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# Crime against Elderly Women in India

*Avanish Bhai Patel*

## Abstract

The cases of crime against the elderly women are rising fast in India. Today, elderly women are facing many problems such as murder, theft, hurt, cheating and bag snatching by the both known and unknown persons. These problems have certainly affected the way of life and sense of well-being of the elderly women. They are also deprived to live a dignified life due to these problems. The study has two objectives; first objective understands the nature of crime against the elderly women and second objective examines relationship between elderly women victims and their offenders and also examines the impact of crime on physical and emotional well-being of elderly women. This study is based on content analysis. The data have been collected through two national newspapers, namely, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran from March 2012 to March 2013. Findings indicate that the elderly women have been victimised due to property and lack of proper adjustment. The study has also found in many cases that elderly women have been targeted by known persons.

**Keywords:** content analysis, crime, elderly women, socio-ecological paradigm, India

## 1. Introduction

There is a sad reality for the elderly women in contemporary time because they are facing the problem of victimisation in this phase of life. The victimisation of the elderly women is the most concerning and emerging social issue in later life. Today, they are being targeted for murder, attempt to murder, hurt, abuse, chain snatching, cheating. It is difficult to find any specific cause behind victimisation. But it can be supposed that the changing social and family structure is responsible for victimisation of elderly women in current times because it has given rise to many problems such as abusive behaviour, neglect and exploitation against the elderly women in Indian society. The changing social and family structures also breach the social order. The way of life and sense of wellbeing of the elderly women has been affected the most due to changing social and family structure [1–3]. Increased longevity of the elderly population has raised a number of problems on households with limited resources, particularly in the absence of formal social support systems [4]. Consequently, it may increase social rejection, broken family ties and embarrassment. The crime does not only make worse and disabling conditions of the elderly women, but it also makes the elderly women more dependent, vulnerable and marginalised.

With the steady rise in elderly population, the rate of their problems is also increasing. The problem of crime against the elderly and elder abuse is one of them. Crime against the elderly and elder abuse has never been considered as a problem

in India. It has been found in many studies [1, 2, 5] that the roots of the traditional social structure are being undermined ushered in by the processes of change such as industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation. In such changing situations, the majority of the elderly, who have spent most part of their lives with their joint families, are on the verge of isolation in old age. When they need family and social support the most they are living alone and are feeling neglected. These changes have certainly affected the way of life and sense of well-being of the elderly to a large extent causing fracture in their social bonds. As a result of which problems like criminal activities and abusive behaviour faced by the elderly are on the rise.

According to, National Crime Record Bureau Report [6] has found its nation-wide survey that 41,942 elderly have been murdered, hurt and robbed in India from 2015 to 2016. This survey has also explored that the family members, neighbours and strangers are involved in committing murder against the elderly. HelpAge India [5, 7] conducted a study on elder abuse in 20 major cities of India. This study reported that the daughter-in-law (61%) and son (59%) emerged as the topmost perpetrators. The most common form of abuse experienced by the elderly is disrespect followed by verbal abuse and neglect and elderly are beaten in the family as well as in neighbourhood. This study has also identified the major reasons behind the elder abuse such as lack of adjustment, economic dependence of the abused, increasing longevity and economic dependence of abuser. Similarly, Group for Economic and Social Studies [8] studied nature of crime against elderly in four metro cities such as Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai and New Delhi. This study pointed out various types of crime such as crime against the body, which are committed against the elderly. These crimes are recognised as crime against the body, crime against the property and economic crime. This study found that those who are rich elderly, they are more vulnerable to exploitation and physical threats for property and financial gain from their family members, relatives and antisocial elements. The survey shows that overall 48.6% elderly in our country are not being respected by their family members, relatives and society [9].

Mallick [10] has pointed out in a study that the elderly women are discriminated in the society on the basis of gender and age. He has mentioned that “the negative connotations of ageism and ideas of dependency and impairment aggregate in the negotiations of power within the society. Ageism and structural divisions combines to create power imbalances that are predicated on the notion of women as being of inferior status”. The gender dimension of ageing reflects that both elderly men and women face discrimination, violence and abuse due to age but elderly females have more experience differently due to the subordinate status and stereotyped attitude towards elderly females. The gender relations structure the entire life cycle from birth to old age, influence access to resources and opportunities and shape life choices at every stage. Often elderly women suffer more from elder abuse and they are treated as a burden on the family because it is considered that they are not reproductive and income generating person in the family they [11]. Therefore, elderly women are subject to harmful practices in the society which can involve in both family and society. The position of elderly women has affected due to socio-technological changes, loss of joint families, changing norms and values and dual career families [12].

