

# The Unseen Struggles: A Gendered Analysis of Women's Rights in Property Ownership and Succession in Chennai a Mixed Method Approach

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**Abstract—Background:** Despite progressive laws, women in Chennai face gender-based struggles in claiming property rights.

**Objective:** To explore women lived experiences of property denial, the abuse they endure, their psychological state, level of legal awareness and coping mechanisms through a mixed-method study.

**Design and Methods:** A convergent parallel mixed-method approach was adopted. Quantitative data were collected from 100 women using structured questionnaires; qualitative data were gathered from 25 in-depth interviews and 6 key informants. Quantitative analysis included chi-square and Pearson's correlation tests; qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

**Results:** Quantitatively, 27% of women reported being denied property primarily by brothers and parents. Verbal, emotional, and physical abuse was reported in 44%, 34%, and 21% of cases respectively. A significant positive correlation was observed between abuse and psychological distress ( $r = 0.246$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ). Qualitative analysis uncovered four core themes: emotional dissonance in family dynamics, psychological strain and identity crisis, legal alienation and fear, and coping through silent endurance or resistance. Many participants shared feelings of betrayal, insomnia, depression, and hopelessness.

**Conclusion:** Women's property rights struggles are deeply embedded in emotional, legal, and familial systems. Denial of rights results in psychological trauma and loss of dignity. The findings underscore the necessity for legal literacy, emotional support services, and inclusive community-based interventions.

**Index Terms—**women's inheritance, property rights, abuse, gender inequality, psychological impact, Tamil Nadu

## I. INTRODUCTION

Property ownership is widely recognized as a cornerstone of women's empowerment, offering economic security, reinforcing autonomy, and enhancing social identity. In many contexts, including India, the ability to own and control property contributes significantly to a woman's capacity to make independent decisions, resist exploitation, and navigate life with dignity and resilience. Property is not merely a material asset; it is a tool for asserting agency and negotiating power within both familial and societal spheres.

India has enacted several legislative reforms aimed at promoting gender equality in inheritance and property rights. Among the most notable is the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act of 2005, which legally establishes daughters' equal rights to ancestral property. While this reform represents a progressive shift toward legal parity, its implementation remains inconsistent. In many parts of the country, women continue to encounter barriers both institutional and interpersonal when attempting to assert their rightful claims. These include bureaucratic delays, lack of legal literacy, male-biased interpretations of customary practices, and social pressures to forfeit claims in the interest of preserving family harmony. In urban centers such as Chennai, Tamil Nadu, the challenge of securing property rights is compounded by the intersection of rapid urbanization and enduring patriarchal norms. Property values have risen sharply due to economic development and land scarcity, intensifying familial disputes over inheritance.

Simultaneously, gendered expectations and cultural beliefs continue to restrict women's participation in decisions regarding land and assets. Even women with educational and economic advantages often face resistance from male relatives and community members when they seek to exercise their legal rights. This resistance frequently manifests as emotional manipulation, verbal abuse, physical threats, and in some cases, social exclusion. As a result, many women are deterred from pursuing rightful claims, leading to significant emotional distress and long-term disenfranchisement.

This study investigates the lived experiences of women in Chennai who attempt to claim their rights to marital or ancestral property. Utilizing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the research integrates quantitative data on the prevalence and patterns of property disputes with qualitative narratives that reveal the emotional and social toll of such conflicts. Through this approach, the study aims to illuminate the complex dynamics that influence women's ability to access property and to document the personal and systemic factors that hinder legal empowerment.

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis simultaneously. This design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological, social and legal challenges faced by women asserting property rights. Quantitative data provided statistical insight into patterns of abuse and resistance, while qualitative data captured emotional depth and contextual complexities.

### Study Setting

The research was conducted in urban and peri-urban regions of Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu. These areas were selected to reflect a range of socio-economic conditions and family structures, where the intersection of traditional patriarchal values and rapid urbanization often shapes women's property experiences. The diverse settings allowed for exploration of variability in legal awareness, access to support services and exposure to conflict.

