

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON WOMEN PROTECTION LAWS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

India has gone through an evolution, in the form of modernization, following the independence of India. There are various laws enacted by Indian Parliament with respect to women protection. India is a socialized society with patriarchal values; this social order has reduced many women into second class citizens with limited access to resources, opportunities and agency. Violence against women is prevalent throughout all sections of society, but it manifests itself differently depending on caste, ethnicity religion etcetera. These legislations are Constitution (1975), Domestic Violence Act 2005, Immoral Traffic Prevention Act 1956, Dowry prohibition act 1961 and Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. The Indian Constitution has tried to achieve gender equality and balance for centuries. But Gender discrimination still remains a tragic reality. The paper analyses the Indian legal provisions for protection of women from violence and abuse, their access to justice system and the remedies available to them under different circumstances and provides an overview on these legislations and their effect on women protection in India. Although the main objective is to provide a glance at the various legislations enacted by Indian Parliament for woman protection with respect to their effect on women protection in India. It will analyse whether these laws are effective or not in addressing violence against women in India.

INTRODUCTION

Women protection laws in India have been a controversial topic as there were many challenges as to how they should be implemented. In matters related to law, the rights of women are a significant area that needs adequate attention and safety measures. This aspect has been taken up by different countries with varying degrees of success over time, with countries such as Canada or Australia being seen as models where this is done effectively. India, despite being one of the top countries in terms of population, tries to address this matter on a priority basis by providing sex-disaggregated data on sex ratio, on violence against women on different platforms. The Sexual Harassment of

Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 ¹was passed to safeguard women's rights at the workplace.

This was done to eradicate violence against women in India. The commission had sought comment from various stakeholders who gave their views on how the implementation should be done over time. The commission, however, had suggested significant issues and challenges that need to be addressed. It has been done primarily in the context of legal provisions and some of the suggestions provided by the law commission had been already adopted while some are pending implementation.

India is a diverse country. The people living in this country have different cultures, values, and views of the world. Even men and women have their differences in this country. Women protection laws are to protect all individuals from sexual harassment, rape, etc. In India, gender discrimination is still prevalent in society. In this article, I will be discussing some of the women protection laws that exist in Indian states and how these laws affect each state's population of women accordingly.

In India, there exist a common Criminal Law. According to this law, all states have adopted a uniform criminal code. The Indian Penal Code deals with all criminal matters that take place in the country. According to the Indian penal code, offenses related to women are classified under a special section called Section 354A ²and DV Act-2005 deals with cases of domestic violence against women and girls.

NEED FOR WOMEN PROTECTION LAWS IN INDIA

In India, discrimination against women is quite rampant. There is a need to protect women and girls from gender-based violence including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and other forms of abuse³. There is a need for laws that can help support women who are victims of gender-based violence and criminal offenses. Violence against women has been neither accepted nor tolerated in our society. It is an offense to discriminate against any individual based on race, religion, caste, creed or sex should not be countenanced in the society at any cost. Any form of abuse towards females should be dealt with sternly by the government and society as a whole. Women protection

¹ https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/2104?sam_handle=123456789/1362

² <https://devgan.in/ipc/section/354A/>

³ <http://www.legalservicesindia.com/article/1818/Women-Protection-and-Changing-Laws.html>

laws in India will help to improve the health and safety aspects of all individuals who are living in this country. Women protection laws in India will pave the way for a society that is more inclusive and accepting of gender equality.

EXISTING LAWS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN

In India, each state has specific laws for protecting females from harassment and violence. These laws have been created by specific lawmakers for addressing different issues. According to Indian constitution Act no XLIX of 1972, a declaration was made that the right to equality for all citizens including men and women is a fundamental right of every Indian. Because of this, all states have adopted a common criminal law under the Indian Penal Code. Some of the provisions which are introduced by the Government towards the protection of women are:

1. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961⁴

The dowry prohibition act seeks to protect the women from long-term marriage practices wherein women are forced to pay "dowry" so their husband can spend as much as he wants towards their family as he has no job. It also aims at preventing atrocities on the women such as dowry-related offenses such as cruelty and death, and it also aims at safeguarding female genital mutilation (FGM)⁵. The Women's Commission of India had recommended that the section about child labor and bonded labor should be repealed and signed by the government.