## **2. Socio-ecological paradigm of crime against elderly women**

Socio-ecological paradigm shapes perception and practices within the disciplines according its subject matter. It shapes what we look at, how we look things, what we label as a problem, and what problem we consider for worth investigation and what methods are preferred for the investigation. Basically, socio-ecological paradigm

states the level of interaction and relationship between individual, family members and neighbourhood members in a particular social setting and how these interactions and relationships influence the way of life and well-being of the individuals [13, 14]. Bronfenbrenner [13] has discussed the system of interactions and relationships under socio-ecological paradigm. The relationship and interaction between the elderly and individuals within their immediate settings such as their family and social networks. It also talks about the social structures and social systems that do not directly contain the elderly but which impact upon the immediate micro system in which the elderly are situated and can include health policy, social welfare system and adult protection services. It also centralises on the overarching beliefs and dominant social values around ageing, such as ageist attitudes towards elderly.

The nature and problem of crime against elderly women can be understood and analysed with reference to Indian society by using above discussed socio-ecological paradigm. The respect and honour for the elderly (women) is deeply rooted into Indian value system and way of life since the ages. The elderly women have always enjoyed a respectable place in family matters and decision making of Indian society. They have provided the entire fabric of the social reality with proper care and concern which have played a nurturing role in the family and society. But the advent of changing socio-economic scenario has weakened the fabrics of social bonding between elderly and their family members. Hence, these have not only affected the respect for and decision making power of elders and elderly women but they have contributed its role in bringing a number of problems before elderly parents and elderly women in India. Today, the elderly (women) are being abused physically, emotionally, verbally by known and unknown persons and sometimes crimes are committed against them in family and society. Aforementioned problems of abuse and crime in various forms have brought social, physical and cognitive frailty among the elderly women in the society as well as family.

## **2.1 Objective of the study**

The study has two objectives; first objective understands the nature of crime against the elderly women and second objective examines relationship between elderly women victims and their offenders and also examines the impact of crime on physical and emotional well-being of elderly women.

## **3. Sources of data**

### **3.1 Content analysis**

The present study is based on content analysis. Content analysis is a method of qualitative and quantitative data analyses which aim is to analyses the content of documents, books, newspapers, magazines and other forms of written material. Berelson [15] has defined that “content analysis is a research technique for the objective and systematic description of the manifest content of communication (verbal and non-verbal materials)”. The researcher applied this method for the study due to unavailability of specific data on crime against elderly women. The research found newspaper as a best source for data collection related to crime against elderly women. The researcher saw the patterns and nature of crime against elderly with the help of every day news papers’ analysis and observation and based on this he made contents for his study such as age group of elderly women, crime rate in rural–urban areas, nature of crime and victim-offender relationship. For this task, researcher went through two national newspapers like *Amar Ujala* and *Dainik Jagran* from

March 2012 to March 2013. The data have been collected both urban and rural areas. The researcher collected 103 cases of crime against the elderly women from five places, namely, Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow, Roorkee and Unnao through newspapers.

3.2 Result and discussion

Newspapers have shown that crime against the elderly women is an emerging social problem in Indian society. A total of 103 cases have been collected from March 2012 to March 2013.

3.3 Age group

Looking at the age group of the victims, we find that the elderly in the 60–65 year age category have been victimised the most. There are 38 (36.8%) such cases in that age group. The study reveals that 33 (32.0%) case of crime against elderly women belong to 66–70 year age group and 18 (17.4%) case of crime against elderly women belong to 71 and above age group. Moreover, the study indicates that the age of victims has not been found in 14 (13.8%) cases of crimes (Figure 1).

3.4 Rural–urban ratio of crime rate

A total of 39 (37.1%) cases of crimes against the elderly women have been reported in rural area as compared to 64 (62.9%) cases of crimes reported in urban area. The crime rate of an area decides level of fear of crime. The crime rate of an area reveals anxiety about crime and it is also found that crime rate is higher in urban areas and urban people are more fearful than rural areas [16] (Figure 2).