### Study Population and Sampling

**Quantitative Phase:** A total of 100 women participated in the quantitative arm of the study. Inclusion criteria were: (1) women aged 21–60 years, (2) direct involvement in a marital or ancestral property dispute, and (3) willingness to provide informed consent. Participants were selected using a multistage sampling strategy. First, stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across age, education, and income levels. Second, snowball sampling was employed to access women who may be socially marginalized or reluctant to disclose sensitive experiences due to family restrictions or social stigma. **Qualitative Phase:** For the qualitative phase, 31 women were selected from the survey cohort based on the severity of conflict, ongoing psychological distress, or exposure to multiple forms of resistance (e.g., emotional manipulation, social exclusion, verbal threats). Purposive sampling ensured representation from varying age groups, legal outcomes (resolved vs. unresolved cases), and family structures (nuclear vs. joint families).

### Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data were gathered using a pre-tested structured questionnaire administered via face-to-face interviews in Tamil. The tool comprised six domains:

1. Demographic Profile – Captured variables such as age, marital status, education, occupation, and family type.
2. Property Ownership and Succession – Explored legal possession, inheritance experiences, and denial of rights.
3. Nature and Frequency of Abuse – Focused on types of abuse (verbal, emotional, physical) and associated family dynamics.
4. Psychological and Emotional Impact – Assessed levels of distress, depression, isolation, and mental health status.
5. Legal Awareness and Support – Measured awareness of laws like the Hindu Succession Act and access to legal aid.
6. Coping and Support Systems – Investigated sources of support, coping mechanisms, and community involvement.

The questionnaire was reviewed and the content validity was obtained from panel of experts in psychology, social work, psychiatry, law, social sciences and gender studies for content validity.

Responses were coded and entered into SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) and inferential tests (Chi-square analysis) were used to examine associations between demographic variables and types of abuse or legal resistance and Pearson's correlation coefficient tested the strength of relationships, particularly between abuse and psychological outcomes. The questionnaire's reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.83, indicating high internal consistency.

#### Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore themes such as emotional trauma, familial conflict, community reactions, and legal navigation. FGDs were conducted in groups of 5–7 participants to facilitate peer interaction and thematic emergence. All discussions were conducted in Tamil, audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed and translated into English.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-step approach: familiarization, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting. Manual coding was carried out independently by two researchers to ensure inter-coder reliability; discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Emergent themes included:

- Emotional dissonance and betrayal within family structures
- Fear of violence or ostracism upon asserting rights
- Legal alienation and lack of systemic support
- Resilience, resistance, and evolving identity post-conflict

**Ethical Considerations:** Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their rights to withdraw at any stage, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Written informed consent was secured. Anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained throughout the study. In cases where participants showed emotional distress during interviews, they were referred to qualified mental health counselors.

### III. RESULTS

- **Demographic Profile:** The participants of this study were predominantly women between the ages of 31 to 50 years, accounting for 69% of the total sample. This age group reflects a critical life stage where responsibilities for family, inheritance, and financial stability converge. An overwhelming majority (97%) were married, indicating that marital status plays a significant role in determining both their property claims and the interpersonal conflicts they face. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 69% holding graduate-level qualifications. Despite this, employment levels were low, with 61% of the respondents identifying as unemployed, underlining the gendered barriers to economic independence. Additionally, 80% of these women lived in nuclear families, a setting that potentially isolates them from traditional joint family structures where property negotiations might be more openly discussed or contested.
- **Property Ownership and Succession:** Among the participants, 53% reported owning property in the form of land, houses, or gold, while 49% claimed to have received such property through inheritance. However, access to and control over these assets remained fraught with familial resistance. Notably, 27% were denied their rightful property claims, with brothers accounting for the majority of denials (73%), followed by parents (17%). These findings suggest a clear pattern of intra-family discrimination, despite legal provisions ensuring equal rights.
- **Nature and Frequency of Abuse:** Experiences of abuse were common among the women surveyed. Nearly 44% of respondents reported enduring some form of abuse verbal, emotional, or physical linked to their property rights. Specifically, 21% faced physical assault, typically from male relatives such as brothers or fathers. Despite the gravity of these encounters, only 4% had pursued formal complaints through legal or police channels. Alarming, 15% of the respondents reported ongoing abuse at the time of data collection, highlighting a continued state of vulnerability and fear.

