

An Analysis of Liquor Ban Policy in Bihar and its impact on Coalition Politics

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Abstract

Nitish Kumar had vowed to boycott the utilisation of liquor in the state if reappointed as the Chief Minister in the state assembly elections of Bihar. One of the points was to control aggressive behaviour of male members at home, regularly connected with excessive drinking. After he cleared the races and accepted his third successive term as the head of the State, Kumar declared forbiddance of alcohol in the state.

This decision significantly impacted the state's economy, an undeniable consequence. Apart from this, various other social aspects surfaced as a challenge for the incumbent government. The liquor prohibition policy impacted the voting pattern, giving the Chief Minister an upper edge as he ideated the policy and affirmed its sustainability. Still, the viability of the coalition was also put to the test. One amusing aspect was that the alliance, known as Mahagathbandhan, which were in place while formulating this Prohibition act, could not sustain for even the next two years, and the coalition changed. Still, the position of Chief Minister remained constant. As a result, now the parties who were favouring and opposing the prohibition act got altered, and seemingly the changed variability is in place with their position following the compliances of the coalition.

The policy has a significant impact on the politics of Bihar, and the effect can be seen on the surface between the parties in the coalition. Therefore, the effect of the policy on state politics has also been analysed, along with the consideration of all the factors associated with it. The result will help us analyse the policy's success and its viability in the future.

Keywords: Prohibition, Coalition, Economy, Voting behaviour, Alcohol, Administration

Background:

Nitish Kumar is in power for the third consecutive term, starting his first tenure in 2006. In this term, boosting finances, he came up with a liberal policy for the state's liquor economy and allowed the opening up of liquor shops in every panchayat (MN, 2022). The Bihar government had permitted liquor stores in every panchayat after having a surplus amount generated by the urban areas angering rural women who claimed that they were regularly molested by drunken men, especially after dark. Then, in December 2012, the woman of Konar, a nondescript village 12 km away from Sasaram, discovered that even young lads were addicted to liquor out of pouches strewn everywhere. In the early phase of that month, a college student was attacked and brutally gang-raped in Delhi. The village women belonging to the marginalised society got very fearful of such violent crimes as the news surfaced Konar. So the women galvanised themselves and organised groups and protested the march for a ban on the sale of liquor (Swaroop, 2020).

Social groups such as Pragatisheel Mahila Manch (PMM), which uses online platforms for promoting women against alcoholism, stated that liquor was one of the key factors and reasons behind the gang-rape episode in Delhi. On receiving numerous complaints by the rural women who were the victim of domestic violence and eve-teasing, the self-help group decided to march and fight for the cause of prohibition of liquor.

The movement of Konar gained momentum and spread all across the states. Women across cities and villages got the support of social activists, and the demonstration surfaced on the streets and even political meetings with the constant demand for liquor prohibition. Local women believed that the state government's policy to issue permission liberally for liquor shops in every panchayat had ruined the youth and children (Swaroop, 2020).

The Liquor Ban Policy, 2016:

The demand for the prohibition on liquor was one of the critical factors of the 2015 Assembly election of Bihar and cherry on the cake for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar (Swaroop, 2020). Gujrat, Mizoram, Nagaland and Lakshadweep were earlier birds to initiate a liquor ban rule in India. Bihar followed after an announcement from Chief Minister Nitish Kumar declared Bihar to be a dry-state on April 1, 2016. The stringent laws in Bihar introduced a five-year jail term for first-time offenders, but later on. Still, later many Nitish Kumar introduced an amendment in 2018, relaxing the norms to a hefty fine for the first-time offenders (MN, 2022). Five years since the announcement and in the run-up to the state Assembly election, we will explore the impact of prohibition on Bihar's people and economy. Kumar received heavy votes from women in the recent elections to the Bihar legislative assembly, and he wants to consolidate this vote bank. After Nitish Kumar came back to power with a

new alliance with RJD under Mahagathbandhan, they quickly instituted measures such as 35% reservation for women in state government jobs and panchayat bodies and complimentary bicycles and school dresses to girls. With the advent of the Liquor ban policy in Bihar in 2016, all processes of the sale and storage of liquor were ultimately restricted (Swaroop, 2020). Nitish Kumar knew that he was in command even though the JDU was the junior partner in the Mahagathbandhan collation. As Lalu Prasad Yadav has a solid vote bank of Yadavs and Muslims, Nitish Kumar wants to secure a women vote bank for himself. The prohibition of liquor was welcomed very warmly by women across the state. Nitish Kumar has always focussed on women votes through empowerment schemes such as cycles for girls and increasing the reservation for women to 50 per cent in the police and local bodies. (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015)

