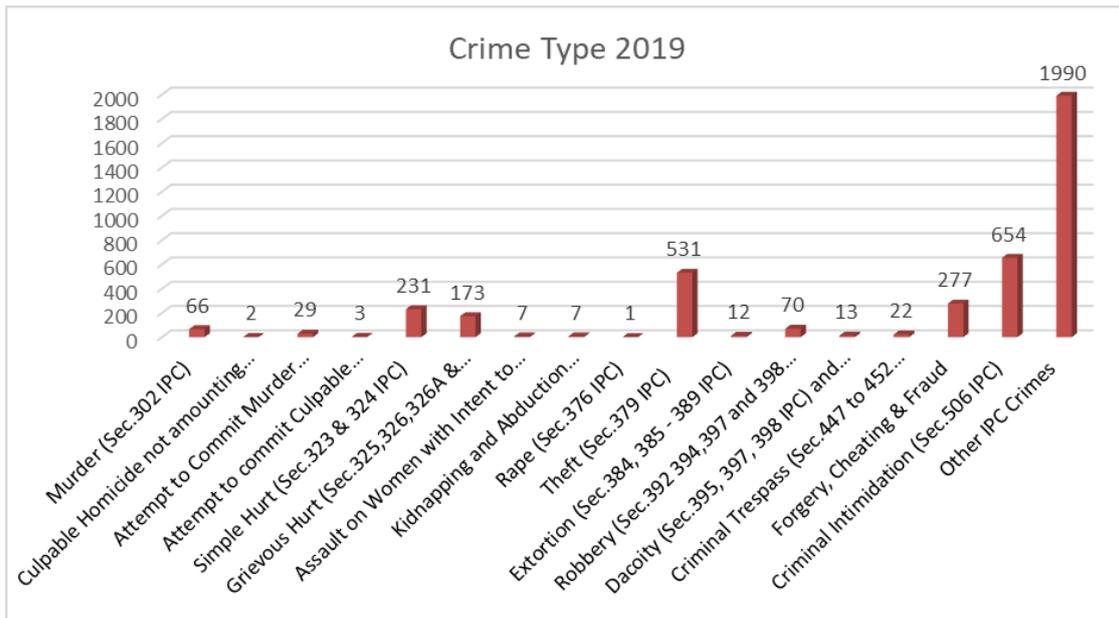
Mamta Patel in **Ageing Agony: Rape Against Elderly Women** talks about how rape collapses the very existence of a woman physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and sexually. This study relies upon quantitative data obtained by the non-intrusive method of content analysis. The study included senior ladies who were 60 years of age or older. A form of sexual assault, rape is a vicious, degrading, and heartless crime that is committed carelessly. Even with a wealth of studies on rape, particularly in India, there is still a significant knowledge vacuum concerning senior victims. Many clinicians believe that the rapist is either the victim of disturbed personality traits or the victim of insatiable cravings. The aim of this research was to investigate the circumstances surrounding the crime and the nature of the interaction between the perpetrator and the victim during the terrible act. Methods: From 2004 to 2018, information from print and electronic media was gathered for this study. 49 cases in all were discovered to have been reported throughout this time of work. The findings indicate that over 25% of the incidents contained cruelty. In maximum number of instances, victims were singled out because they were at home alone themselves. In certain instances, the criminals were discovered to have been drunk when the crime was committed. The majority of the rapists who perpetrated this crime were impetuous types. Conclusions: The results question societal standards and have ramifications for upcoming studies, laws, and practices.