- **Psychological and Emotional Impact:** The emotional toll on these women was profound. Around 17% described themselves as emotionally distressed due to property disputes. A significant 35% experienced mental health challenges such as sleep disturbances, anxiety, or depressive symptoms. Approximately 22% felt socially excluded or isolated, while only a minority (3%) had accessed any form of professional counseling or mental health support. About 27% categorized their psychological suffering as moderate to extreme, pointing to a dire need for emotional intervention services alongside legal remedies.
- **Legal Awareness and Support:** Despite the existence of legislation like the Hindu Succession Act, only 53% of respondents were aware of it. Even fewer (14%) had ever consulted a lawyer or legal expert about their property rights. A significant portion 59% felt too disempowered or afraid to assert their rights, either due to lack of confidence, knowledge, or fear of family backlash. Furthermore, 74% of the women had never attended any legal awareness programs, indicating a widespread lack of engagement with resources designed to empower them.
- **Coping and Support Systems:** In terms of coping, nearly half (46%) leaned on their families for emotional or logistical support. However, 29% reported having no support network whatsoever. Interpersonal sharing (38%) was the most commonly reported coping strategy, while 33% expressed a critical need for financial assistance to navigate their struggles. Alarming, 87% of participants had never been involved in any women’s support group or received any systematic follow-up support, underscoring the fragmented nature of existing social safety nets.

Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Variables of Nature and frequency of abuse. N=100

SNO	Nature and Frequency of Abuse	F	%
1	Minimal abuse	44	44.0
2	Moderate Abuse	41	41.0
3	Most Frequent Abuse	15	15.0

Table 1 presents the distribution of women (N = 100) based on the nature and frequency of abuse experienced during property-related disputes. Abuse was categorized as minimal, moderate, or most frequent, based on self-reported experiences involving verbal, emotional, physical, or psychological harm.

- **Minimal Abuse (44%):** These participants reported infrequent instances of emotional distress or verbal hostility, typically limited to isolated family conflicts or discouragement.
- **Moderate Abuse (41%):** This group experienced more persistent or patterned abuse, including manipulative behavior, emotional blackmail, or repeated verbal threats.
- **Most Frequent Abuse (15%):** Women in this category described chronic, intense, or multifaceted abuse including threats of violence, severe psychological distress, or sustained coercive control, often leading to significant emotional trauma.

This distribution highlights that 85% of the participants experienced moderate to frequent abuse, indicating a substantial emotional and psychological burden associated with asserting property rights.

Fig 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of Psychological and Emotional Impact Among Women

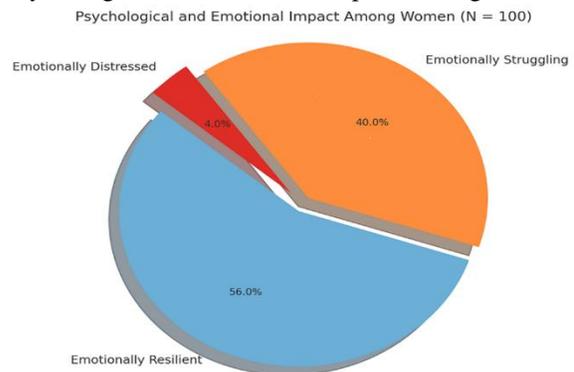


Fig 1 illustrates the psychological and emotional impact of property-related disputes among the women surveyed (N = 100). Participants were classified into three categories based on their self-reported coping responses and emotional well-being:

- **Emotionally Resilient (56%):** Over half of the women (n = 56) demonstrated resilience in the face of conflict, drawing on personal strength, family support, or faith to manage emotional strain and assert their rights.

