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Dry Bihar, Wet Debates: Assessing the Outcomes of Prohibition

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Abstract: *The work "Dry Bihar, Wet Debates" examines what changed beneath the surface of the 2016 liquor ban implemented by the Government of Bihar. Instead of broad strokes, it leans on survey data, conversations gathered on-site, and existing literature. Its attention turns to how people live, earn, and navigate roles as men and women, mostly within urban households in Patna.*

What comes through is a mixed picture, layered but also shifting in unexpected ways. Some households said arguments at home happened less, money got handled more carefully, while others described streets where violence once seemed inevitable. To plenty of women, the prohibition wasn't just a rule - it meant breathing easier where they lived. A quiet kind of strength showed up, not loud but present, in daily routines altered by what was kept

out. Still, the research reveals deep troubles growing right beside those advances - like the spread of unauthorized liquor operations, dangers from poisonous alcohol, along with growing strain on police forces. What women go through shows this split clearly: even as safety improved for a few, life worsened for many tied to money troubles and unchecked drinking habits.

Still, the study shows that prohibition brought real changes in society, yet brought problems too. For lasting success, Bihar must update rules so they help people without losing effectiveness, while raising public understanding and improving aid networks.

Keywords: *Bihar Prohibition, Social Impact, Women's Safety, Illicit Liquor Trade, Governance, Public Policy, Enforcement Challenges.*

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Introduction:

A shift toward sobriety took hold in Bihar when alcohol was banned in April 2016. This move sparked broad attention across India's recent reform efforts. Rooted in Article 47 of the Directive Principles, the goal lay in protecting well-being, nurturing kinship bonds, and uplifting women. For years, women's organizations had pushed for such action, citing harm caused by liquor abuse at home and in communities. At first, results seemed encouraging: quieter streets, more money set aside in homes, stronger female voices in everyday choices. Still, things took a twist. Out of nowhere came deadly bootlegged drinks, vanished state earnings, rising policing expenses, and strain on official channels - all without clear intent. What looked simple at first now showed hidden effects. Research confirmed shifts in criminal behavior, revealing just how tough it is to push major changes through areas already weak economically

and fragile socially. In that light, this research views prohibition less like a clear victory or collapse, instead as a complex test shaped by tangled issues - how power works, fairness for women, money's role, and equity across communities in Bihar.

A look at Bihar's alcohol ban - called "Dry Bihar, Wet Debates: Assessing the Outcomes of Prohibition" - treats the policy not as just winning or losing, instead as part of broader social changes. Instead of focusing on one outcome, it tracks effects across different areas: how women, children, workers, and young people feel the shift. Families, too, are part of the picture, along with police roles, hospitals, and daily livelihoods. Even when government figures show less drinking overall, real-life realities take center stage here. Attention turns to whether people now rely on underground liquor, how homes hold together, how jobs vanish, and whether streets feel safer. What stands out most is how the policy affects women, asking if it truly lifts their place in society and the economy. Instead of just numbers, the work looks at money matters - like taxes lost, effort spent on enforcement, and shifts in businesses tied to drinking. Courts taking too long, police stretched thin, and jails full come into view as part of deeper issues around laws and control.

Through its human-centered and judiciously calibrated appraisal, the study foregrounds the stratified and frequently paradoxical ramifications of prohibition, distilling policy-salient insights that transcend the narrow precincts of excise jurisprudence. In so doing, it casts an analytical beam upon the wider social, economic, and governance architectures that contour the evolving reality of Bihar, revealing prohibition not as an isolated fiscal instrument but as a prism through which the state's contemporary dilemmas and aspirations are refracted

Literature Review:

Kumar (2016) explores the legal and social foundations of Bihar's prohibition policy through an examination of the Bihar Excise Act (2015–16), using the PESTLE framework. The study links the emergence of prohibition to women-led social movements that protested against the social and economic harms caused by alcohol consumption. By comparing Bihar's experience with international cases of prohibition, Kumar highlights both the strict legal provisions introduced by the state and the major challenges related to enforcement, administrative capacity, and the need for context-sensitive implementation.

Falezan (2016) employs a difference-in-difference (DiD) research design to examine how prohibition affected household expenditure patterns. The findings suggest that households significantly reduced spending on alcohol and other temptation goods after the ban. Instead, a greater share of household income was redirected toward essential items such as food and children's education. The study also notes that poorer households experienced relatively larger gains in educational spending, although there was limited evidence of increased savings in formal financial institutions.