Down the line, when the assembly election comes around, the women of Konar are pretty gloomy and ambivalent about the impact of their movement. But, on the other hand, they are thriving because the illicit liquor mafia has undermined the achievements of their campaign.

According to one key campaigner of the anti-liquor protests, a woman claimed that though the spending on liquor came down to a great extent after the prohibition, things are still back to square one now, albeit illegally. The claim was that the ban has remained only on paper, considering liquor smuggling to be rampant.

A quick insight on the history of the success of the Liquor ban policy:

The historical development establishes that Prohibition in India has met with only partial success. The liquor ban experiment has been implemented by many states and then repealed. Haryana implemented the prohibition on liquor in 1996 by the Bansi Lal-led Haryana Vikas Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party government. The ban was repealed in 1998 after the state government had lost Rs 1,200 crore in revenue. Similarly, N T Ramarao imposed a ban in 1995 in Andhra Pradesh (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015). Ultimately, the government soon realised it couldn't fulfil its other promises - cheap rice and electricity - without the alcohol revenue. In 1996, after NTR died and his son-in-law, Chandrababu Naidu, took over as the chief minister. He concluded that illicit brewing had increased 20 to 30 times after the prohibition. Recently, Mizoram also repealed its 17-year-old ban. Manipur and Nagaland also contemplated doing away with the ban on alcohol. Gujarat is the only state that has remarkably successfully implemented prohibition consistently since the 1960s (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015).

The road for the Bihar liquor ban was not a cupcake. Nitish Kumar implemented the Liquor Ban, stating that there would be "complete prohibition" in Bihar as one of his political masterstrokes. The idea was to be backed by the support of neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and West Bengal to make it a success. However, these states were not very much pleased with the cause but saw this as an opportunity for earning revenue from the cross border customers. The same is reminiscent of 1996 when Punjab did little to help Haryana prevent alcohol sales. Similar incidents were witnessed in Gujarat, where shops proliferate near the districts sharing a border (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015).

Moreover, Bihar shares a porous border with Nepal, manned by Sashastra Seema Bal's central government. So tipplers are likely to troop into Nepal, have their fill and come back. So the Bihar government's loss will be Nepal's gain.

We shall proceed to consider each factor:

(1) Voting Behaviour:

As per the statement from the former director of AN Sinha Institute for Social Studies, he claimed that Nitish only got support from rural women. When he announced prohibition, women from the middle and upper class were not with him. By then, even the women of villages who were quite vocal for the cause of the liquor ban got too reluctant by seeing a colossal number of male members getting unemployed and helpless in finding alternative jobs.

A renowned Professor from Patna University claimed in her statement that the enthusiasm of women voters visible in 2015 was much less by the time then. Undoubtedly, the silent women voters were one of the concrete factors behind the victory of Nitish Kumar, who even outnumbered men in the voting process as a mark of gratification of this law. However, this was quite a transitory period. Not very late, they realised the mistake and breach of trust as the headlines of illicit practise of the sale of liquor surfaced the news channels.

The data shows that in more than 1/8th of the total constituencies, women voters crossed the benchmark 70% (Swaroop, 2020).

(2) Revenue and State Economics:

The data shows the tax collected by Bihar from Indian-made foreign liquor (MN, 2022).

Year	Liquor	Tax Collected (in Crores)	Rise
2005-2006	IMFL	Rs. 87.18	
2014-2015	IMFL	Rs. 1,777	1,938%

Table 1: Comparison of tax collected by Bihar from Indian-made foreign liquor

The Economic Survey of 2016 states that Bihar made over Rs. 3,100 crore in 2014-15 from the sale of liquor through excise duty (MN, 2022). As per the survey, the budgeted estimate for 2015-16 was Rs 4,000 crore. Since then, the state has lost all potential revenue from alcohol sales.