2. Dowry Death Regulation Act, 1961⁶

This section deals with 'dowry deaths', that is women committing suicide after being harassed and imposed dowry due to the constant pressure and harassment by the husband and in-laws. The commission had suggested that this should be dealt with as a cognizable offense if the dowry is recovered after the death of the victim. It also recommends the replacement of existing provisions where now under Section 306D⁷ it says that if any person was found guilty of causing death within one year of marriage to the wife as a result "of cruelty" by such person, such person shall be

⁴ https://www.indiacode.nic.in/handle/123456789/1679?sam_handle=123456789/1362

⁵ <https://www.unicef.org/stories/what-you-need-know-about-female-genital-mutilation>

⁶ <https://www.legalserviceindia.com/legal/article-1245-dowry-and-dowry-death.html>

⁷ <https://www.latestlaws.com/bare-acts/central-acts-rules/ipc-section-306-abetment-of-suicide/>

punished with imprisonment for life, or for 10 years or with fine, or both; and all sums exceeding Rs. 50,000 in any one case shall be forfeited. The commission has recommended that "in the recent year's dowry deaths have also been occurring in marriages where the parties were earlier married and for whom no dowry was demanded but where they or their parents had not reported this to the police and the victim was unable to make a complaint to the police due to financial constraints." It is recommended that these cases should be investigated by CID rather than PS. It also suggests that there should be a mechanism such as counselling and mediation in such cases instead of taking legal action against the husband and in-laws.

3. Prevention of Cruelty to Women Act, 1986⁸

This section deals with offenses against women such as dowry-related offenses, acid attacks, and various other cases. It also prescribes punishments for such actions and provides a time frame in which the offenses should be reported and investigated. The commission had recommended that the entire section should be repealed as it proposes excessive punishments for what is essentially a social problem. There is also no provision of mediation or counseling under this section unlike under Section 498a⁹ of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.

4. Domestic Violence Act, 2005

It is a civil law that came into force on 26 October 2006 and was passed to protect women from domestic violence caused by their husbands and immediate family members. It also seeks to provide for maintenance, custody, and guardianship of children. The commission had suggested that the Act is deficient in certain aspects as it does not define 'domestic violence and the remedies provided to the women such as shelter homes for women who are facing such forms of violence.

5. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005¹⁰

This act aims to protect women from domestic violence and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto, and for these purposes; it extends to the whole country. This act also seeks to provide a platform to provide services and welfare measures for victims of domestic violence. It has

⁸ <https://blog.iplayers.in/offences-against-women/>

⁹ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/538436/>

¹⁰ https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/15436/1/protection_of_women_from_domestic_violence_act%2C_2005.pdf

a section that defines how a woman can get protection under the Act. It has provisions wherein it speaks of ways in which women can get protection from domestic violence due to the provision of shelter homes. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) is special legislation for the protection of women from domestic violence. It mainly regulates the issues of domestic violence by protecting its citizens from money and property loss due to this. The PWDVA was passed by the Parliament in 2006 and came into force in 2007. To make this Act more effective, it has been divided into 18 parts. According to the provisions of this Act, any man who assaults or uses criminal force against a woman with the intent of disrobing her in public will be punished with imprisonment up to 2 years and fine up to Rs 25000 (Indian Penal Code, 2013) and also sign an undertaking not to repeat such offense.

This act also says that any man who assaults or uses criminal force against a woman with the intent of disrobing her in private will be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years and a fine up to Rs 50000 (Indian Penal Code, 2013). According to the provisions of this Act, any man who forces a woman or compels her to be present at the celebration of the marriage ceremony, knowing that she does not consent thereto, will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend from one year up to three years and with fine.