CRIME AGAINST ELDERLY IN GUJARAT

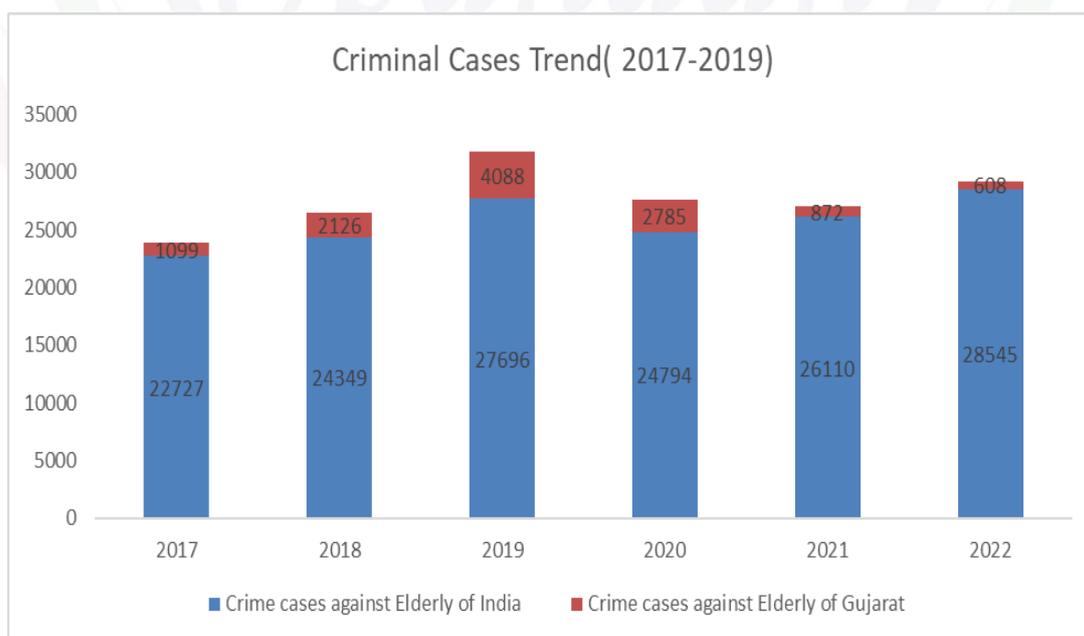
Gujarat which is generally considered to be a safe state, has not exhibited an impressive record when it comes to the safety of elderly. According to the data available on NCRB website, in the year 2019, Gujarat recorded 85.4 crimes per lakh population of the elderly which is among the highest in Indian states in crime against elderly category. According to the 'Crime in India 2019' report published by NCRB, the national average for the crime against elderly in India was 25.9 per lakh population of elderly. The crime against elderly reported in Gujarat in the year 2019 included 66 murder, 231 cases of hurt and 531 cases of theft which is a stark rise as compared to 2018. The number of hurt cases grew by 98 percent in 2019, the number of theft incidents with elderly grew by 89 percent and the instances of criminal intimidation against elderly increased three times as compared to 2018. Overall, a total of 4088 cases of crime against elderly were reported in Gujarat in the year 2019 which brings it to the third position in reported instances of crime against elderly after Maharashtra with 6163 cases and Madhya Pradesh with 4188 cases. Subsequent analysis shows that since 2016, the state has been showing increase in the number of offences against senior citizens with crimes almost doubling every year and finally showing a 92 percent rise in 2019.

RISE IN CRIME AGAINST ELDERLY IN 2019

Senior citizens act as the foundations of a thriving society but unfortunately Gujarat has been experiencing a jolt to these pillars in the last one decade, precisely in 2019. According to NCRB 'Crime Against Senior Citizens' 2017-19, 1099 incidents of crime against senior citizens were recorded in 2017 which almost doubled to 2126 in 2018 and then further compounded to 4088 in 2019. Gujarat alone accounted for 14.8 percent share in the total crimes against senior citizens in India. While Gujarat has 4.5 percent of total elderly population of India, crime against them is 14.8 percent in Gujarat.



