
FALSE RAPE ACCUSATIONS: BALANCING CRIMINAL PENALTIES WITH CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

False rape accusations are a serious concern in India, affecting the lives of the accused, undermining genuine victims, and straining the justice system. While protecting survivors of sexual violence is crucial, wrongful allegations can lead to irreversible damage to innocent individuals, including social stigma, legal harassment, and wrongful imprisonment. This paper examines the legal and ethical challenges of addressing false rape claims while upholding constitutional rights, including the presumption of innocence and protection against malicious prosecution. India's criminal justice system faces difficulties in distinguishing between false complaints and genuine cases due to procedural delays, biases, and societal pressures. While stringent laws like the BNS and the POCSO Act aim to deter sexual crimes, they also risk misuse. The absence of strong legal consequences for false accusers exacerbates the problem, discouraging accountability. However, imposing harsh penalties could deter real victims from reporting crimes, creating a chilling effect.

This study explores potential reforms to balance justice for the accused with protections for survivors. Possible measures include mandatory preliminary investigations before arrests, safeguards against media trials, and stricter penalties for provably false complaints without discouraging genuine victims. The paper also discusses judicial precedents and international perspectives to propose a fair and rights-based approach. Ultimately, India must strengthen legal safeguards against false accusations while ensuring that legitimate rape cases are handled with sensitivity. A balanced framework can protect constitutional rights, prevent misuse of laws, and maintain public trust in the justice system.

Keywords: False rape accusations, women, men, harassment, safeguards, victims, sexual assault.

Introduction

“It is better that ten guilty persons escape than that one innocent suffer.”-William Blackstone

The intersection of false sexual assault allegations with India’s constitutional framework presents a profound societal dilemma, where the imperative to protect survivors often clashes with safeguards against judicial misuse. Recent data reveals that nearly 9.69% of rape cases investigated in 2022 were classified as false, a statistic that underscores the systemic challenges in distinguishing genuine trauma from malicious intent.¹ This tension is exemplified in cases like *Rajnish Singh @ Soni v. State of U.P.*,² where the Supreme Court overturned charges against a man accused of rape after a 16-year consensual relationship, observing that prolonged voluntary intimacy negates claims of deceit. Such rulings highlight the judiciary’s evolving role in curbing the weaponisation of sexual violence laws while affirming the need for rigorous evidentiary standards to protect both survivors and the falsely accused.

Constitutional protections under Articles 14 and 21³ play a pivotal role in this balancing act, mandating that legal procedures remain fair, reasonable, and free from arbitrariness. The presumption of innocence, though not explicitly enshrined in the Constitution, has been judicially recognised as integral to due process, particularly in cases where accusations arise from fractured personal relationships.⁴ For instance, courts have increasingly emphasised that consensual relationships dissolving into acrimony cannot retroactively transform into criminal acts without clear evidence of coercion or deceit.⁵ This principle was starkly illustrated when an 18-year-old Kerala student, Sreenath, endured 35 days of wrongful imprisonment after a fabricated rape allegation a case resolved only through DNA evidence that exposed the accuser’s falsehoods.⁶ Such instances reveal the human cost of procedural laxity and the urgent need for investigative rigour.

Judicial discourse has further grappled with the socio-legal implications of false accusations, particularly their corrosive impact on public trust in the justice system. The *Rajnish Singh* verdict⁷ notably criticized the tendency to conflate failed relationships with criminal

¹ Tarun Kaushik, “Weaponization of Laws by Women in India (A Hundred Culprits May Get Acquitted but One Innocent Should Not Be Convicted)” 5 *Samvedna* (2023)

² 2025 INSC 308.

³ The Constitution of India, 1950.

⁴ *Data Ram v. State of Uttar Pradesh*, [Criminal Appeal No.227 /2018 arising out of S.L.P. (CRL.) No. 151 of 2018].

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Sreenath v. State of Kerala*, 2022 KER 33181.