6. The Trafficking of Women and Children (Protection) Act, 2004¹¹

This law was announced on 11 December 2004 by the government to curb the crimes related to human trafficking and exploitative acts against women and children from all repute from India. The Commission had recommended that this law should be amended to include the definition of 'trafficking' in its scope so that the provision of rehabilitation of women is also included in this act.

7. Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace(Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013:¹²

The Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (SHWOP), also known as 'The Act' is special legislation for the protection of women from sexual harassment at the workplace. This act has been passed by the Parliament in 2014 and came into force in 2015. It has 8 parts. The provisions of this act state that any man who sexually harasses

¹¹ <https://medcraveonline.com/JHAAS/human-rights-and-trafficking-in-women-and-children-in-india.html>

¹² <https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/A2013-14.pdf>

or uses criminal force against any woman to disrobe her or compel her to be present at any place will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend up to 3 years along with a fine. In the case of a minor victim, the fine cannot exceed Rs 50,000 (Indian Penal Code, 2013). This act also states that any person who abets sexual harassment will also be punished.

In 2005 when this Act was passed in the Parliament by Rajiv Gandhi, it was considered a milestone in the history of women's rights in India because before this Act there were no specific laws to protect women from domestic violence and sexual harassment. The punishments under this Act are more severe than those under PWDVA because it provides a wide range of punishments to every person who violates the law. Therefore, it holds all parties responsible for their actions towards women even if they are not included in it directly.

8. Code of Criminal Procedure,1973¹³

This section deals with the investigation and other procedures for cases that should be followed in cases where a case is filed for certain actions by the woman against her husband and family members such as dowry harassment. It also provides for arrest and search warrants as well as other powers to the police officers who investigate such offenses. The commission had proposed that this should be completely adopted as it provides sufficient safeguards to ensure that such action is only taken after proper investigations and those who are found guilty of committing such crimes should be punished accordingly.

9. Indian Penal Code, 1860

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) is one of the oldest laws in India. It was introduced by the British Government in 1860. The IPC is mainly based on British Law. It is a penal code that protects its citizens by providing them with basic amenities like health care services, education, food security, etc. but it does not hold individuals accountable for their actions towards others. According to the provision of Section 352 of IPC¹⁴, whoever assaults or uses criminal force on any woman or abets her assault shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend up to 2 years along with a fine (Section 354¹⁵). The Indian Penal Code is unique from other laws because it does

¹³ https://www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ca_Women_and1.pdf

¹⁴ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1672685/>

¹⁵ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/203036/>

not provide any punishments to individuals who violate its provisions. This type of legislation is very important for the Indian justice system because it is not possible to punish people under one law multiple times, therefore this law is adopted by every state. According to the provision of Section 354 of IPC, whoever assaults or uses criminal force on any woman or abets her assault shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend up to 3 years. However, before making any judgment on the case of this Act, one should know that some states have special laws that are based on this Act. Section 354 of IPC also states that anyone who uses criminal force on a woman by taking advantage of her helpless situation or physical or mental incapacity will be punished with imprisonment of which the maximum will be 3 years along with a fine.

This law works for a common criminal code. Under sections 354A and 355A, this law has provided a safer environment for women by protecting them from sexual harassment and rape. According to Section 354A, "Any man who assaults or uses criminal force against a woman, intending to outrage her modesty or who wilfully disrobes her in public shall be punished with imprisonment for up to 3 years. If the offense involves sexual harassment, it is punishable up to imprisonment for 7 years." According to section 355A, "Any man who assaults or uses criminal force against a woman with the intent of disrobing her in public shall be punished with imprisonment for up to 2 years¹⁶.

Due to this, their numbers vary. Even though India has a common criminal law it does not mean that all states would apply the same law for offenses related to women. State laws are specially designed for each state's citizens to suit their specific needs according to their culture, traditions, and beliefs. Therefore, each state creates separate protective measures for women in various ways by implementing different legislations based on cultural norms and traditions.