Samanta and Narayan (2017) place Bihar's prohibition within the broader socio-economic realities of the state, including persistent inequality, low literacy levels, and weak rural development. They argue that the effectiveness of prohibition depends less on moral or public health arguments and more on the quality of governance and the administrative capacity of the state. Without strong institutional support, the policy risks facing serious implementation challenges.

Bajpai and Mukherjee (2017) analyze the economic implications of prohibition. Their study points to significant revenue losses for the state government following the ban, along with negative impacts on sectors such as hospitality and tourism. They also raise concerns about rising corruption and the expansion of illicit liquor markets, which often affect poorer communities the most due to the consumption of unsafe alcohol.

Dar and Sahay (2018), using a difference-in-difference approach, examine the relationship between prohibition enforcement and crime. Their findings indicate that strict enforcement of the ban led to an increase in both violent and property crimes, largely because police resources were diverted toward prohibition-related activities. The study further shows that areas with higher black-market prices for alcohol experienced larger spikes in crime. In contrast, regions where public support for prohibition was stronger saw relatively fewer such effects. The authors therefore caution against implementing sweeping prohibition policies in states with weak institutional capacity.

Global public health reports by the World Health Organization (2018) and Anderson et al. (2018) provide broader context for the policy debate. These studies document rising levels of alcohol-related diseases, accidents, and violence in South-East Asia and India, offering an important background

explanation for the social and political support that prohibition policies received in places such as Bihar.

Ambekar et al. (2019) show that alcohol consumption does not completely disappear even in states where prohibition is enforced. Their findings indicate that Bihar still reported around 0.9 percent prevalence rate of alcohol consumption after the ban. This suggests that drinking often continues in hidden or discreet forms despite strict legal restrictions.

Drawing on international evidence, Luca, Owens, and Sharma (2019) argue that regulatory approaches—such as taxation, licensing, and controlled availability—tend to be more effective than complete prohibition in reducing alcohol-related harms. Their analysis situates Bihar's policy within a wider global debate on whether total bans are the most practical approach to alcohol control.

Mohan and Kumar (2022) examine the economic efficiency of prohibition and conclude that the policy has imposed substantial financial costs on the state. Their analysis highlights significant losses in excise revenue, rising enforcement expenditures, and growing pressure on the judicial system. As a result, they argue that prohibition can become financially burdensome for a state with limited fiscal resources.

Rajput (2023) focuses on the implementation challenges of the Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act, 2016. Through qualitative analysis, the study identifies several gaps in enforcement, including weak monitoring systems, limited public awareness, and recurring hooch tragedies caused by illicit liquor. These issues, according to the author, undermine the broader objectives of the policy.

Balhara et al. (2023), using data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), report a noticeable decline in the proportion of people who openly report alcohol consumption after prohibition. However, the study also finds a shift toward locally brewed and informal forms of alcohol such as country liquor and beverages like *tadi* and *madi*. This suggests that while official consumption may have declined, unsafe and unregulated drinking practices continue to persist.

Dar and Vellakkal (2024) examine the social consequences of prohibition using a difference-in-difference framework. Their findings indicate that the policy is associated with a decline in fertility rates and improvements in women's empowerment. The study reports reduced probability of childbirth, higher

contraceptive use, lower levels of domestic violence, and stronger bargaining power for women within households.

Bhatia and Suva (2025) highlight the broader policy context in India, noting the absence of a comprehensive national alcohol policy. As a result, different states adopt widely varying approaches toward alcohol regulation. The authors also emphasize the dual economic burden created by prohibition, including the loss of excise revenue and the rising costs associated with policing, enforcement, and judicial proceedings.

Research Gap:

The majority of the research on Bihar's prohibition has been preoccupied with the arithmetic of revenue loss and the architecture of enforcement, leaving the more intimate terrains of psychology, lived experience, and gendered consequence comparatively untouched. The lived realities of drinkers and their families, particularly within the microcosm of neighborhoods where social norms and survival strategies quietly shape outcomes, remain insufficiently interrogated. Public discourse, meanwhile, tends to advance a facile causality: alcohol as cause, violence as effect. Yet this binary obscures a subtler truth that many men who consumed alcohol were not perpetrators of abuse, and that in some households, income continuity once underwrote a measure of economic steadiness. What transformations, ameliorative or otherwise, followed the advent of prohibition, thus remains an open question.

