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# **Why do older women in Kerala Feel Unsafe? An Inquiry Using Intersectional Political Economy**

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# Why do older women in Kerala Feel Unsafe? An Inquiry Using Intersectional Political Economy

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## Abstract:

Despite human development outcomes comparable to developed countries, Kerala is infamous for its 'gender paradox'. National Crime Records Bureau reports show high rates of violence against women in Kerala. Previous research attributed this to greater reporting rather than higher incidences of crime. However, analyzing data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, Wave 1 (2017-18), we find that among the major states, the proportion of elderly women feeling safe from crime and violence is the second-lowest in Kerala. The magnitude of gender gap in perceived safety is also the highest in Kerala. This may not be attributed squarely to 'positional objectivity' (a concept borrowed from morbidity literature), since higher proportions of poor women, widows, and women living alone report feeling unsafe from crime. This finding remains even when we control for other correlates in a multivariate specification. Intersectional political economy explains how gender inequalities may persist in the face of welfare state policies, as patriarchal power structures intersect with other structures of collective power in a complex historical web. Attributing higher figures of reported crime to greater reporting and linking it to greater presence of women in local councils, disregarding their lower presence in higher leadership positions, may be misleading.

**Keywords:** Gender, Crime, Perceived safety, Intersectional Political Economy

**JEL Classification:** J14, J16, I31, P0

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## 1.0 Introduction

With literacy, life expectancy, and social indicators comparable to developed countries, Kerala is often depicted as the model state of India. Nevertheless, among the Indian states, self-reported morbidity rates are the highest in Kerala. The Indian National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) has conducted six full-scale surveys on morbidity since 1973–74. Using data from the Indian National Sample Survey (NSS) 1973–74 (Round 28), Murray and Chen (1992) showed that self-reported morbidity, both chronic and acute, were the highest in the state of Kerala. This appeared as a paradox, because Kerala had already gained acclaim for its impressive achievements in mortality and life expectancy. This paradox was widely discussed in subsequent work in the field (Sen 1993; 1998; 2002). It led to a complete dismissal of self-perceived morbidity as a valid health indicator. Sen (1993) used the notion of ‘positional objectivity’ and argued that interpersonal differences in perception of health were not shaped by individual subjectivities and idiosyncrasies. Rather, people’s self-perceived morbidity ‘varies with what they are used to, and also with their medical knowledge’ (Sen, 1998: 18). Pointing out that positional parameters like education and availability of healthcare systematically affect self-reports of illness, Sen (2002) concluded that self-reported morbidity is a thoroughly unreliable indicator and can ‘mislead public policy on health care and medical strategy’ (p. 860). Sen (2009) repeated this conclusion, stating that ‘[t]he comparative data on self-reporting of illness and the seeking of medical attention call for critical scrutiny, taking serious note of positional parameters’ (p.165). He again gave contrasting examples of Kerala and Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. Sen argued that while among the Indian states Kerala had the longest life expectancy at birth (surpassing even that of China) and had gone through a successful health transition, widely researched by health economists across the world, it also had the highest figures for self-reported

morbidity. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, had low life expectancies at birth and had not experienced any health transition, still having ‘astonishingly low rates of self-assessed morbidity’. In Sen’s words, “in this charmed internal comparison”, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh would be misclassified as “healthy” as opposed to Kerala. Later research, however, questioned Sen’s hypothesis and concluded that the problem lay mostly with the framing of the morbidity question in the NSS questionnaire. Other data sources were used to show that self-perceived morbidity is indeed a valid measure of health (Subramanian et al. 2009; Mukhopadhyay et al.2023).

A similar paradox appears when one considers crime statistics or data on crime against women in particular. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, Kerala reported a total of 15,213 cases of crime against women in 2022. This translates to a rate of 82 cases per lakh population, which is substantially higher than the national average of 66.4 cases per lakh population. Again, Bihar reported a much lower rate of crime against women in 2022, with 33.5 cases per lakh population. One of the most important components of crime against women in Kerala is the high incidence of domestic violence. In 2022, Kerala reported 4,998 cases of cruelty by the husband or his relatives, translating to a rate of 27 per lakh. This is again higher than the national average of 21 per lakh and that of Bihar at a meagre 3.1 per lakh. Moreover, the incidence of sexual harassment and assault is relatively much higher in Kerala. While in 2022 Kerala reported 4090 cases (a rate of 21.7 per lakh) of assault on women, the number of reported cases of assault on women was 395 (a rate of 0.7 per lakh) in Bihar.