While other IPC crimes had the maximum impact upon elderly in 2019 with 1990 cases, criminal intimidation ranked second highest with 654 cases followed by 531 theft cases. Simple and grievous hurt also impacted 431 cases followed by forgery, cheating and fraud with 277 cases. Analysis of these crimes state that in maximum cases of theft, criminal intimidation, fraud and cheating against elderly, most of the elderly were living alone. The inclination of youth towards foreign nations in Gujarat has left the elderly with no other option than living alone, making them easy targets for criminal offences. Most of cheating cases were perpetuated as cyber crimes through OTP frauds and ATM thefts usually carried out on the pretext of helping the elderly people in carrying out an ATM transaction. The economic affluence of elderly in developed states like Gujarat also makes them a lucrative target of the criminals. Apart from these, chain snatching from elderly women out on a morning or evening walk alone or with their spouse is also quite common in urban Gujarat.

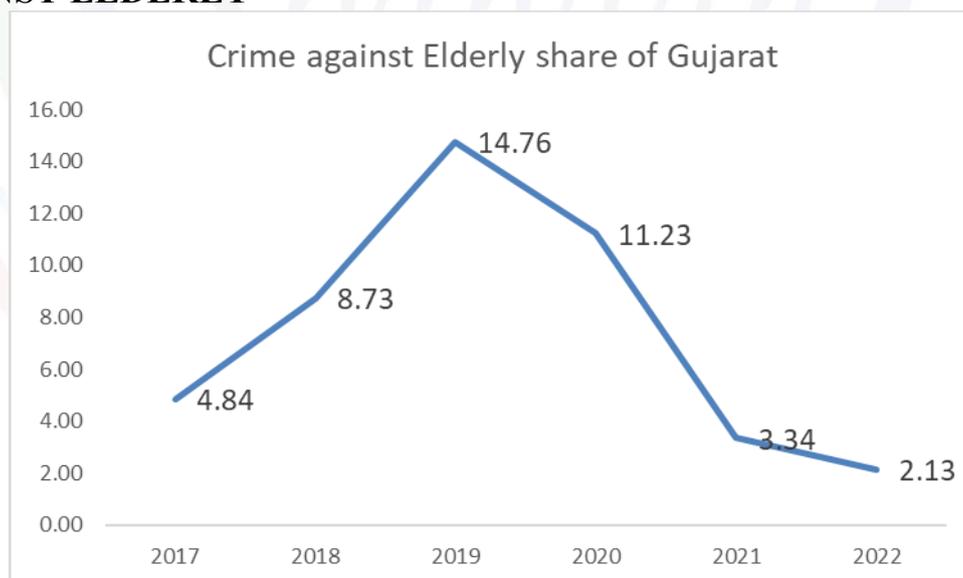


In the year 2017, 22727 cases of crime against elderly were recorded in India of which almost 1100 cases were recorded in Gujarat. In the year 2018, 24349 cases of crime against elderly

were recorded in India which shows an absolute increase of only 1622 cases while Gujarat more than doubled its figures of crime against elderly in a span of one year. In 2019, India had recorded 27696 cases which was an increase of 3347 cases as compared to 2019 but Gujarat against recorded 4088 cases which was quite high as compared to 2018 and that too for a state with only 47 lakh elderly population which is way below the national average. So overall, between 2017 and 2019, Gujarat exhibited an elderly population size which was proportionately lower as compared to the national average of elderly population but the corresponding increase in crimes against elderly have been quite high in Gujarat as compared to the national data, with cases almost doubling every year. 2020 onwards, Gujarat started showing trends of decline in crimes against elderly with cases drastically reducing to 2785 from 4088. However, the national record of similar crimes against elderly also declined but Gujarat again came up with drastic decline in number of cases. Then in the year 2021, cases in Gujarat again dropped down from 2785 to only 872 which was nearly one third as compared to 2020. These crimes further declined to only 608 in 2022 as compared to the national statistics standing at 28545 cases in 2022 after an increase from 26110 cases in 2021.

