

## Empower HER: Education as a Force against Violence on Women



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**ABSTRACT:** Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It is a particularly severe problem in India. While 2020 saw the registration of 28,046 cases of rape, this increased to 31,677 in 2021. Conversely, overall crimes against women rose from 56.5% in 2020 to 64.5% in 2021. The majority of cases categorised as crimes against women were reported under 'Cruelty by husband or his relatives' (31.8%), followed by 'Assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty' (20.8%), 'Kidnapping and abduction of women' (17.6%) and 'Rape' (7.4%) (NCRB, 2021). The Government of India has enacted specific laws and implemented several schemes operated by different departments and ministries to safeguard the interests of women and uplift their status in society. In spite of constitutional guarantees, legislative provisions, judiciary mandate and administrative efforts, women security in India is still lacking in some areas. Mere enactment of laws and chalking out of schemes are not much effective for curbing these atrocities thereby empowering women. This empowerment is possible only through education. Thus, empowering women through education has become the need of the hour. This paper is an attempt to analyse women empowerment in India by looking into the laws and schemes of the Government of India for addressing the violence against them. The study reveals that the women of India are relatively disempowered and gender gap still exists in spite of the various efforts undertaken by the Government. This paper further discusses the impact of education on empowerment of women and how it can bring about a positive change in the attitude of people. The study concludes by observing that access to education is just an enabling factor to empowerment but to achieve the goal, depends largely on the change in the attitude of both men and women towards women.

**KEYWORDS:** Education, empowerment, crime, violence against women, rape, human rights

### INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls stands as a deplorable violation of fundamental human rights. According to the United Nations, violence against women is defined as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." This comprehensive definition underscores the various ways in which such violence can manifest, emphasizing its deeply rooted nature.

The impact of violence against women is profound, extending beyond the immediate instance to have lasting consequences. It not only inflicts immediate physical and mental harm but also has enduring effects on a woman's overall well-being, particularly in the realms of sexual and reproductive health. The repercussions extend beyond the individual, permeating through familial, communal, and national spheres. The negative consequences are not confined solely to women, as the ripple effect encompasses their families, communities, and the nation as a whole. The corrosive nature of such violence hampers the social fabric, hindering progress and perpetuating cycles of harm. Addressing violence against women is not only a matter of justice and human rights but also a crucial step towards fostering healthier, more resilient societies.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this research, our primary objective is to delve into the existing legal framework concerning crimes against women, aiming to comprehensively understand and analyse the current state of women's empowerment within this context. This investigation will contribute valuable insights into the intersection of legal provisions and women's empowerment, shedding light on the strengths and weaknesses of the current legislative landscape.

Another pivotal aspect of our study focuses on exploring the profound impact of education on women's empowerment. We aim to investigate the relationship between education and the empowerment of women, examining how educational opportunities influence their socio-economic status, decision-making autonomy, and overall well-being. Through a thorough examination of relevant literature, we aspire to gain a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted ways in which education contributes to women's

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empowerment. This research endeavours to provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and advocates working towards fostering gender equality through educational initiatives.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed in this study revolves around the acquisition of data from secondary sources. Secondary data, integral to our research, is sourced from a diverse range of outlets encompassing both published and unpublished records. This includes extensive reliance on governmental data and records, as well as insights derived from books, magazines, and scholarly journals. Our approach involves a comprehensive review of existing information to draw valuable insights and support our research objectives. The utilization of secondary data from such varied sources contributes to the depth and breadth of our study, ensuring a robust foundation for analysis and interpretation.

### **LAWS RELATED TO CRIME AGAINST WOMEN**

The legal framework addressing crimes against women comprises two main categories: those delineated in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and those falling within the purview of Special and Local Laws (SLL).

#### **1. Crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)**

The Indian Penal Code of 1860 establishes provisions for punishing perpetrators of grave offenses against women. Specific sections within the IPC are dedicated to addressing and penalizing such crimes. A few of them have been discussed below.

a. Rape- Rape represents one of the gravest and inhumane crimes perpetrated against women. Sections 375 to 377 of the IPC specifically address sexual offenses committed against women. Section 375 of the IPC addresses the crime of rape, defining it as engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman against her will, without her consent, through intimidation, coercion, deception, or when she is incapacitated due to intoxication or misinformation, or is of vulnerable mental health, irrespective of her age, even if she is under 18 years old. Put simply, engaging in sexual intercourse with a woman without her consent constitutes "rape". Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 outlines punishment for the crime. Offenses can be classified across different dimensions, including the rape of a minor girl, rape of a woman (Section 376), rape resulting in murder (Section 376A), familial rape, rape by public servants (Section 376C), gang rape (Section 376D), and marital rape (Section 376B). The penalties for these offenses vary, ranging from imprisonment of up to 7 years to 20 years or life imprisonment, along with potential fines.