3.5 Nature of crime

The break-up of 103 cases of crime shows that there are 23 (22.4%) cases of murder, 12 cases of attempt to murder, eight (7.7%) cases of cheating, six (5.8%) cases of robbery and 10 cases of theft, 13 (12.6%) cases of hurt, 10 cases of mis-treatment and 14 (13.6%) cases of chain snatching. The remaining seven (6.7%) cases pertain to accidents and suicides (Figure 3).

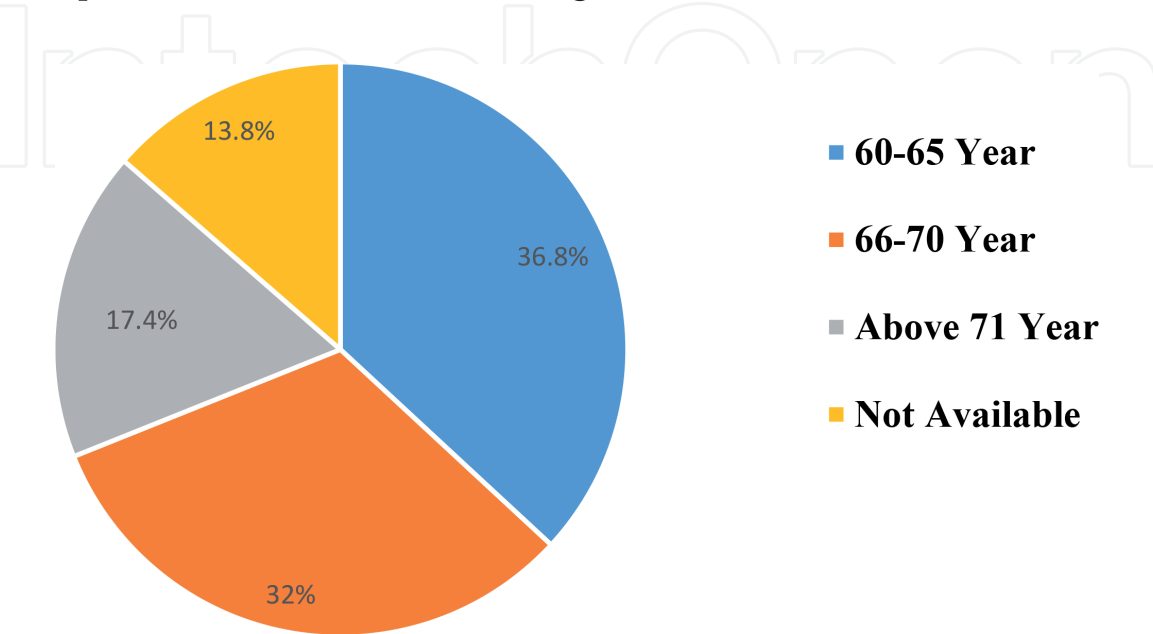
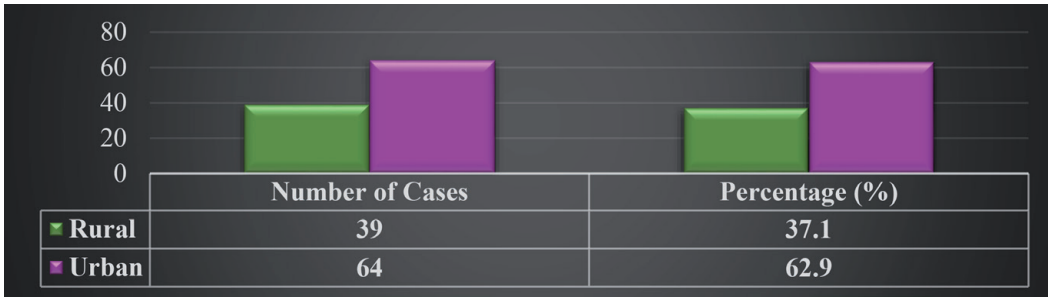
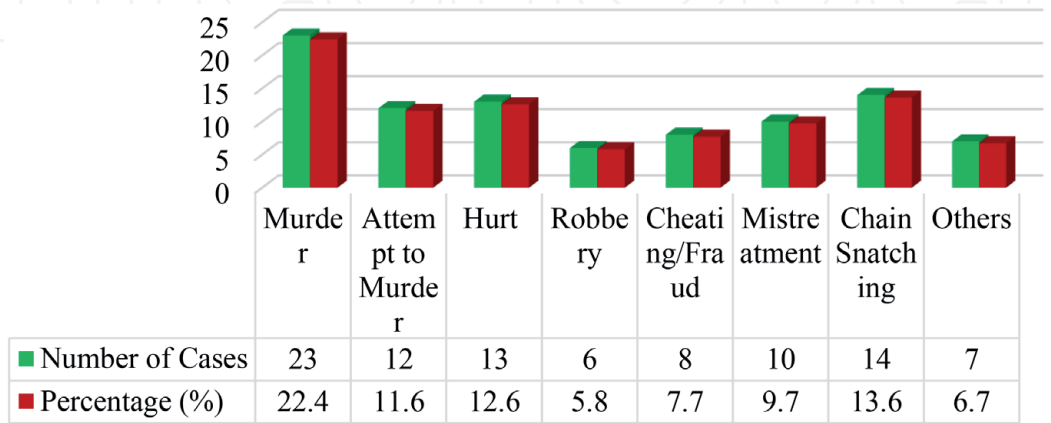