CM Nitish Kumar established the Bihar State Beverages Corporation in 2006 to perform the following functions:

- (1) to offer lucrative prices to the suppliers
- (2) ensure availability of liquor at affordable prices
- (3) maintain buffer stock and control
- (4) price stabilisation as a critical factor

These steps gave the state's finances a considerable boost-up (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015).

Year	Liquor	State Revenue (in Crores)	Contribution in Tax-Revenue
2004-2005	IMFL	Rs. 272	08.15 %
2013-2014	IMFL	Rs. 3,300	15.60 %

Table 2: Contribution of State tax revenue collected by Bihar from IMFL

(3) Per Capita Expenditure:

The per capita expenditure on alcohol according to the estimates is shown below-

State/Region	Per Capita Expenditure (in INR)
India	35.00
Bihar	15.50
Andhra Pradesh	173.00
Kerala	80.85
Punjab	72.00

Table 3 Comparison of per capita expenditure on liquor by Indian States.

The all India average stands double that of Bihar.

However, the scenario completely changes when the per capita expenditure on alcohol is made accountable to the per capita income. Bihar places at the 12th position out of the 29 states and Delhi (Kaushal & Mishra, 2015). The ban may be lousy economics with uncertain social results, but it is smart politics.

Lalu Prasad often accuses Kumar of promoting alcohol sales indiscriminately in Bihar. However, legal consumption of alcohol did rise in Bihar during Kumar's tenure.

(4) Seizures of Alcohol:

Over 3.46 lakh individuals have been captured for alcohol boycott infringement in the State until February this year since the restriction law came into power in 2016. Almost 5,000 had been arrested outside Bihar, exceptionally in Punjab Haryana and Jharkhand.

(5) Seizure:

During the most recent five years, 15,000 vehicles got seized. Since alcohol was restricted in Bihar, upwards of 2,55,111 cases identified with the new disallowance, laws have been held up, and 3.46 lakh individuals have been captured in the State till February 2021. According to the extract office, up to 1.4 million litres of this seized alcohol was a nation made and over 1.6 million litres unfamiliar made.

If that is the alcohol they have figured out how to seize, one can hardly comprehend the sum streaming consistently through Bihar.

(6) Police Dismissals:

Further, 186 police workforce and different authorities excuses, while 60 station house officials (SHOs) have been restricted from posting at police headquarters. In October 2018, two police persons were captured for selling the alcohol they had seized. Fifty-two police authorities have confronted requests for being in cahoots with smugglers, as per the extract office records we got to. Thirty-six have been suspended, and others face legal trials (MN, 2020).

(7) Tourism:

Further, Nitish Kumar denied any drop in the inflow of unfamiliar and homegrown travellers because of preclusion and said their number had expanded by 21%, somewhere in the range of 2015 and 2019. Again, however, the facts seem to appear as an illusion.

(8) Land and stamp obligation:

Kumar claimed that the expense assortment from the enlistment of land and stamp obligation has stayed consistent as 77% of the objective diversity worth Rs3,617 crore has been met.

(9) Demise:

Many people have died in cases related to burning-through misleading alcohol in various parts of Bihar, including the villages and outskirts of town. Few such events occurred in Kharidi-Bigha town under Bhadauni panchayat of Nawada locale, Godhiyari town of Bakhri block in Begusarai area and many others in the list. The kids, youth, and even the older people drank spurious country-made alcohol and suffered illness and deaths in most cases. In the wake of devouring fake alcohol cases on the rise, politicians play the blame game, but definitely, no one can excuse the death due to country-made alcohol.

(10) Domestic Violence Fall: WHO Report

A report from World Health Organization channelises that it is one of the harsh truth behind intimate partner crimes even at extreme levels. "The fact sheet out is based on the study from the countries Chile, Egypt, India and the Philippines. It claims that regular alcohol consumption by the partner makes life vulnerable to violence across all four study countries."