⁷ *Ibid.*

liability, stressing that emotional disillusionment alone cannot justify invoking rape statutes. This aligns with broader concerns about the misuse of laws like Section 376 IPC,⁸ where ambiguous provisions regarding “false promises of marriage” often lead to subjective interpretations. Scholars argue that such legal vagueness disproportionately affects marginalised communities, where limited access to legal resources exacerbates the risks of wrongful prosecution.⁹ The psychological toll on the falsely accused, ranging from social ostracization to economic ruin, further complicates the pursuit of justice, necessitating safeguards that protect dignity without discouraging genuine survivors from coming forward.

Addressing these challenges requires a multidisciplinary approach that harmonizes legal reforms with societal education. The Supreme Court’s insistence on distinguishing between consensual intimacy and criminal conduct in *Rajnish Singh*¹⁰ sets a critical precedent, urging lower courts to scrutinise allegations for corroborative evidence rather than relying solely on testimonial claims. Concurrently, initiatives to enhance forensic infrastructure and expedite DNA testing, as seen in Sreenath’s exoneration,¹¹ could mitigate the risks of prolonged wrongful detention. Public awareness campaigns demystifying consent dynamics and legal recourse pathways are equally vital, fostering a culture where justice systems inspire confidence rather than fear. As India navigates these complexities, the equilibrium between accountability and constitutional rights remains foundational to a justice system worthy of its name.

False rape accusations refer to instances where an individual knowingly makes a claim of rape or sexual assault that is untrue, resulting in serious consequences for the person accused.¹² Such accusations can stem from various motives, including personal vendetta, revenge, coercion, or attempts to gain financial or social advantage.¹³ The scope of false rape accusations in India is complex, as these cases not only inflict psychological trauma, reputational harm, and social isolation on the accused, but also erode public trust in genuine survivors and the legal system. Under the new criminal laws, specifically Section 69 of the BNSS,¹⁴ knowingly making a false charge in a court of law is punishable, reflecting the legal system’s commitment

⁸ The Indian Penal Code, 1860.

⁹ Rajesh Rathod, “False Rape Accusations in India: Legal, Sociological, and Technological Perspectives” *ssrn* (November 24, 2024).

¹⁰ *Supra* note 2.

¹¹ *Supra* note 6.

¹² Suruchi Kumari, “What is False Rape Allegations in India: Analysis, Impact, and Solutions” *Legalonus* (September 4, 2024).

¹³ Azhar Ahmad Khan, “Case Study on False Rape Allegation in India” *Theamikusqrae* (2020).

¹⁴ The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

to addressing the misuse of sexual offence provisions. While false accusations remain, a minority compared to genuine cases, their impact is profound, often amplified by media coverage and societal prejudices, leading to stigma and long-term damage for those wrongfully implicated. The challenge lies in balancing the protection of real victims with safeguards against malicious prosecution, ensuring that justice is not only served but also seen to be fair for all parties involved.¹⁵

The Untold Struggles of Men in False Rape Cases

These fake accusations have led to significant suffering for men who become entangled in the criminal justice system due to allegations that are later found to be baseless or motivated by personal vendetta, financial disputes, or failed relationships. The stigma attached to such accusations is profound. Men like Yogesh Gupta have spoken about how even a false allegation can irreparably damage their social standing, personal relationships, and mental well-being, regardless of eventual acquittal.¹⁶ In states like Rajasthan, official data shows that up to 45% of rape cases registered in recent years were found to be false after investigation, highlighting the growing concern over the misuse of stringent laws meant to protect women.¹⁷ The emotional trauma, social ostracisation, and financial hardship faced by the falsely accused can be overwhelming, often leaving scars that persist long after legal exoneration.¹⁸ Media coverage and public perception frequently amplify these challenges, as society tends to judge the accused harshly even before the facts are fully established.¹⁹ Moreover, the high acquittal rates about 74% in rape cases under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code suggest that many men endure lengthy trials and public scrutiny for crimes they did not commit.²⁰ While it is essential to protect genuine survivors of sexual violence, the legal system must also ensure that safeguards are in place to prevent the misuse of laws and to uphold the constitutional rights of

¹⁵ Vaibhav Ojha, "False Rape Complaints Must Be Dealt Harshly: Delhi High Court Warns of Damage to Real Victims" Lawchakra (31 May 2025).