Figure 1.  
Age group number of cases.

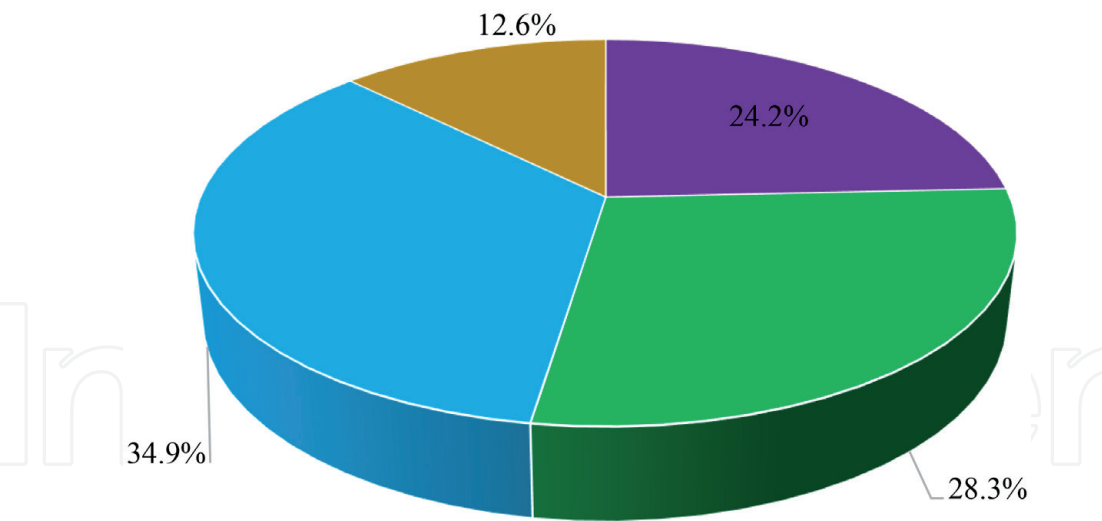




**Figure 2.**  
*Rural–urban ratio of crime rate.*



**Figure 3.**  
*Nature of crime against elderly women.*



**Figure 4.**  
*Victim-offender relationship.*

### 3.6 Victim-offender relationship

**Figure 4** reveals that 25 (24.2%) cases of crime against elderly women have been committed by known persons such as family members and relatives. The study has also found that 29 (28.3%) incidents of victimisation have been committed by the neighbours of the elderly. Thus, it can be said that elderly women are insecure in their families and neighbourhood. Similarly, some researchers have pointed out this trend in their studies that the family members, relatives and neighbours abuse and victimised the elderly which brings many frailty such as physical, emotional

and social frailty among them [17, 18]. The study has found that found that 36 (34.9%) cases of crime have been committed by strangers. Furthermore, 13 (12.6%) incidents of crime have occurred as accidents. In these incidents, criminals are not involved but these incidents points to the negligence of village as well as town municipal administrators [19].