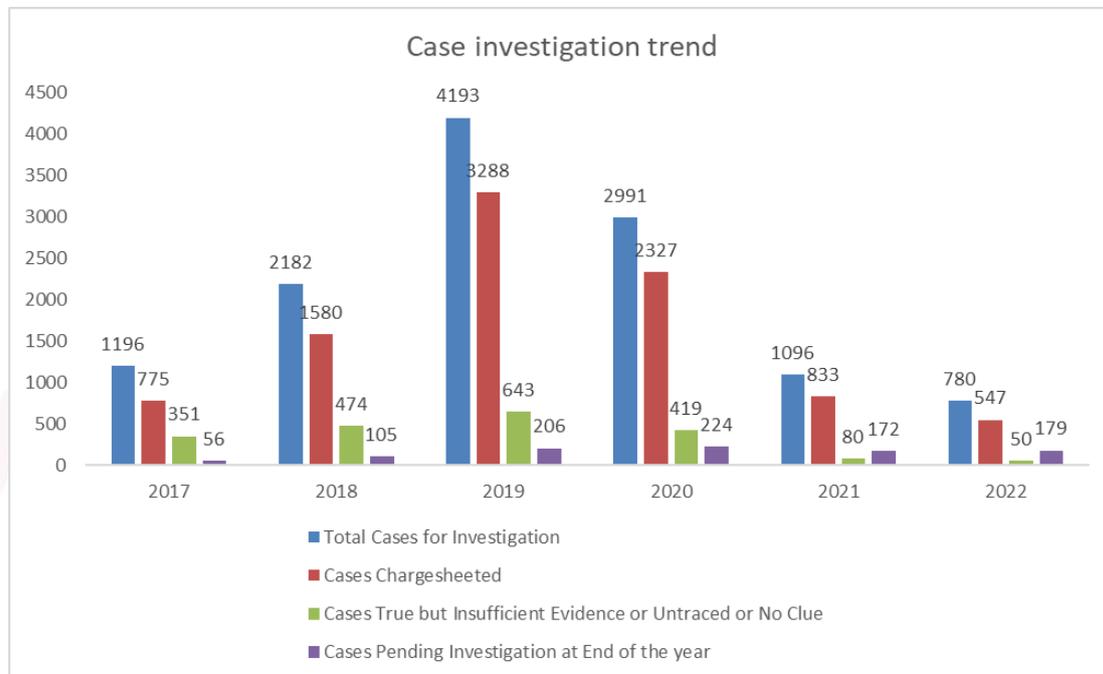
The reasons for the decline in criminal offences against senior citizens in Gujarat could be varied, including the nationwide lockdown imposed in 2020-21 but the lockdown did not have similar impact upon the reduction in crime against elderly in other states of India. Gujarat emerged with exemplary decline in such offences post 2019. Efficient handling of cases and improved rate and process of charge sheeting by Gujarat police can be considered as one of the significant reasons why the state has been witnessing subsequent decline in offences against senior citizens after 2019. We will try to substantiate this quite possible reason with facts given by NCRB in this paper.

ROLE OF GUJARAT POLICE IN CONTROLLING THE CRIME AGAINST ELDERLY



This graph clearly shows that in 2019 Gujarat held 14.76 percent share of total crimes against senior citizens in India which declined to 11.23 percent in 2020 despite the COVID pandemic and further Gujrata's percentage share declined in total crime against elderly declined to 3.34 percent in 2021. The year 2022 has depicted remarkable improvement when it comes to

reduction in the crimes against elderly in Gujarat as Gujarat held only 2.13 percent of criminal offences against senior citizens as compared to the national average. So, we can see a significant decline in criminal cases against elderly people between 2019-22. Police has been a major catalyst in the process of creating safe and secure spaces for our senior citizens in Gujarat.