¹⁶ Gupta, Yogesh, "Falsely Accused: My Story," The Times of India, 15 July 2023, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/voices/falsely-accused-my-story/> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

¹⁷ *Times of India*, "45% rape cases registered last year in Rajasthan false DGP Umesh Mishra," 17 January 2023, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/jaipur/45-rape-cases-registered-last-year-in-rajasthan-false-dgp-umesh-mishra/articleshow/97050153.cms> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

¹⁸ Bhava, Ishita, "Life after acquittal The trauma of men falsely accused of rape," The Times of India, 18 October 2022, available at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/life-after-acquittal-the-trauma-of-men-falsely-accused-of-rape/articleshow/94931051.cms> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

¹⁹ Supra note 9.

²⁰ The Economic Times, "Conviction rate for rape cases in India is 26," 27 August 2024, available at <https://economictimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/conviction-rate-for-rape-cases-in-india-is-26-tmcs-abhishek-banerjee-demands-law-ensuring-punishment-within-50-days/articleshow/112829792.cms> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

the accused. The current situation calls for a balanced approach that recognises the pain and injustice suffered by men who are falsely accused, while maintaining robust protections for real victims, so that justice is truly served for all.

Balancing Criminal Penalties with Constitutional Protections in India

The legal framework in India for addressing rape allegations is built upon a careful balance between protecting genuine survivors and safeguarding the rights of those who may be falsely accused, especially men. Sections 63 to 73 of the Act²¹ detail the provisions related to sexual offences, while crucial safeguards for the falsely accused are embedded in sections such as 216, 217, and 229. Section 216 penalises knowingly making a false claim in court, Section 217 addresses false information given to the police, and Section 229 punishes providing false evidence, each carrying significant penalties to deter misuse of the law. Section 356 of the Act further protects reputation by penalising defamation, and Section 528 of the BNSS²² empowers the High Court to quash baseless FIRs or charge sheets when the evidence is insufficient or the complaint is delayed.

In addition to statutory protections, the Indian Constitution²³ enshrines fundamental rights that are vital in cases of false rape accusations. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law, ensuring that men accused of rape are treated fairly and without discrimination. Article 21 protects the right to life and personal liberty, which includes the presumption of innocence and the right to a fair trial, both of which are threatened when false allegations are made. Article 136 provides an avenue for those aggrieved by High Court decisions to seek special leave to appeal before the Supreme Court, offering an additional layer of judicial scrutiny. The Supreme Court has repeatedly recognized that while rape is a grave offence, a false allegation can cause equal distress, humiliation, and damage to the accused, underscoring the necessity of judicial vigilance and procedural fairness in such cases.

The consequences of a false rape accusation against a man can be devastating, leading to social ostracism, loss of livelihood, and irreparable harm to personal dignity and mental health. The law acknowledges that the stigma attached to such allegations persists even after acquittal, making it imperative that legal remedies are accessible and effective for the wrongfully accused. Remedies include seeking compensation for defamation and malicious prosecution, as well as the possibility of quashing false charges at both the High Court and Supreme Court

²¹ The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

²² The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023.

²³ The Constitution of India, 1950.

levels.²⁴ The courts have also emphasised that judges must carefully scrutinise the facts and circumstances of each case, ensuring that the process is not weaponised for personal vendetta or gain.²⁵ Ultimately, the legal and constitutional framework in India is designed to uphold justice for all parties involved in rape allegations. By integrating stringent criminal provisions with fundamental constitutional rights, the system strives to deter false accusations while maintaining robust protections for genuine survivors. This balanced approach not only preserves the integrity of the justice system but also affirms the dignity and rights of those who may otherwise become victims of misuse of law, reflecting the evolving commitment of Indian society to fairness and equality under the law.²⁶

False Accusations: Causes and Consequences

False accusations of rape are a deeply troubling reality that can devastate the lives of those wrongfully accused, while also undermining the pursuit of justice for genuine survivors. The causes behind such false allegations are varied and complex. In some instances, accusations are made out of personal vendetta, anger, or to settle scores, while in others, they may be motivated by the prospect of financial gain, blackmail, or coercion to force a compromise in unrelated disputes.²⁷ There have also been cases where family members, particularly in situations involving eloped couples, have filed complaints to assert control or protect family honour, rather than as a response to actual sexual violence.²⁸ Media coverage and societal narratives can amplify these situations, sometimes encouraging the misuse of legal provisions or shaping public opinion before the facts are fully established.²⁹ The evolving dynamics of relationships, changing social norms, and even pressure from law enforcement or family can contribute to the filing of false complaints, making it a multifaceted issue that extends beyond individual motives.