- **Emotionally Struggling (40%):** A significant proportion of participants (n = 40) reported moderate emotional difficulty, including anxiety, indecisiveness, or feelings of helplessness. These women often lacked consistent support systems or clarity regarding legal processes.
- **Emotionally Distressed (4%):** A small subset of women (n = 4) experienced severe emotional distress, including symptoms of depression, isolation, or a sense of hopelessness. These cases typically involved prolonged or intense disputes, often compounded by social stigma or betrayal by close family members.

These findings suggest that 44% of the women were emotionally vulnerable, underlining the need for mental health support and counseling services in legal aid frameworks.

Fig 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of Legal Awareness and Support among women

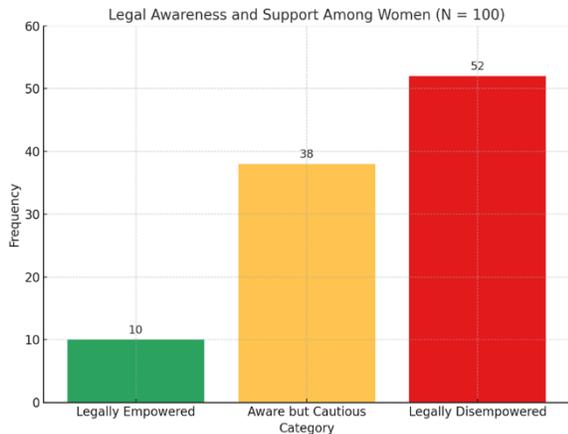


Figure 2 illustrate the levels of legal awareness and perceived support among the women participants. The data reveal significant disparities in their understanding and access to legal rights concerning property ownership:

- **Legally Disempowered (52%):** Over half of the women (n = 52) reported being unaware of their legal rights or unable to access legal help. These women typically relied on family members or local elders for conflict resolution, often at the cost of their entitlements.
- **Legally Aware but Cautious (38%):** A considerable number of participants (n = 38) were aware of their rights under the law (such as the Hindu Succession Amendment Act, 2005) but were hesitant to pursue legal action. Fear of

retaliation, family backlash, financial burden, or distrust in the judicial process were common deterrents.

- **Legally Empowered (10%):** Only a small portion (n = 10) of the respondents reported being confident and proactive in accessing legal aid, approaching legal professionals, or filing formal complaints. These women often had higher levels of education, financial independence, or external support.

These findings underscore the critical need for legal literacy programs and accessible legal aid tailored specifically for women navigating inheritance or property disputes.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Demographic Variables of Coping and support systems. N=100

SNO	Coping and Support Systems	F	%
1	Well supported	20	20
2	Partially supported	65	65
3	Unsupported	15	15

1. **Partially Supported (65%)**
  - The majority of women fall under this category, indicating that while some support exists possibly from friends, distant relatives, or legal advocates it is inconsistent or insufficient.
  - This partial support may be conditional or situational, failing to provide the sustained emotional, legal, or financial backing women need during property disputes.
  - It reflects the precarious balance women must maintain between asserting their rights and preserving strained family dynamics.
2. **Well Supported (20%)**
  - A small portion of women reported being well-supported, suggesting the presence of strong familial ties, peer networks, or NGO/legal support systems.
  - These women are more likely to experience better psychological resilience, higher confidence in legal proceedings, and fewer incidents of abuse or isolation.
3. **Unsupported (15%)**
  - A significant minority experienced complete lack of support, either due to being socially isolated,

ostracized by their families, or unaware of institutional resources.

- These women may face intense emotional distress, helplessness, and limited legal or

psychological recourse, making them more vulnerable to exploitation or withdrawal from pursuing rightful claims.