The nature of crime which is directed specifically against the elderly women and in which only elderly women are victims are considered as crime against the elderly women [20, 21]. The crime against the elderly women is known as abuse and includes any sort of physical aggression or misbehaves. The crimes against the elderly women may involve different means such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, and restraining, throwing objects. In broad terms, it includes threats, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse, controlling or domineering intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse and economic deprivation, rape, abduction, kidnapping, murder against the elderly women [20, 21]. Similarly, present study has found some specific crimes which have been committed against the elderly women. These crimes are murder (22.4%), attempt to murder (11.6%), hurt (12.6%), robbery (5.6%), cheating (7.7%), mistreatment (9.7%) chain snatching (13.6) and other crimes (6.7%).

Victim-offender relationship is the most important finding in the study of crime against the elderly because victim-offender relationship plays an important role in effecting of wellbeing of the elderly women. The study has found that in many cases elderly women have been victimised due property. These elderly women were staying with their family members because their husbands were no more and they had property and bank account. Known persons victimised the elderly women for occupying their property and bank account. The study has pointed out that elderly women are not victimised only for property reasons but also economic dependency on the family members. Similarly, a study has quoted that familial relationship is no more based on love, affection and care. Instead there is an emergence of contractual and utilitarian relationship. Sons look after their aged mothers not out of sense of respect but out of selfish motives to get hold of their property and money [22].

A glimpse of crime against the elderly women can be had from the newspapers. These cases of crime are such: *"A son murdered his mother because she was not giving money him for drinking. Being aggressive he murdered his mother and immediately ran away outside the home (Dainik Jagran: New Delhi, March 18, 2013)."* Similarly, *"a drunkard killed his blind grandmother because she got pension and forbade giving him (Dainik Jagran: Lucknow, February 19, 2013)."* Further, *"in other case an elderly woman was victimised by her drunkard son. In this case son knifed her eye at night. When police reached for enquiry, she was so fearful and not able speak something (Amar Ujala: Kanpur, April 11, 2013)."* *"A son shot his old mother and threw her on the road because he wanted to occupy her property (Amar Ujala: Kanpur, July 10, 2012)."* In another case, *"an elderly woman told the police that her son bothers her son and discards her from house (Amar Ujala: Kanpur, April 25, 2013)."* Moreover, *"an elderly woman was killed by her neighbour. This elderly woman forbade her neighbour to throw the filthy water (Amar Ujala: Dehradun, April 18, 2013)."* In another case it was found that *"an advocate cheated an elderly woman. She told police that advocate borrowed money sometime ago. Now when I asked for money, he abused me and threatens to kill me (Dainik Jagran: Kanpur, July 24, 2012)."* This is a significant finding as the elderly women have, in general, relied upon the family members and relatives for physical and mental support. The dependence of elderly women on family members is based on trust and attachment. But these cases of crime against elderly women indicate that in many cases elderly have been victimised in the families. The different forms of crime have been pointed out in present study such as mistreatment, cheating, hurt, theft, murder, attempt to murder which highlight the social, physical and cognitive frailty experienced by the elderly women [19]. Similarly, Madhurima [22]

has examined in her study that family members especially sons beat their elderly mothers they do not show any kindness to their elderly parents. She has reported in her study that often elderly parents' physical victimisation is not reported and in many cases they are isolated from the mainstream of the society [22].

Moreover, the study has pointed out through news items that technological innovation, urbanisation and migration have significantly affected our value based social system because these changes have brought the technological innovation. This technological innovation has exposed individual to all kinds of violent behaviours and abusive behaviours which are the major factors behind the crime against elderly women [23, 24]. Further, the study has found that that economic growth has brought to India problems inherent to rapid urbanisation and migration which have affected the contemporary way of life. Urbanisation and migration have resulted in loosening of social controls and widening of social gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged. Security and violence have not been regarded as core issues of urban management. This is one of the major reasons for increased crime (against elderly women) in the society. Separation from family, lack of identity and possible anonymity of the migrants is also a possible explanation of the increasing rate of crime against the women (elderly women) [23–25].