It would be quite natural to ascribe the Bihar-Kerala difference in reported crime to the idea of positional objectivity, just as in the case of self-reported morbidity, since reporting rates

often indicate greater sensitivity to crime, better legal systems and a greater presence of police personnel. Reported crime may be low in a region because the victim does not report the crime or the police is unwilling to record the crime. Indeed, chargesheeting rate for crime against women in Kerala (95.4%) way exceeds the national rate (75.8%) and the rate for Bihar (76.4%). Commentators have since long viewed figures of reported crime with scepticism (Mukherjee et al. 2001; Sharma 2015). Iyer et al (2012) even consider an increase in documented crimes against women ‘good news, driven primarily by greater reporting rather than greater incidence of such crimes’ (p. 165). One of their findings is to link greater reporting of crimes against women to greater presence of women in local government, than to women’s representation in higher-level leadership positions. This, according to them, happens because presence of women leaders in proximity boosts the confidence of women victims of crimes to go to the police.

Nevertheless, police-recorded crime statistics reflect both actual incidence of crime and under-reporting biases and there is no way to disentangle the two dimensions from NCRB data. Taking the cue from recent literature on self-reported morbidity in the Indian context, which has used multiple data sources to question the NSS data-driven narrative of positional objectivity, this paper challenges the dominant practice of crime literature ascribing any increase in reported crimes to greater reporting than rise in actual crimes. This is supported by the existing body of rich literature in history and sociology that points out a gender paradox and rising crimes against women in Kerala, which we summarize in Section 2. To wit, works of feminist scholars of Kerala amply suggest that Kerala’s society is deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms and one must suspect any hypothesis which presupposes that the component of under-reporting of crime against women in Kerala is low. Section 2 also details the unique demographic context of

Kerala to understand the situation of older women, the population sub-group that we study in this paper. Section 3 describes the data and methods and Section 4 presents and discusses the results. We use the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India, Wave 1 (2017-18), and show that among the major states, the proportion of elderly women feeling safe from crime and violence is the second- lowest in Kerala. The magnitude of the gender gap in perceived safety is also the highest in Kerala. We then conduct a disaggregated analysis that is not possible with NCRB data and find that higher proportions of poor women, widows, and women living alone report feeling unsafe from crime. This finding remains even when we control for other correlates in a multivariate specification. This leads us to conclude that a higher proportion of older women in Kerala feeling unsafe may not be attributed squarely to 'positional objectivity'. Positional objectivity would require a lower proportion of women from marginalized positionalities reporting feeling unsafe compared to women from more privileged backgrounds. It may be relevant to mention here that while a lower proportion of the poor and marginalized report morbidities when the NSS question on having felt sick during a reference period is used, analysis of other health surveys shows that proportionately more men and women from marginalized sections report specific illnesses, compared to those from privileged backgrounds (Mukhopadhyay 2022). Section 4 concludes the paper by highlighting that intersectional political economy explains how gender inequalities may persist in the face of welfare state policies, as patriarchal power structures intersect with other structures of collective power in a complex historical web. Thus, attributing higher figures of reported crime to greater reporting and linking it to a greater presence of women in local councils (Iyer et al. 2012), disregarding their lower presence in higher leadership positions, may be misleading.

## Understanding the Context

### *The Gender Paradox in Kerala*

Scholars note that in developing regions, the interactions between power structures and gender often manifest in a complex web, with the correspondence between overall development and gender equality being weak. With a favourable sex ratio and better human development figures for women, Kerala was hailed by many as the model state not only for development, but also women's empowerment. Nevertheless, Kerala continues to grapple with substantial gender disparities and patriarchal norms. Feminist scholars have pointed out that there is an underlying gender paradox in Kerala, which does not always manifest overtly (Lekha and Palackal 2020).

Even concerning standard indicators of human development, the situation of women in Kerala has been deteriorating for quite some time (Lekha and Palackal 2020). Gender disparities are stark in education, nutrition, labour market outcomes and political participation. Scholars have argued that even the sex ratio figure does not look impressive once Kerala's huge male migration is accounted for (Rondinone 2007). It is even more alarming that the child sex ratio declined from 1047 to 951 between 2015-16 and 2019-21, according to the National Family Health Survey figures. Kodoth and Eapen (2005) used the latter figure as an indication of greater conditioning of Kerala's women to patriarchal norms within the family, compared to many other states of India. Even the reports of the last two rounds of the NFHS (2015-16 and 2019-21) shows that while the economic status of women in Kerala has improved (in terms of house or land ownership), their social status has not improved commensurately. Mobility of Kerala's women is lower in Kerala compared to many other states and more than half of the women in Kerala feel that wife-beating is justified. According to NFHS-5 (2019-21) report, one in every ten of married women in Kerala, aged 18-49 years, have



experienced spousal violence. Though this means a decline in domestic violence between 2015-16 and 2019-20, a study based on Kudumbashree's strategies to reduce violence against women, observes that violence against women has been rising and women's rights are being increasingly violated in Kerala (Parthasarathy et al 2018).

