

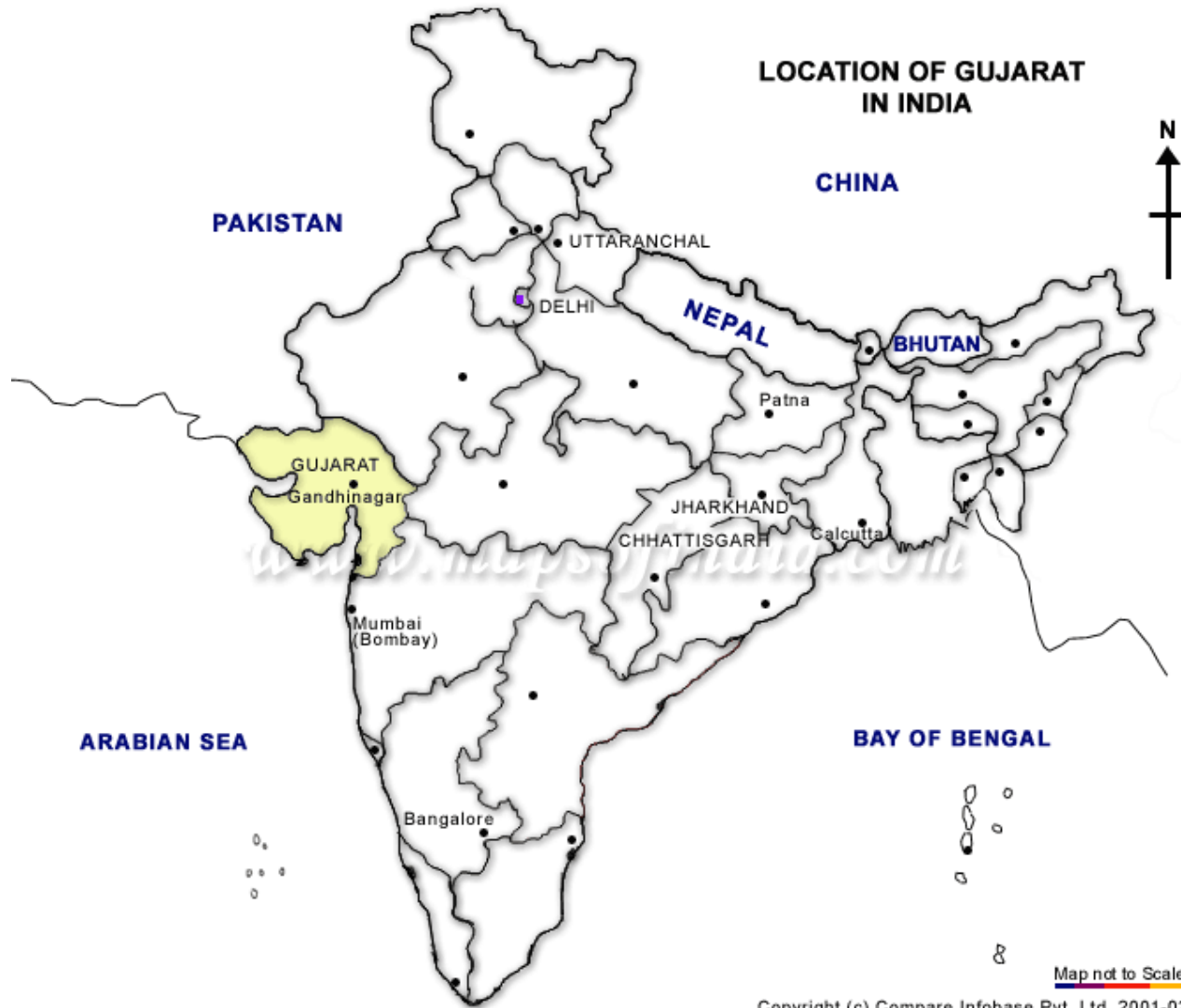
**DEAD OR ALIVE ?  
THE EFFECTS OF  
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND  
ITS AFTERMATH ON THE  
MENTAL HEALTH OF  
VICTIM-SURVIVORS.**

Shazneen Commissariat Limjerwala,  
India  
PhD, Institute for Health research, Lancaster  
University, UK.

# Research Aim

To understand a victim's experience following rape.

# Setting





# Methodology

Ethnography

Phased Fieldwork

NGO

Medico-legal

Social

Data

Interviews

Conversations

Observations

Researcher diary



# Durga's Story

# Medico-legal: In the hospital...

Examination vs Treatment

Delay

Indifference

*“Rape victims are not the priority in gynaec ward because they are not a case of life and death.”*

(AN, Gynaecologist, Civil Hospital)

Prejudices

*“She could have run away with someone because of unsatisfactory sexual relations and then this could have happened. She could have tried committing suicide herself.”*

(Gynaecologist, who examined Durga)



# Social: In the family...

Decision makers

Support

Shame

*“You can die if you like, but you should not affect your family honour.”*

(Bhavana, rape victim's uncle to her)



# With the NGO...

## Support

*“She would hold my hand that please be with me. I used to give her strength that she has to fight the case.”*

(NGO worker P, who supported a rape victim as she went through the filing of police complaint and medical examination.)

## Conflicting Agendas



# Understanding a rape victim

## *Context*

*Family Samaj*

*Geography*

*Socio-Economic status*

*Marital Status*

*Education Exposure*

# The post-rape experience

## Stigma

*“Will someone take (marry) her now! (Pause) Now that such a thing has happened and everyone knows about it, who is going to take her? (Pause) Its come in all the papers that this girl has been raped. Is anyone going to take her? Her life has been ruined now. You only tell us now. Her life has been wasted. Who is going to take her now? Anyone will know that such a thing has happened to her. Then who will take her?”*

(Chanchalben, mother of 18 year old rape victim)

## Shame & Guilt

*“I want to die, I have brought shame on my family. My father never cries. He cried (due to this instance)”.*

(15 year old eloped with boy and had sex. Returned home and had to forcibly undergo medical exam, as part of routine procedure for examination of rape as acc. To Indian law sex before a girl is 16 is considered rape).

# The post-rape experience

## Isolation

*“I used to get a headache, you should ask Hiteshbhai, how much medication I have taken. My head. I could not live, my mental condition was not good. I was scared that I will become mad, 100% I will become mad. By talking in the house, what can happen. In the house, there are already problems. (...)I have taken medications and because of that there is some relief; even as of now, I have headache. Then I am scared that if I die, then this case. No one has that strength to take it up.”*

(Interview with Geeta, 24/6/05)

## Suicide

*“I loved Sajal, but he raped me. I have already earned a bad name but God will punish the guilty.”*

(Excerpt of suicide note of gang rape victim Bijal Joshi, quoted in Times of India, Ahmedabad edition, 10/1/2004. Sajal was her boyfriend and one of her gang rapists. They have been convicted of rape)

Thank you