This study found that victimisation affects the well-being of elderly women which lead many other problems before the elderly women. The study has found that the mistreatment is more common among the elderly women, which raise the feeling of insecurity, depression and isolation. The mistreatment leads to physical ill-health and lack of emotional bonding with family members and other individuals. The present research has pointed out that the family members do not give proper attention and provide basic needs such as food, cloth and medical facilities in rural areas which brings cognitive, physical and social frailty among the elderly women. The study has found that most of rural elderly women are not economically strong and are also widow and due to it they are dependent on their children and other family members for their basic needs. Most of times children and other family members do not fulfil their demand and they behave rudely with elderly women on their any demand. These ignorance and rude behaviour emotionally weakens them and brings many problems to them such as feeling of negligence, isolation and fear of abuse. Many researchers [26, 27] have also discussed in their studies that when elderly women are not able to care themselves due to growing age, then they have hope for caring, for activities of daily living and for the financial support from the children and other members of the family. As a result, their hope and dependence on the children and other family members become the source of abuse. Moreover, HelpAge India [7] has also pointed out in its report that emotional dependence on the abuser' and economic dependence on the abuser are the major reasons for them being abused. In the case of urban elderly people, it is seen that when they need care the most, they are living alone and are dependent on the caretakers and neighbours because their family members have migrated to other towns for job [28]. Their caretakers and neighbours take advantage of their helplessness and abuse them. This abusive behaviour affects their well-being and raises the feeling of insecurity.

The Researcher has also focused on frailty to examine its impact on the physical and emotional well-being of the elderly women with the help of news items. The researchers has found during the analysis of news items that in many cases elderly women have expressed that they are physically and socially weak and are not able to protect themselves. The researcher has found that many of the elderly women are suffering from multiple diseases such as paralysis, eye sight problem and diabetes. The elderly women have become weak due to these diseases and these diseases have reduced their physical capability. Due to such physical frailty, they are not able to protect themselves from any mishappening or criminal assault. The researcher has



also analysed that many elderly women think that they are emotionally weak because in old age they are less engaged in social activities and consequently, feel isolated. The news items indicated that children and other family members do not have time for the elderly women and they do not have 'we feeling' like people of the past. They are of the view that materialistic way of life has affected Indian social structure a lot and has contributed its share in bringing emotional frailty among the elderly women. Similarly, Patel and Mishra [29] has found in their study related fear of crime among the elderly that the nuclear families, working couples, changes in neighbourhood behaviour have left the elders neglected, uncared for and lonely. The social support of the elderly has weakened. Due to this many elderly are frail, vulnerable and cannot help themselves [14, 30].

#### **4. Conclusion**

The paper implies that crime against the elderly women is an emerging social problem in India. In this paper researcher has tried to highlight the nature of crime against the elderly women through news items. The news items show that occurrence of crime in neighbourhood affects the way of life and sense of wellbeing of the elderly women because those who were victimised, they expressed their fear and said that they are not safe anywhere. Findings have found that maximum crimes against the elderly women have been committed due to money and property and mostly these incidents of crime against the elderly have been committed by known persons such as family members and neighbours. Finally, Government should implement abuse preventive and elder supportive mechanism for the safety and security of the elderly women. Moreover, the paper suggests about the police accountability for the protection of the elderly women from crime as well as fear of crime. Police should implement neighbourhood watch programs through community policing. Police Friendly Mobile System should be implemented by police, which motive is to solve the public problems and the problems of elderly women. The paper also suggests that elderly women should follow some guidelines for their safety and security. These guidelines such as elderly women should have telephone numbers of police helpline and neighbours so that in case of any mishap immediate help could be sought. The elderly women should install good locks, auto locks on doors and windows and use door chains, magic eye and strong grills on the doors and windows.

#### **5. Limitations of the study**

There are certain limitations of this study. The present study is based on secondary data which have been collected through newspapers of few places. These secondary data do not reveal clear picture of crime against elderly women. Whatever cases related to crime against elderly women have been collected from newspapers, they are very few and focus only on the crime of a particular area. It would be difficult to make generalisations from this study considering that there is great diversity of experience and difference in perception and nature of crime against elderly women in the society.

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### **Author details**

Avanish Bhai Patel  
Alliance School of Law, Alliance University Bengaluru, India

\*Address all correspondence to: [avanish\\_patel@yahoo.co.in](mailto:avanish_patel@yahoo.co.in)

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