Kodoth and Eapen (2005) decomposed the state-level gender development index and found that better performances in health and education masked the poor figures of women's employment in Kerala. Early 20th century social reforms improved women's access to education and matrilineal structures of family did not restrict property rights of women in the state. Nevertheless, these reforms also led to the emergence of a newer form of marriage that was rooted in modern patriarchal relations, reinforcing regressive social norms. Devika (2002) showed that while institutions like the state, the church, caste organisations, religious establishments, labour organisations and groups participating in the nationalist movement played a positive role in improving human development outcomes for women, they worked together to reinforce patriarchal norms and women were mostly restricted to care work, both in private and public spaces. The matrilineal family structure dwindled and the declining position of women became apparent in the poor figures of female labour force participation. Research has shown that violence against women and harassment on the roads, in public transport, in the neighbourhood or at the workplace make women anxious about being abused outside their homes and reduce their likelihood of participating in the labour market. Worldwide, the freedom of mobility of girls and women is limited by the possibility of harassment in the public space, which may range from unwelcome sexual remarks and gestures to rape and femicide (UNWOMEN 2025).

The Fourteenth Five Year Plan (2022-2027) of Kerala rightly observes that it would be wrong to look for the inherent causes

of gender inequality within the household or the family alone. Patriarchal forces intersect with institutions such as the state and the market, both local and global. The report acknowledges that, despite efforts to reduce gender inequality in Kerala, patriarchal forces are still strong and apparent in certain social norms which try to relegate women to the domestic sphere. Persistent patriarchy is “reflected in recent crimes against women and children which took a very violent turn, alerts us to the need for understanding social relations of gender and explore innovative ways of creating a gender-conscious society” (p.14). The report speaks of various forms of violence against women in Kerala, namely domestic violence, dowry-related violence, violence by jilted lovers, cyber violence, suicide and self-harm, and harassment at the workplace.

It is crucial to understand the differences between crimes against women in private and public spaces, which lies mainly in the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. In private spaces, crimes such as domestic abuse are perpetrated by someone close to the victim, a family member or a partner. This type of violence usually keeps recurring and reflects the power dynamics within the household. Crimes against women in public spaces may comprise harassment or assault by strangers or acquaintances. These crimes largely reflect societal attitudes towards women and are often underreported due to stigma and fear of retaliation (Kabiraj 2025).

### ***Older Women in Kerala***

Kerala's demographic transition has been much discussed. Rajan et al. (2020) show that Kerala's population is ageing at a faster pace compared to the country as a whole. According to The Kerala Ageing Survey (KAS) 2013 report, the number of people above 60 years in the state was 4.2 million in 2011. Again, the growth rate of the elderly population is more than four times

the growth rate of the general population in Kerala. The study by Rajan et al. (2020) also shows that within the category of elderly, women outnumber men and a substantial proportion of them are widows. The old age dependency ratio of Kerala (19.6%) also exceeds that of India (14.2%). The study highlights another important issue. Among the elderly population of Kerala who needed special care, the 'young-old' females were much more vulnerable and reported low levels of life satisfaction. 'Young-old' males, on the other hand, reported high life satisfaction and were economically much more stable. Both genders from the 'old-old' category had poor health and needed special care. However, the proportion of women in this group exceeded that of men. Given the unique demographic context in which Kerala's older women find themselves, an enquiry into what explains their perceived safety merits attention. The substantive findings of the paper thus have a relevance for policy, both in terms of understanding gender based crimes and ageing and gender in Kerala.

## **Data and Methods**

### **Data**

The paper uses data from the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) Wave 1, 2017-18 (<https://www.iipsindia.ac.in/lasi>). The LASI is a full-scale country-wide longitudinal survey of health and its economic and social determinants and other dimensions of population ageing in India. It is a nationally representative survey of 72,250 older adults age 45 and above across all states and union territories of India. It uses internationally harmonized questionnaires and aims to study the health status and the social and economic well-being of older adults in India. It adopted a multistage stratified area probability cluster sampling design and the respondents were older adults aged 45 and above and their spouses, irrespective of age.