Table 3: Statistical Distribution of Pair wise Correlation Coefficients among Study Variables on Coping and Support Systems (N = 100)

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation
Psychological Impact & Abuse	r=0.246	0.014	Significant positive correlation: Women who experience higher levels of abuse are more likely to report greater psychological distress. This relationship is statistically significant (p < 0.05), indicating a meaningful association.
Psychological Impact & Legal Awareness	r=0.072	0.474	No significant correlation: Legal awareness does not appear to influence or alleviate psychological distress in a measurable way.
Psychological Impact & Coping Support	r=0.048	0.638	No significant correlation: Coping strategies or support systems, as measured, do not show a strong link to psychological impact.
Legal Awareness & Coping Support	r=0.061	0.547	No significant correlation: Being legally aware does not necessarily translate into having better coping mechanisms or support systems.
Legal Awareness & Abuse	r=-0.058	0.565	No significant inverse relationship: There is a weak and non-significant inverse correlation between legal awareness and experience of abuse, suggesting that awareness alone may not prevent abuse.
Coping Support & Abuse	r=0.189	0.060	Borderline significant positive correlation: There is a mild, nearly significant positive relationship, suggesting that women who experience more abuse may seek or require more coping support, though this does not reach the conventional significance threshold (p = 0.060).

- Statistical Associations: A significant positive correlation was found between the experience of abuse and psychological impact (r = 0.246, p = 0.014), suggesting that those who were abused were more likely to report psychological distress.

Table:4 Descriptive Statistical Distribution of Within-Subject Factor Levels among Study Variables on Coping and Support Systems (N = 100)

Dependent Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological and Emotional Impact	1.4645	.72138
Nature and Frequency of Abuse	1.694	.9474
Coping and Support Systems	1.9563	.90816

1. Psychological and Emotional Impact (Mean = 1.4645)

- The mean score of 1.46 indicates that most women reported low to moderate levels of psychological and emotional distress due to property-related issues.

- However, the standard deviation (0.72) shows moderate variation in responses some experienced greater distress than others.
- The range (Min = 1.0, Max = 3.0) shows that a few women experienced high emotional impact, even though the group average remains lower.

2. Nature and Frequency of Abuse (Mean = 1.694)

- The average score here is higher (1.69), indicating that abuse (verbal, emotional, or physical) was more commonly reported.
- The higher standard deviation (0.95) suggests that experiences of abuse varied widely while some women reported no abuse, others experienced severe or frequent abuse.
- The wide range again confirms the presence of both minimal and extreme cases in the sample.

3. Coping and Support Systems (Mean = 1.9563)

- This is the highest mean value among the three variables, suggesting that women relied more frequently on coping strategies or support systems.

- A standard deviation of 0.91 indicates that although some women had strong support systems, others lacked any support at all.
- Since the maximum is 3.0, some participants reported strong and effective support, which contrasts with the 29% who had none (as indicated in the earlier results section).

Table: 5 Association between Psychological Impact and Selected Demographic Variables (N = 100)

Demographic Variables	Women (n=100)		Chi-Square Value	df	P Value
	F	%			
Age in years			$\chi^2=2.252$	6	0.895 NS
21-30	19	19.0			
31-40	30	30.0			
41-50	39	39.0			
51-60	12	12.0			
Educational status			$\chi^2=14.353$	10	0.157 NS
Illiterate	1	1.0			
Primary education	1	1.0			
Secondary education	1	1.0			
Higher Secondary	25	25.0			
Graduate	69	69.0			
Marital status			$\chi^2=0.161$	2	0.923 NS
Single	3	3.0			
Married	97	97.0			
Widower	-	-			
Divorced / Separated	-	-			
Occupation status			$\chi^2=15.020$	6	0.020 S
Housewife	4	4.0			
Employed	26	26.0			
Self employed	9	9.0			
Unemployed	61	61.0			
Family income/ month			$\chi^2=10.067$	6	0.122 NS
< ₹10,000	28	28.0			
₹10,001–₹30,000	33	33.0			
₹30,001–₹50,000	26	26.0			
₹50,001	13	13.0			
Type of Family			$\chi^2=0.374$	2	0.830 NS
Nuclear	80	80.0			
Joint	20	20.0			
Religion			$\chi^2=6.315$	4	0.177 NS
Hindu	63	63.0			
Muslim	3	3.0			
Christian	34	34.0			
Others	-	-			
Number of siblings			$\chi^2=9.004$	6	0.173 NS
1	31	31.0			
2	48	48.0			
3	20	20.0			
4	1	1.0			

- Occupation status was significantly associated with emotional impact ( $p = 0.020$ ), indicating that employment may offer some psychological buffer. However, other variables such as income, education, and age did not show statistically significant associations with psychological outcomes.