To a better prospect, the resultant outcome of liquor prohibition by Bihar is a 37% fall in domestic violence cases related to 498A of the Indian Penal Code that is cruelty by husband and in-laws (MN, 2022). In contrast, the crime rate – or cases per 100,000 women dropped by 45%. Countrywide, claims rose 1-2% during the same period, and the crime rate rose 3%.

In Bihar, Cases Of Domestic Violence Fell 37% In 4 Years

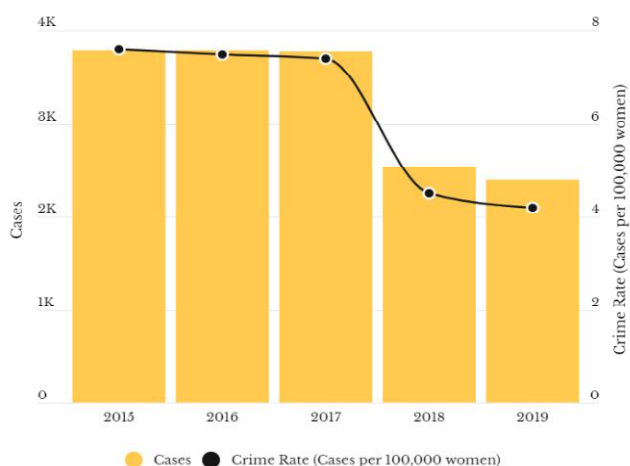


Figure 1 depicting trends in domestic violence cases in Bihar (2015-2019).

Source: Crime in India reports for 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, National Crime Records Bureau.

Issues associated with the Prohibition Laws:

(1) Parallel Economy:

The ban was made ineffective by the people themselves who got unemployed due to the liquor ban. The government failed to provide better employment alternatives for such people, and hence the impact of the liquor ban turned hostile. The illegal and illicit trade of liquor from the cross border started generating huge finances for the people, and black-marketing rose to heights. Thus, a parallel economy started playing a role. A parallel of illicit liquor trade is flourishing in Bihar, even as the state loses revenue from alcohol sales.

(2) Pushed consumption of Local hooch and drugs:

The police crackdown on prohibition violators has also disproportionately affected the marginalised sections of society. The liquor ban became a gold-digging opportunity for the bootleggers selling the alcohol at very high prices due to the high demands. The ones who can afford it are enjoying it at higher prices, but the poor section has been pushed to alternatives of hooch and drugs, which are relatively cheaper and readily available. The action of the police crackdown can easily witness a heavy impact on the finances of the oppressed and marginalised (MN, 2022). Easy availability of hooch and local drugs through cross border states and even Nepal had played a significant factor.

(3) Law and Order issue and not a social:

The issue with executing the forbiddance in Bihar is that liquor abuse is being managed as peace and lawfulness but not a social issue. The state might have set aside some effort to accomplish more open mindfulness crusades, counselled applicable partners, set up de-fixation focuses, etc

- a) Public Awareness Campaign
- b) Consulted relevant stakeholders

- c) De-addiction centres _ no workdays for poor hampering economy
- d) A support system to seek rehabilitation
- e) Hefty fines are not affordable; loans lead to more consecutive debt
- f) State Revenue converted to floating Black Money
- g) Marginalised are disproportionately affected
- h) Careers and not Businessman gets arrested

(4) Administrative connivance

The straightforwardness with which the business is continuing would be unimaginable without the association of the state's law requirement organisations asserted a few smugglers in an interview with correspondent

(a) Rodents polished seized liquor:

In May 2017, the Bihar police guaranteed that rodents had polished off 900,000 litres of liquor seized from people in general. This was not to be a genuine excuse that surfaced every news channel mocking the work style of Police officials, but nothing concrete could come out.

(b) No business without Involvement of Law Enforcement agencies:

A heavy consignment of IMFL and country-made liquor was confiscated in four years. The Police often hired road rollers to smash liquor bottles. But experts warned that only a tiny fraction of the smuggled liquor got seized. Allegations of bottles disappearing from police godowns became common. One such instance came in 2018 where Police in the Kaimur district of Bihar claimed that rats drank 11,000 litres of confiscated liquor (Swaroop, 2020).