²⁴ Adv. Darpan Magon, “Remedies Under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) if a Woman Falsely Accuses a Man of the Offence of Rape or Sexual Harassment| New Criminal Laws” Myjudix Remedies under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) if a woman falsely accuses a man of the offence of rape or sexual harassment| New Criminal laws (Last visited at May 31, 2025).

²⁵ “Rape Accused Must Be Protected Against Possibility of False Implication SC”, *Economictimes*, July 09, 2023, available at: <https://legal.economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/litigation/rape-accused-must-be-protected-against-possibility-of-false-implication-sc/102579812> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

²⁶ Susmita Sen, “False Rape Allegations and its Implications on Basic Legal Rights of the Accused” *Jus Corpus Law Journal* (05 January 2023).

²⁷ Sachin Kumar Tripathi, Richa Choudhary, et.al., “Systemic Assessment of Fabricated Injury in Sexual Assault Cases: A Narrative Review” *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research* (May 2023)

²⁸ Geetika Mantri, “What the Data on ‘false Rape Cases’ Doesn’t Tell Us”, *Thenewsminute*, May 05, 2022, available at: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/news/what-data-false-rape-cases-doesn-t-tell-us-163631> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

²⁹ Supra note 9.

The consequences of being falsely accused of rape are profound and often irreversible. Men who are wrongfully accused may suffer severe psychological trauma, social ostracization, and irreparable damage to their reputation and personal relationships. The stigma attached to such allegations persists even after acquittal, with many facing ongoing suspicion and isolation within their communities.³⁰ Financial burdens are another significant consequence, as the accused often must bear the costs of legal defence, which can be overwhelming and life-altering. Loss of employment, public humiliation, and the breakdown of family structures are common, and the emotional toll can lead to long-term mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. These personal hardships are compounded by the slow pace of the justice system, which can prolong the suffering of the falsely accused for years.

On a broader level, false rape accusations have serious implications for society and the justice system. They erode public trust in legal institutions and can make it more difficult for real victims of sexual violence to come forward, fearing disbelief or backlash. The misuse of stringent rape laws can also perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, fuelling further discrimination and tension between men and women. When the legal system is seen as vulnerable to manipulation, it weakens faith in due process and fairness, creating a chilling effect on both genuine complainants and those who might otherwise support them.³¹ The resulting skepticism can discourage reporting of actual crimes and hinder the prosecution of offenders, ultimately harming the broader fight against sexual violence.

Despite the seriousness of false accusations, data from the NCRB indicates that less than 8% of rape cases under investigation in recent years were found to be false, though some local studies have reported higher figures in specific contexts.³² Legal provisions such as Section 216 and Section 217 of the BNS address the act of making false claims and giving false information to authorities, while Section 229 penalises the giving of false evidence.³³ These measures aim to deter malicious prosecution and protect the innocent, but the challenge remains to ensure that the justice system is not misused and that those genuinely wronged by false allegations have access to remedies and support. The need for careful investigation, judicial vigilance, and societal awareness is critical in addressing both the causes and consequences of false rape accusations in India.

³⁰ Joanna Jolly, "Does India Have a Problem with False Rape Claims?", Bbc, Feb. 08, 2017, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-38796457> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

³¹ Supra note 9.

³² Supra note 22.

³³ The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

Notable Recent Instances of False Rape Allegations

Recent years have seen a troubling rise in the number of false rape accusations against men in India, with several notable instances highlighting how these cases can remain unregistered or are later exposed as fabricated before reaching the courts. Data from Delhi district courts between 2021 and 2024 reveals that the conviction rate for rape cases is alarmingly low, at just 4.3%, with a significant portion attributed to complainants turning hostile or withdrawing their statements often indicating that the original allegations may not have been genuine.³⁴ In some instances, women have filed multiple rape complaints against different individuals for personal gain or revenge, as seen in the case of a 64-year-old former Army officer. The Supreme Court quashed the FIR against him after it was discovered that the complainant had filed eight other similar complaints in various police stations, exposing a pattern of serial false accusations.