According to Article 51A of the Indian Constitution¹⁷, India is a "Union of States". Therefore, all state governments have their powers and responsibilities. The Constitution also provides for a separation of powers between the Union and the State governments. For example, Article 265 of the Constitution states that education is a subject under State List. This means that it is within its jurisdiction and control of each state individually. According to Article 227¹⁸, All States and Union Territories have power over property. Therefore, every state has the right to create laws that

¹⁶Indian Penal Code, 2013, "Women Protection Laws" by Justin Humphreys

¹⁷<https://indiankanoon.org/doc/867010/>

¹⁸ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1331149/>

regulate property and property-related issues. The laws of each state differ based on the state's local culture and traditions. This makes India a diverse country in terms of women's protection measures and laws. Different states take different measures to protect women from harassment and violence by creating different legislation for this purpose. Some states have created separate legislation regarding protecting women while some others have included some provisions regarding it in their criminal law like Indian Penal Code (IPC).

While we can say that each state has its laws to protect women, the main focus is on the common criminal law in all states. Therefore, the rest of the article will be discussing all women protection laws in Indian states and how they affect each state's population of women.

In India, each state has specific laws to protect women from violence and harassment. These laws have been created by state legislators to address different issues. Some of these laws may vary from state to state because the states have their own cultural and social norms which vary from one region to another. Therefore, the legal system in each state is mainly based on their culture and traditions.

Most of the women protection laws in India are based on Article 21 of the constitution because it holds all individuals accountable for their actions towards others. However, some states created special legislation for women's protection because they have their own cultural and social norms which differ from other states.

UNIVERSAL PROVISIONS IN DIFFERENT STATES

In India, states have taken different measures to protect women from harassment. Some states have enacted specific laws relating to this while some other states have included provisions of this law within their criminal law. For example:

- In 2005 Bihar enacted a special women protection act called 'The Domestic Violence Act. This law is specially designed to protect women from domestic violence by punishing perpetrators. This act prohibits men from harassing, mistreating, or harming women in their families. Men who commit this offense are punishable with fines and imprisonment. The act was made effective with

an amendment of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) by adding section 357-A¹⁹. Under the act, the offender's property can be confiscated along with arrest if he commits an offense under this act. The law provides safety through rehabilitation, compensation, and justice to victims of domestic violence. "According to the act, there are two types of violence; one is physical and the other is sexual. This act also provides help to women who are victims of violence."²⁰

- Haryana had created separate legislation called 'The Haryana Prohibition of Violence on Women Act, 2005' for protecting women from domestic violence. This law was enacted to protect against any sort of domestic abuse, whether it is sexual or physical. This law prescribes imprisonment for 3 years along with a fine of up to 50 thousand INR for abusers under this act. Protection officers are appointed under this act. They must provide protective measures to victims through legal methods. It also provides financial assistance of any kind to victims as per their needs²¹.

- In 2005, Gujarat passed a law called 'The Gujarat Domestic Violence and Women Protection Act'. This act is very specific and has detailed provisions for the protection of women. The law protects all women and girls against domestic abuse. Householders who ruin or destroy anything owned by a woman or girl can be sentenced to imprisonment up to 7 years along with a fine of no more than 2 lakh INR (Indian Penal Code). A woman can seek protection under this act by approaching a family court. The court has the power to pass orders for the protection of women against abuse. The act also provides information about women-related issues so that they can protect themselves from violence. Women are given the right to get maintenance after separation from their sexual partners for any reason if they have lived together for 3 years or more. Also, if there are no children during the marriage then after separation, a woman is entitled to receive alimony if she lived with her husband for 1 year or more (The Gujarat Domestic Violence and Women Protection Act, 2005).