b. Kidnapping & abduction for specified purposes- The term "kidnapping" encompasses two types of offenses as defined in Section 359 of the Indian Penal Code: kidnapping from India and kidnapping from lawful guardianship. Section 360 of the Indian Penal Code stipulates that anyone transporting a person beyond India without their consent is deemed to have kidnapped that person from India. Additionally, the act of taking away a minor (16 years in the case of males and 18 years in the case of females) without their consent or the consent of their guardian is considered as kidnapping that person from lawful guardianship, as outlined in Section 361. Section 363 of the Indian Penal Code specifies the punishment for kidnapping which states that whoever kidnaps any person from India or from lawful guardianship shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term that can extend to seven years. Additionally, the offender shall be liable to a fine. Section 366 of the Indian Penal Code defines the act of kidnapping, abducting, or inducing a woman to compel her marriage and engage in forceful sexual relations. According to this section, the offender can be punished with imprisonment for up to 10 years, in addition to a fine.

c. Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths or their attempts- The reprehensible practice of demanding dowry persists in the rural areas of India, and opposing this tradition often leads to the tragic and gradual loss of women's lives. Section 304B of the IPC outlines that when the death of a woman is caused by burns, bodily injury, or occurs under abnormal circumstances within seven years of her marriage, and there is evidence that she was subjected to cruelty or harassment by her husband or any relative of her husband in connection with a demand for dowry shortly before her death, it is termed a "dowry death." In such cases, the husband or relative is deemed to have caused her death. Anyone found guilty of committing dowry death shall face punishment, including imprisonment for a term not less than seven years and may extend to imprisonment for life.

d. Cruelty by husband or his relatives- Domestic violence is a prevalent issue in our country, rooted in the historical perception of women as an inferior stratum of society. Such acts of violence encompass a range of abuses, including physical assault, rape, and coerced sexual acts. Section 498A states that anyone, whether the husband or a relative of the husband, who subjects a woman to cruelty, can be punished with imprisonment for a term that may extend to three years, in addition to being liable for a fine.

e. Assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty- Section 354 of the Indian Penal Code addresses the offense of molestation, specifically assault to a woman with the intent to outrage her modesty. The primary purpose of this section is to safeguard women against any form of indecent or offensive behaviour by others that is derogatory to her modesty. Sexual harassment is characterized by unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical behaviour of a sexual nature. This encompasses a spectrum from mild transgressions to more severe actions such as sexual abuse, assault, or forcing someone to view pornography against their will. According to Section 354A of the Indian Penal Code, if an individual commits an act of sexual harassment, they can be subjected to rigorous imprisonment for up to three years along with a fine.

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f. Insult to the modesty of women (Sec. 509 IPC)- An act done with the intention to insult the modesty of a woman, even if it doesn't necessarily involve physical force, falls under the purview of Section 509. This provision aims to discourage any form of encroachment on a woman's modesty, whether through words, gestures, acts, or by intruding upon her privacy. Section 509 is often colloquially referred to as the 'Eve Teasing Section' to describe public sexual harassment or molestation of women by men. It is a prevalent issue, particularly among the youth, encompassing a spectrum of behaviours from sexual remarks, catcalls, and brushing to more severe forms of sexual aggression such as groping. Anyone found guilty of an offense under Section 509 can be punished with simple imprisonment for a term that may extend to three years, along with a fine.

### **2. Crimes under the Special & Local Laws (SLL)**

Crimes against women, as addressed in Special and Local Laws, are designed to eradicate immoral practices and the exploitation of women in society. These laws undergo periodic review and amendment to ensure they remain responsive to evolving needs. Some of the following acts include special provisions aimed at protecting women and their interests.

a. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956- Trafficking in women and children involves subjecting them to forced labour or forced sexual exploitation. Recruiters and traffickers often compel women or children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations. Additionally, these illegal activities may include false marriages, deceptive adoptions, domestic labour, and various forms of illicit employment. The gravity of such practices underscores the need for stringent legal measures to combat human trafficking and protect the rights of vulnerable individuals. Section 5 of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 imposes penalties for procuring, inducing, or taking a person into prostitution, whether with or without their consent. If the individual subjected to such an offense is a minor, the punishment can extend to rigorous imprisonment for a term ranging from not less than 7 years to not more than fourteen years. This provision underscores the severity of penalties when the victim is a minor, emphasizing the legal commitment to protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation in the context of prostitution.