There are also examples where men have been acquitted after courts found the allegations to be baseless, with Delhi courts recently ordering legal action against women who filed fake cases. These cases often do not get formally registered as “fake” in police records, as the system rarely initiates perjury or false complaint proceedings unless the court specifically directs it. In another prominent case, a Delhi film director was granted bail by the High Court after the complainant admitted to fabricating the accusation, prompting the court to warn that such misuse of law must be dealt with harshly to protect innocent individuals.³⁵ Beyond the courtroom, several men have recounted how false allegations were used as tools for extortion, blackmail, or to gain leverage in personal disputes, but these cases frequently remain unregistered or are quietly dropped during police investigation due to lack of evidence or the complainant withdrawing the complaint.³⁶ The National Crime Records Bureau data and investigative reports also point to a pattern where many complaints are filed under pressure from families or to extract financial settlements, but are never pursued to trial, thus escaping official statistics on fake cases. These examples underline the urgent need for robust safeguards and investigative diligence to ensure that men are not victimized by the misuse of stringent sexual offence laws. The psychological, social, and financial consequences for those falsely accused are severe, and the lack of accountability for false complaints further exacerbates the

³⁴ Vineet Upadhyay, “Hostile Witnesses, False Complaints: Delhi’s Rape Conviction Rate at 4.3%”, Times of India, May 19, 2025, available at: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/hostile-witnesses-false-complaintsdelhis-rape-conviction-rate-at-4-3/articleshow/121253183.cms> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

³⁵ Supra note 15.

³⁶ Khan Mohammad Obaida, “Weaponisation of Rape Laws Against Men in India: A Complex Legal & Societal Issue” Voice for Men India (Mar 28, 2024), *write 4 long paras of introduction in simple and formal language which is...* (Last visited at June 1, 2025).

problem. Courts and legal experts continue to call for stricter penalties and better mechanisms to identify and deter fake accusations, ensuring that justice is not only served for genuine survivors but also for those wrongfully implicated.

Judicial Response to False Allegations of Rape

In recent years, Indian courts have shown increasing awareness and sensitivity towards the devastating impact of false rape allegations, especially on the lives and reputations of the accused. The judiciary has recognised that while it is crucial to protect genuine survivors of sexual violence, it is equally important to prevent the criminal justice system from being misused for personal vendetta or ulterior motives. The Supreme Court, in several landmark judgments, has set aside criminal proceedings where it found that the allegations were malicious, fabricated, or lacked substantive evidence. For instance, in a notable 2025 decision, the Supreme Court quashed an FIR against a Non-Resident Indian who faced multiple rape accusations from a woman after he withdrew a marriage proposal. The Court observed that the prosecution was a “travesty of justice,” highlighting the complainant's manipulative and vindictive behaviour, as revealed through WhatsApp chats and her history of filing similar complaints against others. The bench emphasised that continuing such a prosecution would be unjust, and described the FIR as a bundle of lies, full of fabricated and unsubstantiated allegations.³⁷

Similarly, the judiciary has repeatedly cautioned against equating failed relationships or long-term consensual partnerships with sexual exploitation under the false pretext of marriage. In another recent Supreme Court judgment, the Court quashed rape charges against a bank official accused by his live-in partner of 16 years, stating that it was difficult to believe that the complainant could have been coerced for such a prolonged period without protest. The Court clarified that not every case of a soured relationship should be given the colour of a criminal offence, and warned against the growing tendency to resort to criminal proceedings when personal relationships break down.³⁸ In yet another case, the Supreme Court set aside a rape prosecution against a former judge, reiterating that consensual relationships, even those involving promises of marriage, cannot automatically be framed as rape if both parties were aware of each other's circumstances and entered the relationship willingly.³⁹

³⁷ Batlanki Keshav (Kesava) Kumar Anurag v. State of Telangana & Anr, 2025 INSC 386.

³⁸ Ravish Singh Rana v. State of Uttarakhand & Anr., 2025 INSC 635.