Equally, although women stood at the vanguard of the anti-liquor mobilization, their agency is often acknowledged only perfunctorily. Comparative explorations across regions and social strata are sparse, and expansive analytical frameworks such as PESTLE are seldom deployed to examine the technological, environmental, and psychological reverberations of the policy. This gap in the literature points to the need for field-based investigation. We must look at direct accounts from residents to determine if the alcohol ban actually improved community welfare, or if it simply pushed old problems into new, hidden corners.

Objectives:

This project evaluates two main areas:

- Assessing the ban's direct effect on family budgets, local job markets, neighborhood crime, and daily community interactions.

- Determining the policy's actual outcomes regarding the financial independence, physical safety, and overall social standing of women.

Research Questions:

- Did the prohibition successfully lower the frequency of alcohol-fueled disruptions, specifically street intoxication and domestic fights?
- In what specific ways did the sudden legal shift alter the daily routines and welfare of individuals who were regular consumers prior to the ban?
- What is the measurable impact of this policy on the economic agency and personal security of women?

Methodology:

We utilized a mixed-methods approach to capture both the statistics and the human reality behind Bihar's liquor restriction. Our fieldwork targeted three specific municipal wards in Patna. From each ward, we surveyed 25 households chosen to represent a wide cross-section of income levels.

Data collection relied on a combination of standard questionnaires and unscripted interviews with various family members, including women and children. The goal was to track how the policy altered family spending, interpersonal conflicts, and daily habits. All participants provided explicit informed consent before we recorded and mapped the conversations for recurring themes. Key focus areas during analysis included changes in household savings, shifts in female independence, the visibility of black-market alcohol, and local police effectiveness.

Alongside this field data, we reviewed state records, academic papers, and media archives to verify wider trends in crime and public spending. Ultimately, this approach aims to provide a realistic, evidence-based assessment of the prohibition: what worked, what failed, and what policymakers can learn from it.

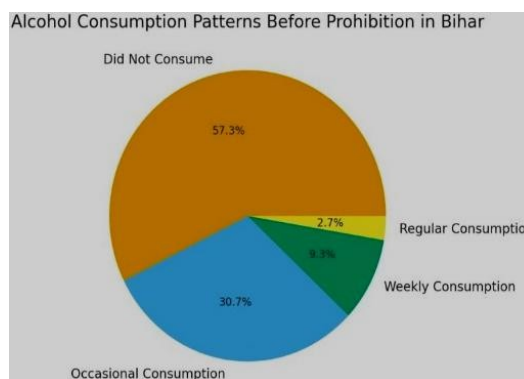
Area:

This research isolates the urban zones of Bihar, focusing primarily on the state capital of Patna due to its high profile in media and policy debates. To capture a diverse sample of the city's population, we conducted field surveys in three specific neighborhoods: Jakkanpur, Gola Road, and Saguna

More. These locations were deliberately picked because they feature vastly different socio-economic structures and community norms. By comparing the survey results across these distinct areas, the study highlights how families from varying financial backgrounds experience the alcohol ban differently.

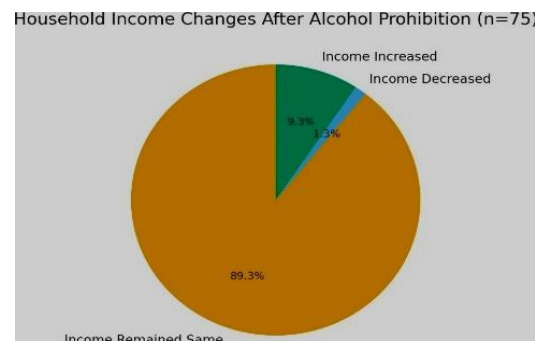
Empirical Analysis:

1. Before the 2016 policy took effect, did any household members consume alcohol?



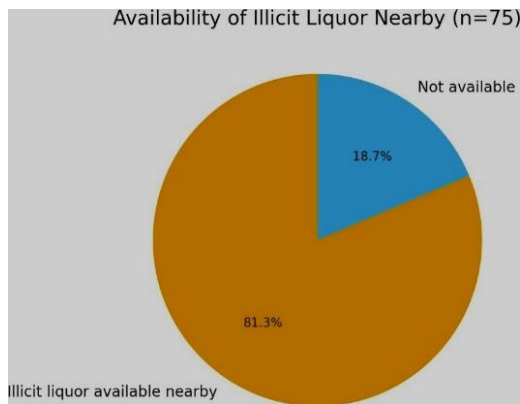
Survey results show that 57% of participants were strict non-drinkers prior to the ban. Of those who did consume alcohol, 31% drank occasionally, 9% drank weekly, and 3% maintained regular drinking habits. Because these baseline habits varied so widely, the ban naturally disrupted different demographics in very distinct ways, explaining the highly polarized reactions during its rollout.