The investigation and charge sheeting of the cases of crimes against elderly in Gujarat has shown a healthy trend. The regular follow ups and timely investigations has reduced the cases pendency at the end of year. Despite the rising trend of crimes against elderly in Gujarat from year 2017 to 2020, the cases pendency at the end of year have been quite low. The high investigation completion rate, despite the higher number of cases of crimes against elderly in Gujarat, has been a deterrent in keeping a check on the new cases of crimes against elderly in Gujarat. As the cases of crimes against elderly in Gujarat show a declining trend from 2020, after touching the peak in 2019, can primarily be attributed to high investigation completion rate, especially in 2019 and 2020. Moreover, the quantum of cases, which were true but Insufficient Evidence or Untraced or No Clue are showing a declining trend from year 2019, indicating a healthy trend of growing competence in investigating cases and enhanced awareness of elderly in recognizing evidences and proofs.

PRIMARY DATA BASED ANALYSIS

One of the top priorities for law enforcement organisations across the globe, including those in Gujarat, India, is reducing crimes against senior citizens. Considering this, the present study was carried out to find out how well Gujarat Police's tactics worked to handle this urgent problem. The study explores several dimensions, including the role and purpose of initiatives like the "SHE Team," the effect of charge sheeting and conviction rates, and the identification of risk factors and patterns of criminal behaviour. The effectiveness of police efforts and tactics intended to protect older citizens' rights and safety is also examined in this study.

In addition to the secondary data collected through various sources including the NCRB website, primary data was also collected after conducting interviews with people from Gujarat

police pertaining to their efforts in reducing crime against senior citizens. By merging both primary and secondary sources of information, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the efficacy of Gujarat Police's strategies in addressing and mitigating crimes targeting senior citizens, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on law enforcement practices and elderly safety in the region.

The study focuses on four major cities in Gujarat: Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Vadodara, and Surat. These cities were selected as the study areas due to their significant population densities and varying socio-economic landscapes, providing a diverse spectrum of insights. To ensure a comprehensive representation of perspectives across the study area, two police personnel from each city were strategically chosen based on the geographical distribution.

- **Role of Gujarat Police in Crime Reduction:** The findings underscore the indispensable role played by the 'SHE Team' within the Gujarat Police in safeguarding vulnerable populations, including senior citizens, women, and children. Through proactive engagement and community outreach programs, the police cultivate a sense of trust and cooperation among senior citizens. By treating them as integral members of the police family, officers establish meaningful connections that facilitate communication and the sharing of vital information. Moreover, awareness campaigns focusing on cyber fraud and digital safety equip seniors with the knowledge and tools to protect themselves against emerging threats in the digital realm. The direct accessibility of law enforcement personnel ensures prompt assistance in times of distress, bolstering seniors' confidence in their safety and security. Furthermore, the nurturing of strong social bonds between police and seniors fosters a collective sense of responsibility for crime prevention within the community.
- **Impact of Increase in Charge Sheetting Rate:** While an increase in charge sheetting rates may signal proactive law enforcement efforts, participants in the study highlight the nuanced nature of its impact on crime reduction. Factors such as public cooperation in investigations, the efficacy of surveillance mechanisms, and the adaptability of criminal elements contribute to the complexities surrounding the effectiveness of charge sheetting alone as a deterrent to crime. The sophistication of modern criminals, adept at exploiting loopholes in legal processes, underscores the necessity for a multifaceted approach to crime prevention that extends beyond the mere filing of charges. It is evident that addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour and fortifying community resilience against crime demand a holistic strategy that integrates various preventive measures.
- **Conviction Rates and Post-Charge Sheetting Measures:** The fear instilled by police investigations and the prospect of facing charges serves as a potent deterrent to potential offenders. However, concerns are still bothersome regarding the susceptibility of certain demographic cohorts, particularly older and wealthier families, to targeted criminal activities. The study reveals a troubling trend of premeditated offenses, with criminals often preying on physically vulnerable, disabled, or less educated individuals within the senior population. Moreover, women emerge as particularly vulnerable targets of fraud crimes, necessitating tailored protective measures to safeguard their interests. Regular risk assessments and proactive interventions aimed at fortifying the security of vulnerable individuals are imperative to mitigate the risk of exploitation and victimization. By addressing the unique vulnerabilities faced by seniors and

implementing targeted strategies, law enforcement agencies can effectively combat crime and uphold the safety and well-being of all members of society.