The factor as mentioned above was claimed due to the following reasons:

- o Trucks carrying alcohols were emptied in observation of Police
- o Police officials were set down for not to do patrolling at fixed timings
- o Bribery is an easy escape route for illegal traders
- o It was also claimed by some smugglers that Police officials confiscated half amount and used it to release the rest for sale
- o Hideouts in villages with the help of villagers
- o School and College going students are readily available carriers
- o Police station as safe house and store in case of liquors out of stock from the open market.

(c) Heavily deployed Police for this act engraved their workability:

As per data from 2016-2020 (MN, 2020), the law implementation organisations have directed 488,450 strikes, capturing 67,367 individuals, information from the extract division show. The most significant number of strikes, 120,481, were in 2017 when 21,292 individuals were arrested.

(5) Patna High Court clogged of cases

In an unprecedented incident of 2019, the Patna High Court dug out the Bihar government for obstructing the courts, with more than 2 00 000 cases identified with the alcohol boycott (MN, 2020). Already baffled by so many pending cases, the judiciary got too clogged with more liquor-related issues.

Reports claimed that lower caste people were arrested when surveyed in Jail.

(6) Bihar government proposes new amendments to seal houses for storing illegal liquor (Sharma, 2021)

Nitish Govt. implemented a very stringent rule to make the Liquor ban policy successful in Bihar by proposing to seal warehouses or any other premises used for storage, production, sale or import and export liquor in Bihar. In addition to this, if an individual uses a house section for storage or area for alcohol consumption (House Bar), the state government will seal that portion and put it on for public auction. (IANS, 2021)

Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016: An amendment was passed by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in which he proposed that vehicles laden with liquor and its manufacturing materials, such as cars which are using the roads of Bihar, will have to go outside the state within 24 hours even if it has to cross the state for transition. Moreover, the vehicles carrying liquor and its constituent materials must be declared and notified of the nature of the material while entering the territory of Bihar. The state authority will digitally keep data of it and the timing of the vehicles' entry. (IANS, 2021)

The reaction by different Political Parties observing Liquor Ban:

Janta Dal United:

The JDU, led by Chief Minister and party president Mr Nitish Kumar decided on a Liquor ban following the demands of rural women during the 2015 State assembly elections. The party members and legislators supported the decision, taking into cognisance the requests of women and the plight of domestic violence, which hit the rural areas. The decision was taken by JDU just after the General Elections of 2014 when BJP projected Narendra Damodardas Modi as the PM candidate (Singh, 2013), to which Nitish Kumar was personally not in favour. This clash surfaced just before the State Assembly election of Bihar in 2015 when Nitish Kumar changed the long-time coalition with NDA and moved into a new alliance with Mahagathbandhan.

Mahagathbandhan was a greater alliance of Congress, RJD, VIP and the newly formed HAM party. The coalition succeeded in the name of Nitish Kumar and good governance, which followed his agenda in Bihar from the last two consecutive terms. RJD under Lalu Prasad was the second major party in this coalition, and Tejaswi Yadav was given the government lead. The decision of liquor ban got support from the alliance members of Mahagathbandhan, which wanted to polarise the women votes count and the previous Nitish Kumar tenure got the upper hand. The ban continued in Bihar, but the coalition changed again, and even the stakeholders with the changing time.

Rashtriya Janta Dal:

The RJD had been quite popular in the rural domain since its 15 years of rule in state politics. The Muslim-Yadav votes polarisation and the messiah figure of Lalu Yadav was a key factor for Mahagathbandhan to resume back power in the 2015 state assembly elections under the lead in the name of Nitish Kumar. RJD supported the liquor prohibition, and they were pretty hopeful that the coalition partners would remain intact for a full five-year term. However, the aspiration of RJD leaders and their statement of projecting Tejaswi Yadav as the next CM surfaced in public and media. The inner turmoil could not sustain for long, and as a result, the coalition broke in 2017, just within two years of collaboration. JDU broke the alliance with Mahagathbandhan and resumed its partnership with NDA.

After the defeat of Mahagathbandhan in the 2020 elections, the anonymity between RJD and JDU grew too coarse, and RJD is now in demand of lifting a ban from alcohol.