³⁹ Apoorva, “Consensual Relationships, Where Possibility of Marriage May Exist, Cannot Be Given a Colour of False Pretext to Marry After Fall Out”; SC Quashes Rape Case Against Former Judge”, SCCOnline, Apr. 11,

Recent cases further demonstrate the court's determination to uphold justice and prevent the misuse of rape laws. For example, in *Bilkis Yakub Rasool v. Union of India*,⁴⁰ the Supreme Court quashed the Gujarat government's order to release convicts in a high-profile rape and murder case, reaffirming the judiciary's intolerance for any compromise on justice in sexual violence cases. In another notable 2024 case, the Supreme Court took suo moto cognizance of the brutal rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata,⁴¹ forming a national safety task force and ordering enhanced security for healthcare workers. While these cases primarily focused on ensuring justice for victims, they also highlighted the court's vigilance in demanding thorough investigations and fair trials, regardless of public pressure or media scrutiny. Such judgments reveal a judicial ethos that values careful scrutiny of evidence, protection of due process, and a balanced approach that neither allows the law to be weaponised for personal vendetta nor lets genuine grievances go unaddressed. The courts' insistence on fairness and accountability helps maintain public trust in the legal system, ensuring that both the rights of the accused and the dignity of survivors are respected.

International Best Practices in Prosecuting False Accusations

A comparative look at how different countries handle false allegations of rape reveals a range of legal approaches and important lessons for reform. In the United Kingdom, individuals making false rape accusations can be prosecuted for perverting the course of justice, a serious offence that carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. Notable cases like *R v Beale*⁴² and *R v Eleanor Williams*⁴³ resulted in substantial prison terms for those who repeatedly made false allegations, with courts emphasizing the grave harm such actions cause not only to the falsely accused but also to genuine victims, who may be discouraged from coming forward due to fear of disbelief or backlash. Similarly, in Botswana, Section 168B of the Penal Code⁴⁴ specifically criminalizes knowingly making false or misleading allegations of sexual offences, with penalties of up to five years in prison. During legislative debates, some lawmakers even argued for penalties equal to those for rape itself, recognizing the severe

2025, available at: <https://www.scconline.com/blog/post/2025/04/11/sc-quashes-rape-case-former-judge-consensual-relationship/> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

⁴⁰ (2016) 7 SCC 1.

⁴¹ In Re: Safeguarding Healthcare Workers and Justice for the R.G. Kar Medical College Incident, Suo Moto Writ Petition (Criminal) No. 58 of 2024.

⁴² [2017] EWCA 1012 (Crim).

⁴³ "Eleanor Williams Sentencing: Men Tried to Take Own Lives Over Rape Lies", *bbc*, Mar. 13, 2023, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-cumbria-64943465> (last visited on June 2, 2025).

⁴⁴ Botswana Laws, Act 27 of 2021.

consequences that false accusations can have on a person's life and reputation. Kenya also has laws that impose penalties for false sexual offence accusations, sometimes matching the punishment for the original alleged crime. In contrast, Zambia treats false rape reports as misdemeanours, with much lighter sentences, highlighting the diversity in global legal responses.⁴⁵

International best practices suggest several areas where Indian laws could be strengthened to better address the problem of false rape accusations. For example, the UK's approach of prosecuting false accusers under serious offences like perverting the course of justice sends a strong deterrent message and underscores the seriousness of the harm caused.⁴⁶ Botswana's law makes it clear that the prosecution must prove beyond reasonable doubt that the allegation was knowingly false, and that an acquittal alone does not automatically mean the complaint was fabricated this protects genuine survivors from being penalized for cases that fail due to lack of evidence.⁴⁷ Additionally, experts recommend that police and prosecutors follow strict investigative guidelines before labelling a complaint as false, including thorough documentation and actual evidence of fabrication, as outlined by the International Association of Chiefs of Police. Public education campaigns in several countries have also helped clarify the distinction between false accusations and acquittals, reducing the risk that genuine victims are deterred from reporting.⁴⁸ Drawing from these examples, India could consider introducing clearer statutory provisions specifically targeting false rape accusations, adopting stringent penalties for proven malicious complaints, and implementing mandatory investigative protocols to ensure fairness for both complainants and the accused. These changes would not only protect the rights of the falsely accused but also strengthen the credibility and integrity of the justice system as a whole.