IV. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative analysis of narratives gathered through in-depth interviews and key informant discussions revealed four central themes that reflect the emotional, psychological, legal, and social dimensions of women’s experiences with property denial and succession-related abuse.

Theme	Subtheme	Participant Quote
1. Emotional Dissonance and Betrayal within Family	1.1 Loss of emotional trust in siblings or parents	“I never imagined my own brother would treat me like a stranger.”
	1.2 Manipulation and guilt imposed to suppress claims	“They said I was breaking the family by asking what was rightfully mine.”
2. Fear of Violence or Social Ostracism	2.1 Threats of physical harm or disinheritance	“They threatened to throw me out if I went to court.”
	2.2 Social exclusion and stigmatization in community	“People stopped talking to me; they treated me like I was greedy.”
3. Legal Alienation and Systemic Barriers	3.1 Lack of awareness or understanding of inheritance laws	“I didn’t even know I had legal rights until someone told me much later.”
	3.2 Intimidation or discouragement by legal intermediaries	“The lawyer said it’s better to let it go—too much hassle for a woman.”
4. Resilience, Resistance, and Identity Transformation	4.1 Internal strength and coping through faith, children, or self-motivation	“My daughter kept me going. I couldn’t let her see me give up.”
	4.2 Reclaiming self-worth through action	“Filing that case made me feel like I’m finally standing up for myself.”

1. Emotional Dissonance in Family Dynamics

Many women expressed a profound sense of betrayal by the very people they considered closest—brothers, parents, and in-laws. They described instances where promises of property division were reneged upon, and affectionate familial bonds turned adversarial once property matters surfaced. This betrayal was not only material but deeply emotional, shaking their sense of belonging and familial trust.

Participants also revealed how they were subtly or overtly silenced. They were often told that raising questions about property rights would disturb family harmony or dishonor family values. This imposition of guilt was a recurring pattern, with women made to feel selfish, ungrateful, or dishonorable for asserting their legal entitlements. Such silencing left lasting emotional wounds, with some expressing internalized shame and helplessness.

2. Psychological Strain and Identity Crisis

The emotional betrayal often spiraled into significant psychological distress. Participants spoke of chronic anxiety, sleeplessness, and even suicidal thoughts triggered by prolonged disputes and social isolation.

Many internalized a sense of worthlessness, stating they felt like outsiders within their own families. For some, the denial of property rights became a denial of identity a stripping away of legitimacy and personhood.

Some women noted that despite their education and social standing, they felt invisible in familial negotiations. Their opinions were often dismissed, and their consent was never sought during property discussions. This erasure deeply affected their confidence and mental well-being.

3. Legal Alienation and Fear

A strong theme that emerged was the lack of confidence in legal systems. Several women feared that taking legal action would lead to backlash not only from immediate family members but also from the extended community. Concerns ranged from character assassination to physical threats. This fear kept many from seeking legal recourse, even when they were fully aware of their rights.

Additionally, there was widespread distrust in legal institutions. Participants expressed skepticism about the fairness of courts, delays in proceedings, and

potential bias against women. A common belief was that the law may exist on paper, but its application was riddled with patriarchal attitudes and procedural complexities.

#### 4. Coping and Resistance

In response to these challenges, many women resorted to silent endurance. They chose to withdraw from the dispute rather than risk familial conflict or societal backlash. This endurance, however, came at a great emotional cost. It involved suppressing one’s needs, desires, and sense of justice in exchange for fragile family peace.