2. Did family income and job stability shift after the ban?



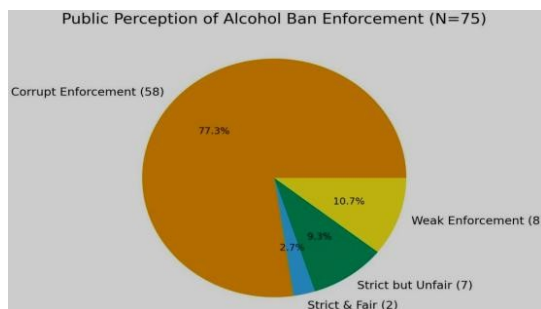
Out of the 75 families interviewed, 89% saw zero change in their monthly earnings. Exactly 10% reported financial gains linked to new job prospects, and only 1% suffered a drop in income. Yet, families that still sought out alcohol despite the legal restrictions faced a harsh reality: they ended up spending significantly more money because of the highly inflated prices charged by the underground black market.

3. Is illegal alcohol sold near your home?



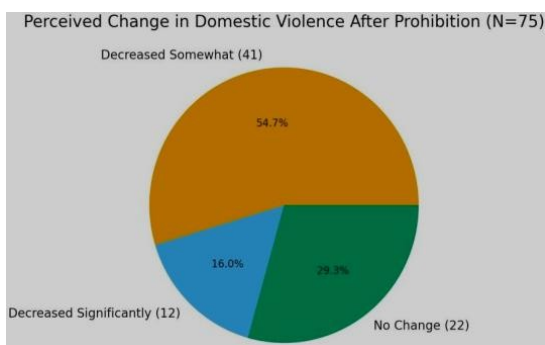
A massive 82% of the surveyed group confirmed that bootleg liquor is still easily accessible right in their neighborhoods. Only 18% had not personally witnessed this local trade. This widespread availability points to a massive failure in how the prohibition is actually being policed on the ground.

4. How would you rate local police enforcement of the ban?



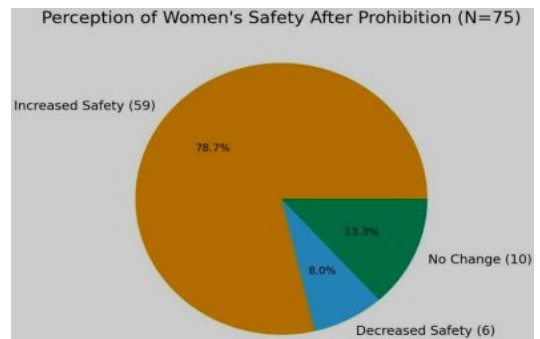
Public confidence is exceptionally low. Approximately 78% of the respondents believe local enforcement is completely compromised by corruption, with hardly anyone calling the policing efforts effective. This severe lack of trust proves that opaque, unaccountable policing actively sabotages the state's prohibition goals.

5. Has domestic abuse changed in your home since the ban?



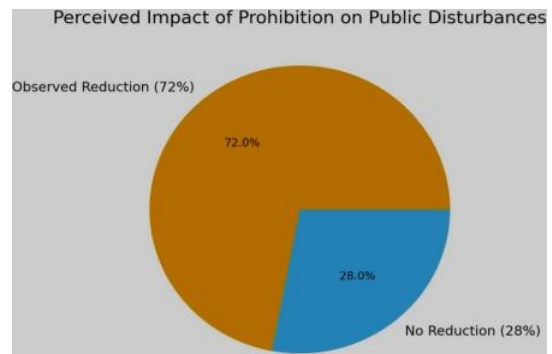
Around 70% of participants noticed a drop in domestic conflicts, though most described this decrease as only a "moderate" improvement. Meanwhile, 30% of homes experienced absolutely no change in abuse levels. This proves that intimate partner violence is a deeply rooted issue; simply taking away legal alcohol does not fix the underlying problems unless the state provides dedicated social support programs.