- **Other Contributing Factors:** While the role and effectiveness of the 'SHE Team' in reducing crime against senior citizens stand out prominently, the study also identifies additional contributing factors that bolster crime prevention efforts. Regular awareness programs conducted by the police play a crucial role in educating both seniors and the wider community about prevalent risks and precautionary measures. Individual counselling sessions and personalized interactions further enhance the impact of police interventions, fostering a sense of trust and cooperation among senior citizens. Moreover, the prioritized allocation of resources, including financial expenses and the provision of special facilities, underscores the unwavering commitment of law enforcement agencies to address issues related to senior citizen safety and security. These initiatives, coupled with intensified patrolling and enhanced police presence in vulnerable areas, collectively reinforce the preventive measures aimed at curbing crimes targeting seniors.
- **Patterns in Criminal Behaviour:** The study sheds light on discernible patterns in criminal behaviour targeting senior citizens, necessitating tailored preventive measures. Police verification processes for regular domestic workers and specific directives for society and security personnel play a pivotal role in mitigating risks associated with household vulnerabilities. Heightened vigilance during routine activities such as cleaning, repair, renovation, or maintenance work is identified as essential for identifying and averting potential threats to senior citizens' safety. These insights underscore the imperative for proactive measures and community engagement initiatives aimed at fortifying the defence of senior citizens against exploitation and victimization within their living environments.
- **Police Initiatives and Strategies:** The study underscores the proactive initiatives and strategies implemented by the Gujarat Police to address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of senior citizens. Regular training sessions conducted for police personnel within the 'SHE Team,' focusing on family interactions and specialized interventions, exemplify the commitment to proactive policing practices. Additionally, the provision of dedicated staff members trained to handle cases involving children, women, and senior citizens reflects a comprehensive approach to addressing diverse societal needs. These initiatives underscore the importance of community engagement and tailored interventions in fostering a safer and more secure environment for senior citizens, thereby aligning with the broader objectives of crime prevention and public safety.
- **Overall Analysis and Implications:** The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of crime reduction efforts targeting senior citizens in Gujarat. While certain initiatives demonstrate effectiveness, challenges persist, requiring collaborative solutions. Enhancing public cooperation, leveraging technology for surveillance, and strengthening post-charge sheeting measures are imperative to address evolving crime dynamics effectively.

KEY FINDINGS

- Significant reduction in crime against senior citizens post 2019 because of the efficacy shown by Gujarat Police in general and SHE team in particular.
- Charge sheeting did not have a direct impact upon reducing the crime against elderly in Gujarat but increased charge sheeting did have an indirect yet profound impact upon crime reduction against senior citizens as it gave a clearcut message to the planned criminals about the seriousness of Police in this regard.
- Improved charge sheeting and zero pendency of cases also instilled a sense of fear among the criminals leading to fewer new reported cases of criminal offences against senior citizens.
- Poor conviction rates post charge sheeting continues to be a matter of concern for which respondents feel that poor public cooperation and trust upon police are major roadblocks along with adaptability of criminals. Police is working in this regard with rapport and trust building mechanisms with senior citizens and common public.
- Most of the offenders being domestic helps, plumbers, electricians, provides well meditated insights to the Police to plan and develop mechanism to deal with this section of offenders without any major hassle, leading to automatic reduction in crime against elderly in Gujarat.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Limitations include the chances of bias in participant's responses and accessibility to sensitive and confidential data from the Police.

The study yields various recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at decreasing crime against older adults. Each advice highlights a distinct aspect of intervention and cooperation.