Yet, amidst this silence, stories of resistance emerged. A few women, particularly younger or more educated ones, chose to assert their rights and even educate others in similar situations. These women became informal advocates within their communities—offering legal information, emotional support, and in some cases, accompanying others to legal aid centers. Their narratives underscore the possibility of transformation from silent sufferers to agents of change.

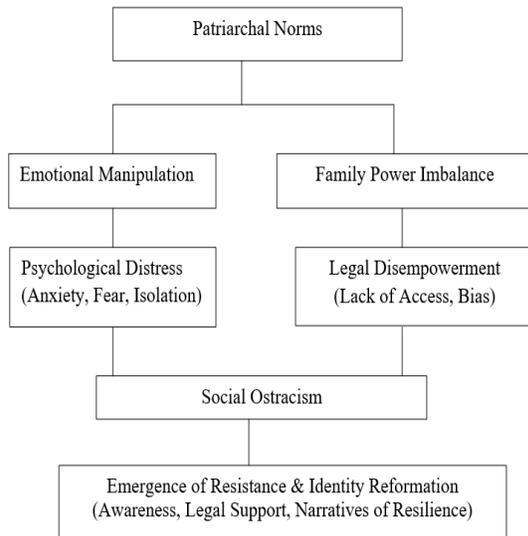


Fig:3 Conceptual Model of Women’s experiences in Property Rights and Disputes

#### V. DISCUSSION

The current study provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional and psychological impact faced by women in Chennai who are struggling to claim their rightful property. The findings indicate that beyond the legal entitlements, women’s experiences are

deeply embedded in a sociocultural framework that continues to marginalize their voices and suppress their autonomy in matters of inheritance and ownership.

#### VI. INTERSECTION OF GENDER, PROPERTY, AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

One of the most compelling findings of the study is the significant psychological burden borne by women who are denied property rights. The denial is not merely a financial setback but an act that symbolically and practically undermines their status and security within the family and society. Emotional betrayal especially by immediate family members such as brothers, parents, or in-laws contributes significantly to anxiety, low self-worth, depression, and feelings of abandonment. This aligns with Jain’s (2006) feminist critique, which asserts that patriarchal family structures systematically deny women the autonomy to claim property without emotional costs.

The study showed that 44% of participants experienced moderate to frequent abuse, and 35% reported significant psychological distress, including symptoms of emotional withdrawal, helplessness, and sadness. Quantitative correlation analysis revealed a positive and significant relationship ( $r = 0.246$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) between the nature and frequency of abuse and psychological/emotional impact. This highlights the compounded nature of the trauma, where denial of property is often accompanied by psychological manipulation, verbal abuse, or even physical violence.

#### VII. SOCIOECONOMIC DETERMINANTS OF EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Another noteworthy observation is the association between occupational status and psychological impact. The chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = 15.02$ ;  $p = 0.020$ ), suggesting that women who are unemployed or financially dependent on family members experience greater psychological vulnerability. Financial dependence weakens their bargaining power and limits their ability to seek legal or emotional support. In contrast, women with stable employment reported relatively better coping mechanisms and emotional resilience. This finding resonates with the argument by Agarwal (1994), who emphasized that economic

independence is a crucial determinant of women's ability to assert land and inheritance claims.

#### VIII. LEGAL AWARENESS: NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT

Interestingly, the study found that legal awareness alone did not significantly correlate with better coping or reduced psychological impact. Although 53% of the women were aware of property-related laws, only 14% had sought legal assistance. The gap between knowledge and action appears to stem from fear of family backlash, cultural conditioning, distrust in legal systems, and emotional fatigue. Many women expressed feelings of shame or guilt at the idea of challenging family members in court, which reflects deep-rooted patriarchal norms that associate women's honor with familial obedience and silence.

This phenomenon, described as "legal alienation", was strongly evident in the qualitative interviews. Several women expressed that while they were aware of their rights, they perceived the legal process as intimidating, male-dominated, or biased against them. These findings are consistent with Deininger et al. (2013), who noted that the mere provision of rights does not guarantee their utilization, particularly in socially conservative environments.