We use this dataset because apart from detailed information on

positional parameters, the LASI questionnaire comprises two questions on perceived safety of elderly adults in India, namely, 1. In general, how safe from crime and violence do you feel when you are alone at home? And 2. How safe do you feel when walking down your street/locality alone after dark?

Instead of considering the question on actual crime victimization (which we aggregate at the primary sampling unit level and use as an indicator of crime environment), we consider the question on perception since a direct question on the perception of safety is better than a question on the experience of facing crime for our purpose as we draw on the literature on self-perceived health. There is a study which deals with crime victimization of older adults in India using the LASI data (Muhammad et al, 2021) but we are not aware of any other study analyzing perceived safety using LASI data. The morbidity literature has tested the validation of the variable of self-perceived health using information on objectively measured health variables, including dimensions of physical health, mental health, functional health, and health behaviours (Cullati et al. 2018). Unfortunately, with crime data we cannot perform such construct validity exercises because it is difficult to obtain objectively measured actual crime data. The issue of under-reporting of crime (more so for gender-based crimes) has received a lot of attention in developing country contexts. Thus, we deal with data that seems to be subjective, namely perceptions of crime and not actual crime. We check if these responses, instead of being purely subjective, are positionally objective (Sen 2003; 2009) (if they are conditioned by positional parameters such as awareness, crime environment, and functioning of law-enforcing institutions) or are objective. If there seems to be an objective component in perceived safety itself, then it implies that reported crime too has a component that correctly reflects women's lived experiences with respect to crime. In our framework, the objectivity of perceived crime is indicated by a greater proportion of women from marginalized backgrounds reporting feeling

unsafe. It is to be noted that the feeling of being unsafe from crime, as asked in the LASI questionnaire, does not imply feeling unsafe from gender-based crimes specifically. This purges the analysis of reporting biases specific to gender-based crimes. However, the existence of a gender gap in perceived safety from crime in general would reflect greater vulnerabilities of women to crime, compared to men.

## Methods

We conduct a cross-tabulation of the perceived safety variables to examine the gender gap in perceptions about crime in Kerala. We also present disaggregated analysis of perceived lack of safety among older women in India, Bihar and Kerala. This is followed by multivariate logistic regression of perceived safety of older women on positional parameters, controlling for demographic factors. Robustness checks are performed using generalised ordinal logistic regression considering perceived safety as an ordinal variable instead of a binary variable. This is done since criminology literature has shown that different levels of perceived vulnerability to crime have different correlates and have different implications on functional health (Gray et al. 2010). Sensitivity tests are performed by dividing the population of elderly women into finer age categories.

### Variables in the multivariate analysis

We have two variables on perceived lack of safety:

1.  $unsafe_h$ : unsafe when alone at home (=1 when the responses are not safe and not safe at all and 0 when completely safe and safe)
2.  $unsafe_r$ : unsafe when walking down your street/locality alone after dark (=1 when the responses are not safe and not safe at all and 0 when completely safe and safe)

We construct two sets of models with dependent variables  $unsafe_h$  and  $unsafe_r$  respectively.

The positional parameters are poverty status (classifying the two bottom quintiles of monthly per capita consumption as poor), education level, the number of people facing a violent crime in the primary sampling unit in the last 12 months. Control variables are age, residence, social group affiliation, marital status and living arrangement. In the first model we include sex as a control variable. Since older women are significantly more likely to feel unsafe than older men in Kerala, we then focus on women and see how the positional parameters are associated with perceived safety.

We repeat the exercise for Bihar. If positional parameters are associated with perceived safety in such a way that marginalized women are more likely to feel unsafe, it further weakens the hypothesis of positional objectivity. We then have reason to believe that perceived safety has a one-to-one correspondence with the actual incidence of crime.

### Results and Discussion

#### Police-reported Crime in Kerala and Bihar

**Table 1: Crime Rates in Kerala, Bihar and India**

	Rate of Cognizable Crimes (IPC & SLL) (2022)	Charge- sheeting Rate (2022)	Rate of Total Crimes Against Women (IPC & SLL) (2022)	Chargesheeting Rate for Crimes Against Women
Kerala	1274.8	97.5	82	94.5
Bihar	277.1	82.5	33.5	76.4
India	422.2	82	66.4	75.8

Source: Author's calculations from NCRB data, 2022

Since there is no way to disentangle the relative importances of under-reporting of violence, and actual incidence of crime,

we turn to survey data on self-perceived safety. This is a pure perception variable, apparently subjective. Following Sen (1993; 2002; 2009), we ask, are the differences in perception purely subjective, or are they conditioned by positional parameters. We undertake the analysis for each of the two contrasting states, Kerala and Bihar.