Congress:

The Congress, which had a commanding position in the early post-Independence period in Bihar, got to diminish its bases under the effect of regional parties. As a result, the party got limited to a supportive party in the coalition. No major decision was left for it, even in seat-sharing and portfolios in state government. One major issue in the party also relates to the State Leadership, which has been in a mess in the past few years, and no such Presidentship could sustain a tenure. Congress, an alliance partner in 2015, supported the Liquor prohibition, but recently the party seems to be divided on the issue.

While Congress legislature party leader Ajit Kumar Sharma asked Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to withdraw the prohibition, his party colleague and MLA from Katihar Shakil Ahmad Khan demanded strict anti-liquor laws.

Bhartiya Janta Party:

The National Democratic Alliance was the coalition of all the parties against Congress. BJP was the leading alliance in this coalition and carried the partnership in all states. In Bihar, JDU was the critical alliance of NDA, and after RJD was ousted from power, it came into state assembly with Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister. Everything was in place until 2014, but just before the General Election of 2014, JDU broke the alliance with NDA in a shocking move.

In 2015, BJP was ousted from power in the state as the Mahagathbandhan got the power, but the leadership of Nitish Kumar in the new coalition continued. However, with the renewal of the alliance in 2017, when JDU got back to NDA and BJP resumed state politics. Since 2017, BJP has been backing the Liquor ban policy following the norms of the coalition and is seen defending the state government whenever required.

Hindustan Awam Morcha:

The new party created by Jitan Ram Manjhi, Ex-CM of Bihar and once a core member of JDU, has always been critical of this liquor ban since its advent. While an ally and part of Mahagathbandhan during 2015-2017, Manjhi was not very pleased with this policy and highlighted the issues that were to come to the surface for the lower caste people, especially his community.

However, cognisance of the speculated reports of hooch deaths, former CM minister Jitan Ram Manjhi proposed that "a new mechanism" was needed to prohibit Bihar effectively. Manjhi, who has always been critical of this law, was a little soft when he said despite all efforts to implement the ban, the result is not fruitful. Even after changing coalition and now again being a partner in NDA the alliance, the stand of Manjhi is consistently critical for this law.

Conclusion:

In any case, this misfortune ought to be compared against the reserve funds the state makes as far as decreased medical care and peace and lawfulness costs, just as fewer occasions of aggressive behaviour at home. The monetary misfortune should be found regarding social expense. When you check out the miniature view, you see the financial trouble. Yet, one needs to factor in the cash you spend on lawfulness and well-being due to alcohol. It additionally prompts brutality against ladies. However, the facts confirm that the alcohol boycott has also started debasement, with an equal economy coming up in Bihar.

Another major factor that affected the implementation of the liquor ban policy was the stakeholders, who were the major key players. The procedure only considered the economic elements when observing, whereas the social part was only on papers. As a result, the ban was not handled as a social issue, but the finances surrounding it grabbed the attention of all. We also see how the prohibition policy was mishandled by the large section of

people who got unemployed by the act, and the state somewhat failed to provide a justified alternative. As a result, the parallel economy started circulating, which was workable in practicality, but the state lost the actual finances. Administrative connivance, the overlogging cases burdening the workload of the judiciary, stringent laws of rigorous imprisonment and hefty fines by the state government which resulted in huge debts on defaulters from lower-income groups, the impact on caste-based jobs in rural and outskirts areas where the country made liquor is a part of daily routine life. Various others have been studied in detail so that the viability of the liquor prohibition policy could be well examined.

If that is the alcohol they have figured out how to seize, one can hardly comprehend the sum streaming consistently through Bihar. The intention of the state government to bring this law is associated with their excellent sense of reducing domestic violence, increasing the workforce's productivity, cutting out the monthly expenses of low-income families on liquor, shaping them for a better future. Still, the implementation of the liquor prohibition facility has its negative consequences as well. So, considering all the concerning facts, the government should keep such points at priority and address them in their entirety.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Data are for cases under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code which reads as “*Husband or relative of husband of a woman subjecting her to cruelty.—Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to cruelty shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation.—For the purpose of this section, “cruelty” means—*
(a) any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health (whether mental or physical) of the woman; or
(b) harassment of the woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security or is on account of failure by her or any person related to her to meet such demand.”

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