- Kerala has also provided various women protection laws. The state in 2005, passed a law called "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act" which was recently introduced in the state in the year 2011. This act was enacted to protect women from domestic violence by punishing abusers. This law makes any man or boy guilty if he commits an offense under this act. Any man who commits an assault on his wife, daughter, sister, or mother is punishable with imprisonment up

¹⁹ <https://devgan.in/crpc/section/357A>

²⁰The Domestic Violence Act 2005, "Women Protection Laws" by Justin Humphreys

²¹The Haryana Prohibition of Violence on Women Act, 2005, "Women Protection Laws" by Justin Humphreys

to 6 months along with a fine of up to 6 thousand INR. Any man who commits an assault on his daughter or sister is punishable with imprisonment up to 1 year along with a fine of up to 5 thousand INR. A woman can seek protection under this act by approaching the court. The court can pass orders for her protection against abuse. The law also provides information about women-related issues to women so that they can protect themselves from violence.

- In 2005, the Punjab government passed a law called the Punjab Prevention of Domestic Violence Act to protect the women in the state from abuse. This act has provisions for punishment against abusers who commit any offense under this act. Any husband, son, or relative who commits any offense is punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years along with a fine of up to 100 thousand INR for abusers or his family members. Any woman or girl who commits an offense under this act is punishable with imprisonment up to 3 years along with a fine of up to 100 thousand INR. A woman can seek protection under this act by approaching the court. The court can pass orders for her protection against abuse. The law also provides information about women-related issues to women so that they can protect themselves from violence. "Women Protection Laws" by Justin Humphreys has given details of all special laws passed in states which are specially designed to protect women from domestic violence. The entire article has described the salient features of all these different acts which are specifically designed for the protection of women from abuse by family members or my husband's family members.

INTERNATIONAL LAW²²

All individuals who are living in India have a right to human rights and international laws. These laws help protect individuals against all forms of gender-based violence and any form of discrimination on basis of race, creed, or religion. All forms of behaviour that humiliate an individual based on sex should not be tolerated at any cost. The International Crimes Act of India is an example of an act that has been passed to help protect individuals against all forms of gender-based violence. It has been passed by the parliament based on international law for peace which was signed by General Assembly in 1948.

²² <https://everywoman.org/violence-against-women-and-the-law/>

The International Crime Prevention Treaty was passed by the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 2003. Article 12 states that "Each State Party shall take such measures as may be necessary to establish as a matter of national law that any act or omission perpetrated as part of a widespread pattern of gross violation of human rights carries with it individual criminal responsibility. According to the International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, states are required to protect all women against discrimination concerning marriage and family ("Art. 5(a)"), education ("Art.5(d)") and about particular civil rights ("Art. 13(a)")

According to Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948²³), "everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible."

The international laws help provide a platform for individuals living in India as well as those abroad who may not be able to enjoy the basic human rights specified in these Acts. These laws help protect the human rights of all individuals living in India or abroad. These laws enforce justice and punishments for individuals who do not follow these laws. Human Rights Watch, an organization that monitors international laws, has issued a report card for women's rights in each state of India. It has listed states on basis of how well they protect women against gender-based violence and discrimination. The report card looks at the laws that are in place to protect women against gender-based violence and also looks at how effectively these laws are implemented by the state government.

The report card issued by the organization states that the women who are victims of gender-based violence in India may not be able to enjoy their basic human rights. This situation needs to be changed urgently if we want to see an equal society where all individuals live with dignity and respect. The international laws help provide a platform for individuals living in India as well as those abroad who may not be able to enjoy the basic human rights specified in these Acts. These laws help protect the human rights of all individuals living in India or abroad. These laws enforce justice and punishments for individuals who do not follow these laws. Human Rights Watch, an organization that monitors international laws, has issued a report card for women's rights in each

²³ <https://vikaspedia.in/social-welfare/human-rights/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

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EFFECTIVENESS OF EXISTING WOMEN PROTECTION LAWS²⁴

In the cases of domestic violence, it is important to understand the reasons for which a woman comes under this abuse. If the abuse is due to dowry or other matrimonial issues then one can very well rule out that she deserves protection under any law enacted for this purpose. If the abuse is because an attempt has been made on her life then she can very well seek help from police in this matter. But there are many cases where the reason for abuse cannot be solved by police or courts. The woman may also not want to approach the police or courts due to various reasons. The most common reason for which women seek help from police and courts is mistreatment by husbands, sons, or relatives. It is important to understand that concern for a mother or sister is not always the reason for abuse. Sometimes, the reason for abuse may be because of property disputes between family members or any other dispute within the family. In such cases, there is a need for a law that protects women from such kind of mistreatment and provides justice to them. It is indeed very unfortunate that we do not have any such law in India at this point.