Table 2 shows that the differences in perceived lack of safety for older adults matches the NCRB figures. Breaking up the figures by gender, and looking into the perceived safety of women, we find a striking similarity with the figures for crime against women from NCRB. The country-wide statistics and likewise the figures for Bihar and Kerala show a clear gender gap in perceived safety for men and women. This paper contends that the gender gap may be ascribed to the incidence of violence against women, specifically, gender-based crimes. Analysis of state-level LASI figures further reveal that the gender gap is the highest in Kerala among all the states.

Proportionately more women in Kerala feel that they are unsafe, when compared to the country as a whole or to the poorer and relatively less developed state Bihar. Such differences mimic the NCRB figures and may be squarely attributed to positional objectivity at first sight. Nevertheless, NCRB data does not permit disaggregate analysis, while LASI does. This is what follows in Table 3 and Table 4.

**Table 2: Perceived lack of safety when alone at home ( $Unsafe_h$ ) or while walking down the street/locality alone after dark ( $Unsafe_r$ ), per lakh population**

Perceived lack of safety	Bihar		Kerala		India	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
$Unsafe_h$	1790	3030	3070	7890	3650	6880
$Unsafe_r$	2600	5500	6600	17310	999	15360

Source: Author's calculations from LASI Dataset, Wave 1 (2017-18)

Table 3 and Table 4 present disaggregated analysis of perceived lack of safety among older women in India, Bihar and Kerala. Cross-tabulation by economic status shows that poorer women in India and Bihar are less likely to feel unsafe when alone at home or at the road after dark, compared to non-poor women. This is similar to the findings on the NSS morbidity figures and lends support to the positional objectivity hypothesis. Interestingly, the pattern is reversed in Kerala, with proportionately greater number of poorer women reporting feeling unsafe when unsafe at home.

However, as intersectionality literature points out, looking at a single axis of disadvantage may not reveal the entire story. While sample size limits the scope of further breaking down the group of poor older women in the individual states, we look at other positional parameters in isolation. Disaggregated analysis by marital status and living arrangement shows that widows compared to married women and women living alone compared to those not living alone, are more likely to report feeling unsafe when alone at home or at the road after dark, irrespective of the state of residence. Thus, the hypothesis of positional objectivity seems to be rather weak when we consider various dimensions of social disadvantage. The high figures of perceived lack of safety for widows and single women and women living alone in Kerala strikingly map onto the feminist literature highlighting the existence of a gender paradox in Kerala.

**Table 3: Perceived lack of safety when alone at home ( $Unsafe_h$ ), per lakh population, by positional parameters of older women**

Positional Parameters		Bihar	Kerala	India
Economic Status	Poor	3770	12180	8290
	Non-Poor	4740	11220	9890
Marital Status	Widows	6450	13290	12900
	Married	3620	9700	7480
	Never Married/Others	-	16840	6820



Living	Alone	8660	20370	10190
Arrangement	Not Alone	4130	11140	9130

Source: Author's calculations from LASI Dataset, Wave 1 (2017-18)

**Table 4: Perceived lack of safety when alone at home ( $Unsafe_h$ ), per lakh population, by positional parameters of older women**

Positional Parameters		Bihar	Kerala	India
Economic Status	Poor	6950	20810	16240
	Non-Poor	6580	20760	18400
Marital Status	Widows	8600	22560	20870
	Married	6240	19080	15960
	Never Married/Others	-	16840	13860
Living	Alone	13030	17860	30650
Arrangement	Not Alone	6570	17470	20320

Source: Author's calculations from LASI Dataset, Wave 1 (2017-18)

Table 5 shows that females are significantly more likely to report feeling unsafe with regard to both the dependent variables. This confirms our hypothesis of greater vulnerability of women to crimes. We then focus on women and see how perceived lack of safety is explained by positional parameters.