6. Did the ban make women feel safer locally?

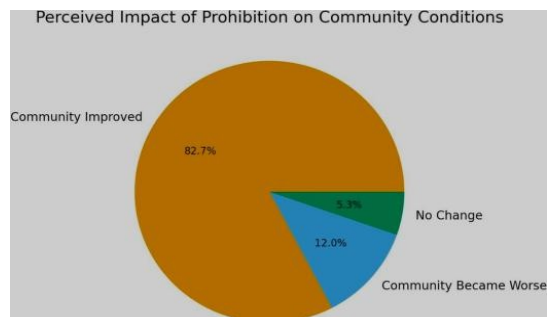


A clear majority—59 out of the 75 participants—felt that neighborhood streets became noticeably calmer and safer for women. However, a smaller group reported either no improvement or a decline in safety. These individuals frequently blamed the rise of new, unregulated drug substitutes in their areas, showing that the alcohol ban needs to be paired with wider public health initiatives.

7. Have public fights and street intoxication decreased?



8. How did prohibition alter your society overall?



Ultimately, 83% of the participants believe the ban was a positive step that brought order and safety to their communities. Conversely, 12% argued that their neighborhoods actually deteriorated because of the new black-market activities and dangerous substitute intoxicants. Another 5% saw no change whatsoever. This paints a picture of a largely supported policy that is simultaneously plagued by dangerous, unintended side effects requiring urgent administrative attention.

Key Findings:

This research paper presents the key findings of the field study conducted in three urban areas of Patna—Jakkanpur, Saguna More, and Gola Road—to understand and evaluate how Bihar's Alcohol Prohibition Policy has affected the daily life of families. The findings indicate towards mixed and complex results, showcasing benefits and problems within society. Amongst all three localities, many families have reported positive impact after ban on Alcohol. Families experienced a kind of peace and happiness at home, least alcohol related disputes. Also, family income is used for essential needs. Women in particular, expressed feeling of peace and confidence in family decision making. Public spaces became much calmer. Elderly people supported the policy but at the same time, it found some serious unintended results. Alcohol consumption has not stopped but changed its face. Hidden home delivery and smuggling network has been common making alcohol more expensive and dangerous.

There has been rise in spurious liquor cases and health risks. Youth has been drawn towards substitute substance and minor illegal activities related to smuggling of alcohol. Policing this ban has proven exceptionally difficult. Widespread claims of police bribery and uneven enforcement have severely eroded public confidence. Meanwhile, the sheer volume of prohibition-related arrests has paralyzed the judicial system, leading to backlogged courts and severely overcrowded jails. Furthermore, this crackdown disproportionately penalizes marginalized communities, leaving the women in these vulnerable households exposed to new layers of danger. For these families, the underground drinking culture introduces fresh anxieties and physical risks, proving that the supposed empowering effects of the ban are distinctly unequal across different social strata.

Recommendations:

Based on grassroots feedback, this study proposes several critical shifts in strategy:

- Shift the policing focus away from low-level consumers and aggressively target the major distributors running the illicit supply chains.
- Establish completely transparent, community-led reporting mechanisms to curb localized police corruption.
- Reframe alcoholism as a severe public health crisis rather than a strictly criminal issue by drastically expanding access to local rehabilitation and psychological counseling.
- Fortify grassroots support networks specifically designed to protect women and children, ensuring rapid responses to domestic abuse.
- Launch aggressive public education initiatives detailing the physical dangers of bootleg liquor and explaining citizens' legal rights.
- Seriously reconsider the current framework by exploring a strictly regulated alcohol distribution model, channeling the generated tax revenue directly into community welfare, healthcare, and women's protection programs.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, Bihar's liquor restriction defies a simple "success or failure" categorization. It represents a deeply complex social intervention that has drastically altered daily routines across the socio-economic spectrum. For many households, particularly women and children, the policy delivered tangible peace and domestic stability. Conversely, it simultaneously birthed a hazardous underground market, triggered public health emergencies, and overwhelmed state administrators. The core reality is that the legislation did not erase the public's desire for alcohol; it merely drove the consumption into dangerous, unregulated shadows.

If the state hopes to salvage the original intent of this policy, it must pivot away from a purely punitive framework. Meaningful progress requires a holistic, health-first strategy that actively supports the community. Rigorous legal enforcement is useless unless it operates in tandem with widespread addiction recovery programs, aggressive public education, and robust youth outreach. By acknowledging and fixing these severe unintended

consequences, Bihar can still realize the foundational goals of its prohibition. Genuine, lasting societal transformation demands more than just writing new laws; it requires empathetic governance that actually responds to the daily struggles of its citizens and actively invests in their long-term welfare.

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