1) Collaboration Among Stakeholders:

It is imperative to fortify cooperation among diverse stakeholders, such as law enforcement agencies, community organisations, healthcare providers, and governmental entities. Senior citizen safety can be addressed in a more coordinated and all-encompassing manner by promoting collaboration and synergies amongst various organisations. In order to exchange information and coordinate responses to emerging risks, this collaboration may entail cooperative training sessions, the sharing of resources and knowledge, and frequent communication channels. Incorporating local citizens and senior citizen advocacy organisations into decision-making processes can also guarantee that interventions are customised to the unique requirements and goals of the community.

2) Targeted Steps to Address Vulnerabilities:

It's critical to design procedures specifically to address the vulnerabilities that older adults encounter. To reduce these risks, specific programmes must be designed after identifying and prioritising areas of concern, such as financial exploitation, physical safety, or social isolation. Initiatives may include, for instance, giving police officers specialised training on how to spot the warning signs of elder abuse, setting up community-based support networks to help elders who are socially isolated, or improving financial literacy programmes to help seniors protect

themselves from exploitation and fraud. Targeted vulnerability-addressing strategies help interventions work as well as possible.

3) Additional Research and Validation:

Conducting further research to validate and substantiate the effectiveness of existing mechanisms and identifying the emerging trends is quintessential for evidence-based policymaking catering to the safety and security needs of elderly. This research can involve longitudinal studies tracking crime rates and victimization trends among senior citizens, as well as evaluating the impact of specific interventions on reducing crime and enhancing safety outcomes. Additionally, qualitative research methods such as focus groups and in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of senior citizens and inform the development of more responsive and contextually relevant solutions. By continuously refining and validating interventions based on empirical evidence, stakeholders can ensure that the resources are aligned in the correct direction along with using the strategies having greatest potential for impact.

CONCLUSION

The discussions noted in this paper offer insights into the impact of improved police charge sheeting on reducing crime against senior citizens in Gujarat by instilling a sense of fear and deterrence in the actual and potential offenders. It also serves valuable guidance for future research and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing public safety and protecting the vulnerable elderly population. The study's conclusion emphasises how significantly better police charge sheets can lower crime against senior adults in Gujarat. This study clarifies the complex relationship between societal changes, criminal behaviour, and the victimisation of elderly people by exploring the socio-cultural background and demographic trends. After a thorough review of statistical data, qualitative analysis, this study outlines the ways in which crimes against older adults have changed over time and how well law enforcement has responded to these issues.

The results indicate a sharp increase in crimes committed in Gujarat against the elderly, especially in 2019. These crimes are a reflection of broader socioeconomic changes marked by anomie, the breakdown of conventional social structures, and older individuals' greater vulnerability etc. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, Gujarat Police's proactive actions—such as increased charge sheeting rates and focused interventions via programmes like the "SHE Team"—have proven to be crucial in correcting this concerning trend.

Importantly, higher charge sheet filing rates indicate the seriousness of law enforcement in addressing crimes against senior adults, which acts as a powerful deterrent even if they may not immediately correlate with lower crime rates. In addition, the development of trust and collaboration between law enforcement and the senior community, in addition to focused awareness campaigns and specialised training for law enforcement staff, emphasises the comprehensive strategy Gujarat Police has implemented to protect senior citizens' rights and safety.

Notwithstanding these admirable initiatives, there are still issues, such as poor conviction rates, demographic weaknesses, and changing criminal tactics. To tackle these issues, an all-encompassing approach is required, which includes stakeholder partnerships, focused

interventions aimed at tackling vulnerabilities, and ongoing research to test and improve current methods.

In summary, this study adds significant knowledge on the trends and patterns of crime against the elderly and the part played by law enforcement agencies, predominantly Police, in addressing these issues. This study acts as a catalyst for future research and policy initiatives aimed at improving public safety and protecting the vulnerable elderly population in Gujarat and beyond by highlighting the effectiveness of improved police charge sheeting acting as a deterrent for criminals to target elderly. The study also advocates for multifaceted interventions tailored to the specific needs of senior citizens.

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