⁴⁵ Baboki Jonathan Dambe, "A Double-Edged Sword? the Criminalization of False Rape Accusations in Botswana" 45 Academic.Oup (16 March 2024).

⁴⁶ United Kingdom, Crown Prosecution Service, "Perverting the Course of Justice and Wasting Police Time in Cases Involving Allegedly False Allegations," available at <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/perverting-course-justice-and-wasting-police-time-cases-involving-allegedly-false> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

⁴⁷ Supra note 40.

⁴⁸ International Association of Chiefs of Police, "Sexual Assault Response Policy and Training Content Guidelines," (2017), available at <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/all/i-j/IACP%20Sexual%20Assault%20Response%20Policy%20and%20Training%20Content%20Guidelines.2017.3.23.pdf> (last accessed June 2, 2025).

Challenges in Proving False Allegations

- i. Gathering concrete evidence to prove that an allegation is false is extremely challenging, as these cases often rely on conflicting personal testimonies rather than clear physical proof.
- ii. Investigators must show not just that the rape did not occur, but that the accuser knowingly made a false claim, which requires a high standard of proof and careful scrutiny of motives and circumstances.
- iii. Sometimes, complainants withdraw or change their statements for reasons unrelated to the truth of the allegation, making it difficult to distinguish between a false report and a genuine case with insufficient evidence.
- iv. Social stigma and the sensitive nature of sexual assault cases can discourage thorough investigation, as authorities may fear being seen as unsupportive of victims if they question the veracity of a complaint.
- v. Courts are cautious in labelling a case as a false allegation, since a mere acquittal or lack of evidence does not automatically prove that the original claim was fabricated.
- vi. Mistaken identity or miscommunication can lead to wrongful accusations, but unless deliberate intent to deceive is established, these are not treated as false allegations under the law.
- vii. The emotional and psychological complexities involved often make it hard for investigators to challenge the complainant's account without risking further trauma or public backlash, complicating the pursuit of truth in such cases.

Conclusion

False rape accusations in India present a deeply complex challenge, impacting not only the individuals involved but also the broader trust in the justice system and the fight against genuine sexual violence. These accusations often arise from personal disputes, misunderstandings, or, in some cases, deliberate attempts to harm another person's reputation or gain leverage in unrelated conflicts. The consequences for those falsely accused are severe ranging from social stigma and emotional trauma to loss of livelihood and long-term damage to personal relationships. At the same time, the prevalence of such cases can erode public faith in real survivors, making it harder for them to come forward and seek justice. The legal system in India, while equipped with provisions to penalize false evidence and malicious prosecution, still faces significant challenges in distinguishing between genuine and fabricated complaints,

especially given the sensitive and private nature of most sexual offence allegations. There is a growing call for reforms that include clearer investigative protocols, gender-neutral frameworks, and support mechanisms for both genuine victims and the falsely accused. Addressing false rape accusations requires not only legal safeguards and judicial vigilance but also greater societal awareness to reduce stigma, ensure fairness, and uphold the integrity of the justice system for everyone involved.

Suggestions

1. Laws should be strictly enforced to penalize those who knowingly file false rape accusations, ensuring that proven malicious complaints result in real consequences for the accuser.
2. Gender-neutral legislation is needed so that all individuals, regardless of gender, are equally protected from false allegations and can seek justice on fair terms
3. Fast-track courts should be established to handle cases of false rape accusations, reducing the emotional and financial burden on the falsely accused by ensuring timely resolution.
4. Police and judicial officers must receive specialized training and sensitization to identify, investigate, and handle false complaints with fairness and empathy for both parties.
5. A statutory body dedicated to addressing men's rights and grievances, similar to the National Commission for Women, should be created to provide support and policy recommendations.
6. Legal provisions should require thorough investigation and corroboration before an accusation leads to arrest, protecting innocent individuals from unnecessary detention and stigma.
7. Public awareness campaigns are essential to educate society about the serious consequences of false accusations and the importance of upholding justice for both victims and the accused.
8. Compensation and rehabilitation mechanisms should be in place for those proven to be falsely accused, helping them recover from reputational, emotional, and financial harm caused by the false allegation.

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