The only legal recourse available to women against her husband or in-laws is filing a divorce case under Section 13(1)(i-a) of the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955²⁵ if she can prove cruelty by the husband to her (The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955). But even in such cases, the husband can simply ask the court to dismiss the case as cruelty cannot be established by the mere filing of a divorce petition. This is because there is no other legal redress available to a woman against her husband and his family if she has got married under Hindu Marriage Act. There is a provision available for a woman

²⁴ <https://blog.ipleaders.in/protection-laws-women-effective-country-analysis/>

²⁵ <https://sites.google.com/site/divorcelawyerindelhi/divorce-on-cruelty-ground-section-13-1-ia-of-the-hindu-marriage-act>

under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code ²⁶regarding maintenance of wife and children from husband. But this provision is very difficult to be invoked in the case of cruelty by the husband.

In many cases, the reason for which a woman seeks help from police or courts comes under contempt of court or violation of court orders. In such cases, women themselves do not go to police or courts due to fear and humiliation at the hands of her husband and relatives. The DV Act, 2005 does not provide any relief against contempt of court or violation of court orders. The only remedy available against such wrongdoers is statutory maintenance which cannot be claimed by a woman in a divorce petition as mentioned earlier. In other cases, police and courts do not help the women because they do not understand the problem. The women also do not want to go to the police or courts for fear of humiliation by their husbands and relatives. Sometimes there is also a problem of the language barrier in dealing with police and courts.

All these problems can be avoided if we have laws in place which protect against domestic violence by providing legal remedies for women in such situations so that they can get justice. Laws which provide monetary or material benefits to victims of domestic violence are very important because they reassure the victim that she is important for society and that she has value even without any protection provided under the law.

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CONCLUSION

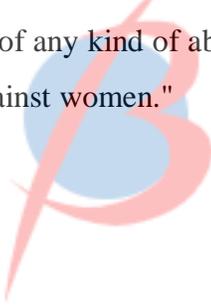
The extreme violence against women in India makes it necessary for the government to take action²⁷. Women are the most important asset of any country and, unfortunately, they are being treated as second-class citizens by society. The governments of all states should take prompt action to protect the rights of women under the existing laws and introduce new laws which will protect women against domestic violence in India. Even if no new law is enacted, existing laws should be implemented properly so that they are effective against all kinds of domestic violence.²⁸ The governments need to also ensure that provisions regarding maintenance under Section 125 CrPC

²⁶ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/538436/>

²⁷ "Gender Justice" by Raj Bhaskar&Devangshu Datta, Third Edition, 2005 - Chapter IX: Domestic Violence by Women

²⁸ "The Prosecution of Domestic Violence" by Sakshi Rajan Mahapatra & Aileen Kuchler, Legal Aid Foundation, 2001 - Page 169 - 175

²⁹are implemented properly so that victims get justice by getting financial benefits from their husbands or families. The governments of all states should put measures in place for providing legal assistance to women through NGOs. All these steps will help to solve the problem of extreme violence against women in India and ensure that they are treated as equal citizens. In conclusion, special laws have been made by many states to protect domestic violence against women. "Mostly the laws are in the form of laws which protect the women from domestic violence. These protection laws are very important to protect a woman from any kind of abuse by her husband, parents, or in-laws. Police and other law enforcement agencies must be properly trained about these acts to prevent abusive behaviour of any kind." "Mostly, women fear from their husbands and relatives about domestic violence ... But the government must make these rules stringent so that mothers can receive justice from their abusers. Also, these acts must be strictly followed by police so that they can also give justice to the women in case of any kind of abuse. If the law is properly enforced, this will help in reducing domestic violence against women."



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²⁹ <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/1056396/>