#### IX. PSYCHOSOCIAL DIMENSIONS: FEAR, SHAME, AND ISOLATION

Qualitative narratives from the study revealed intense emotional conflicts, including fear of being labeled ungrateful daughters or greedy sisters, especially when asserting claims in ancestral property. Women spoke of being emotionally manipulated by family, threatened with social ostracism, or gas lighted into believing they had no rightful claim. These emotional strategies used by family members serve as subtle but powerful tools of disinheritance.

Feelings of isolation were especially prominent among women who lacked spousal or parental support. Many women stated that even when they tried to express their concerns, their voices were dismissed or ridiculed. The fear of being "cut off" from the family or denied support during crises (such as widowhood or illness) often discouraged them from pursuing legal redress.

#### X. RESILIENCE AND AGENCY

Despite these adversities, the study identified a subgroup of women who exhibited remarkable emotional resilience. Some participants, especially those with children, reported that the desire to secure a future for the next generation became a source of strength. Others relied on women-led support groups or NGOs, which offered emotional validation and legal guidance. These pockets of empowerment suggest that community-based support systems can play a transformative role in helping women overcome the psychological barriers to property claims.

#### XI. CONCLUSION

The fight for women's property rights in Chennai is emblematic of the broader intersection between gender, law, and lived experience. While statutory provisions may ostensibly guarantee equal inheritance and ownership, the real-world journey of claiming those rights is often riddled with emotional, psychological, and social obstacles. Women who attempt to assert their entitlements frequently face not only legal hurdles but also the emotional betrayal of being rejected by their families, societal stigma, and mental health burdens that are largely invisible in policy frameworks.

This study underscores the fact that legal recognition alone is insufficient. The act of reclaiming property rights, especially in deeply patriarchal family systems, is not just a legal process but a traumatic emotional experience. Women often endure psychological stress, alienation, and even threats to personal safety. These challenges are particularly acute in urban and peri-urban settings like Chennai, where socio-economic transformations coexist with rigid traditional norms.

In conclusion, property rights must be reframed not only as legal entitlements but as human rights deeply intertwined with emotional well-being and social justice. Only by addressing both the legal and psychological dimensions of this struggle can we move toward a society where women in Chennai and across India can claim what is rightfully theirs with confidence, support, and dignity.

## XII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Launch legal literacy campaigns targeting women in urban and peri-urban Chennai.
  - Conduct workshops and community meetings in local languages (Tamil).
  - Collaborate with law schools, legal aid cells, and women's rights organizations.
  - Distribute simplified legal materials (pamphlets, videos, info graphics).
  - Utilize local media (radio, cable TV, social media) for outreach.
2. Integrate mental health counseling into property dispute interventions.
  - Embed trained counselors or social workers within legal aid centers.
  - Offer individual and group counseling sessions alongside legal support.
  - Provide trauma-informed services for women facing emotional abuse or displacement.
  - Create referral networks with mental health clinics and crisis help lines.
3. Support NGOs providing feminist legal advocacy.
  - Provide funding, capacity-building, and legal training to grassroots NGOs.
  - Encourage strategic litigation that sets legal precedents favoring women.
  - Support legal aid camps in slums and low-income neighborhoods.
  - Promote intersectional advocacy, considering caste, class, and religion.
4. Introduce localized property grievance redress forums.
  - Establish women-friendly mediation centers in each ward or panchayat.
  - Include paralegal volunteers, retired judges, and women leaders as mediators.
  - Ensure cultural sensitivity and confidentiality during hearings.
  - Facilitate fast-tracked decisions for urgent or violent displacement cases.
5. Promote awareness through women-led community support groups.
  - Train women leaders to facilitate regular support group meetings.

- Share success stories, legal updates, and emotional coping mechanisms.
- Organize collective actions (e.g., rallies, petitions, legal literacy walks).
- Act as informal watchdogs monitoring local property rights violations.

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