**Table 5: Odds Ratio of perceived lack of safety among women within the elderly population feeling more unsafe in Kerala**

	$Unsafe_h$	$Unsafe_r$
Females (Reference Group: Males)	1.12***	1.42***

\*\*\* significant at 99% level of confidence

Controlling for positional parameters and demographic factors (age, region of residence, economic status, education levels, social group affiliation, living arrangement, crime environment

Table 6 shows that perceived lack of safety among older women is

associated with positional parameters in such a way that we have support for the rejection of the positional objectivity hypothesis for older women in Kerala. While the likelihood of feeling unsafe when alone at home does not significantly differ (at 95% level of confidence) between poor and non-poor women, poorer women are significantly more likely to feel unsafe when alone on the streets after dark. Looking at living arrangements, we find that women living alone are significantly more likely to feel unsafe both in private and public spaces. Linear Probability Modelling (results not reported) showed that inclusion of the marital status variable in the same specification leads to multicollinearity. We thus drop the variable and look into its association with perceived lack of safety in an alternative specification. We find that married women are less likely to feel unsafe compared to widows and women living alone. This confirms the findings of the sociological literature on the gender paradox in Kerala. The results show us that positional parameters of older women in Kerala do not condition their perception of safety from crime in such a way that disadvantaged women report feeling safer. This would mean that subjective indices are also not purely subjective, neither are they entirely positionally objective. Thus, if there is objectivity even in subjective variables on perceived safety, higher incidences of reported crime may not be used to indicate ‘good news’ assuming that the rise is primarily due to greater reporting.

**Table 6: Odds Ratio of perceived lack of safety among older women in Kerala by positional parameters**

Positional Parameters		Unsafe <sub>h</sub>	Unsafe <sub>r</sub>
Economic Status	Poor (Reference Group: Non-Poor)	0.8*	1.2***
Living Arrangements	living with spouse and/or others	0.6***	0.6***
	living with spouse and children	0.6***	0.5***

living with children and others	0.7***	0.5***
living with others only	0.9***	0.6***
Crime Environment	1.2***	1.8**

Controlling for age, region of residence, education levels, social group affiliation

\*\*\* significant at 99% level of confidence; \*\* significant at 95% level of confidence; \* significant at 90% level of confidence

Robustness Tests using ordinal logistic regression and generalised ordinal logistic regression following the Brandt test mostly confirm our results. Sensitivity tests show if results differ among finer categories of age among the elderly women in Kerala. We also conduct a similar exercise for Bihar and one for the country as a whole.

## Conclusion

Feminist literature in Kerala has shown that patriarchal forces form a complex intersectional web with institutions such as the state and the market, both local and global. Even state documents acknowledge that, despite efforts to reduce gender inequality in Kerala, patriarchal forces are still strong and apparent in certain social norms which manifest in violence against women.

Persistence of patriarchy in a welfare state with a long tradition of left politics is reflected in the high incidence of crime against women. This paper draws on the recent turns in the morbidity literature that question the validity of individual perception. While the dominant discourse rejects the perception-based indicators on the ground that these are positionally objective, conditioned by positional parameters such as awareness, disease environment, and availability of healthcare facilities, recent literature uses multiple data sources and questions the hypothesis. We find a striking similarity of the morbidity paradox with the puzzle

of police-reported crime against women, which manifests in a poorer and backward state, Bihar showing much lower figures of gender-based violence, compared to Kerala. We use the LASI data on perceived lack of safety of older women in Kerala and find that these figures mimic the picture represented by the NCRB data. However, NCRB does not permit a disaggregated analysis. We do so with the LASI data and find that poorer women, women who live alone, and widows have even higher figures of perceived lack of safety. Thus, we conclude that higher incidence of crime may not be squarely attributed to positional objectivity. Women in disadvantaged situations reporting higher insecurity regarding crimes indicate an actual high incidence of crime.

Our analysis dealt with older women in Kerala. Ageing in Kerala has unique demographic features and poses specific gendered challenges. We argue that invoking the framework of intersectional political economy will be useful to understand and deal with the challenges. Folbre (2021) notes that

Relatively few economic historians, however, acknowledge the relevance of patriarchal institutional structures. Most neoclassical and Marxian accounts of the emergence of capitalism presume a kind of stage-based transition from precapitalist to capitalist institutions without explicit consideration of collective conflicts that do not fit this sequence. Inequalities based on gender, race/ethnicity, nationality, or citizenship are often attributed to inherited attitudes, irrational preferences, sticky cultural norms, or capitalist class interests—absolving many historical agents of responsibility for them. Conversely, much feminist social science focuses on the dynamics of gender inequality within families and firms, rather than a larger structure of patriarchal power, because the very concept of structure has fallen out of fashion.

Drawing on the feminist scholarship on the gender paradox in Kerala, this paper argues that figures of crime against women need to be understood in the structural and institutional roots of patriarchal power.

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