b. The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (Amended in 1986)- The term "dowry," as defined in Section 2 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, refers to any property or valuable security given or agreed to be given, directly or indirectly, by one party to the other at, before, or any time after marriage. Demands for cash, gold, cars, or any other form of property are considered as dowry. Engaging in the acts of giving, taking, demanding, or even advertising for dowry is deemed as an offense under this Act. Under Section 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, demanding or receiving dowry is considered an offense. This includes making requests for dowry at the time of or even after marriage, even when no cruelty is involved. The law is designed to discourage the practice of demanding dowry and to penalize those who engage in such activities, irrespective of whether any cruelty is associated with the demand. This provision reinforces the legal stance against the dowry system and aims to prevent its perpetuation. If any person, after the commencement of the Dowry Prohibition Act, gives or takes dowry or abets the giving or taking of dowry, they shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term not less than five years and with a fine not less than fifteen thousand rupees or the amount of the value of such dowry, whichever is more. The Dowry Prohibition Act aims to curb the social malpractice of demanding dowry and provides legal measures against such actions.

c. The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, is designed to prohibit indecent representation of women in any form, such as books, photographs, paintings, films, pamphlets, packages, etc. Under this Act, if an individual harasses another by creating, publishing, or distributing any material that constitutes indecent representation of women, they can be liable for a minimum sentence of two years. The Act aims to prevent the exploitation of women through inappropriate portrayals and takes a strong stance against such activities by imposing legal consequences. Any person who contravenes the provisions of Section 3 or Section 4 shall, on the first conviction, be punishable with imprisonment of either description for a term that may extend to two years, along with a fine that may extend to two thousand rupees. In the event of a second or subsequent conviction, the person shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than six months but which may extend to five years, and shall also be subject to a fine not less than ten thousand rupees but which may extend to one lakh rupees.

d. The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987 (3 of 1988)- This act was enacted to enhance the prevention of the abhorrent practice of sati, involving the burning or burying alive of widows or women, and to curtail its glorification. Recognizing that sati contradicts the principles of human nature and is not mandated by any religion in India as an obligatory duty, the act aims to implement more effective measures to prevent the occurrence of sati and any attempts to glorify it. Under this Act, anyone attempting to commit sati and engaging in acts toward such commission shall be liable to punishment, with imprisonment for a term that may extend to six months, a fine, or both. If a person commits sati, anyone aiding the commission of such an act, whether directly or indirectly, is subject to the penalty of death, imprisonment for life, and is also liable to a fine.

e. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) acknowledges the right of women to live a life free from violence and fear. It places the responsibility on the state to provide protection against domestic violence to women. The Act is designed to address and prevent domestic violence, recognizing the need for legal mechanisms to safeguard the well-being of women within the domestic sphere. PWDVA aims to safeguard women from all forms of domestic violence and prevent harassment and exploitation by family members or relatives. The Act, enacted in 2005, came into effect in October 2006, signalling a legal framework designed to address and combat domestic violence, ensuring

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the protection of women within the home environment. Section 3 Act covers various forms of abuses, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse and economic abuse. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) empowers women by providing them with the right to claim immediate maintenance and compensation. One of the most significant rights granted to women under the Act is the right to secure accommodation. The rights include: right to reside in a shared household, right to issuance of orders, such as Protection Orders, Residence Orders, Monetary relief, Orders for custody of children, Compensation orders, Interim and Ex parte Orders, right to obtain relief granted by other suits and legal proceedings. These provisions ensure that women have legal recourse and protection against domestic violence, including the right to reside in a shared household and obtain various orders to address their specific needs and circumstances.

### **PRESENT SCENARIO**

Over the years, the reports published by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) have consistently served as a crucial and reliable source of statistical information covering a wide spectrum of crimes. From economic and financial offenses to crimes against women, these reports have provided valuable insights into the evolving landscape of criminal activities in the country. The NCRB's dedication to compiling comprehensive and accurate data has not only facilitated a deeper understanding of crime trends but has also played a pivotal role in shaping informed policies and interventions aimed at addressing and mitigating various forms of criminal behaviour. As a cornerstone in the realm of crime analysis, the NCRB reports continue to contribute significantly to the ongoing efforts to enhance public safety and security.

Recent statistics reveal a disturbing trend as crime against women surged by 15.3% compared in 2021 to the preceding year. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report indicates a notable escalation, with the incidence of crimes against women rising from 56.5% in 2020 to a concerning 64.5% in 2021, measured in incidents per 1 lakh population. These figures underscore the urgency of addressing and combating the factors contributing to the vulnerability of women, emphasizing the crucial need for comprehensive societal efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of women across the nation. Within this alarming surge in crime against women, a significant portion, 31.8%, falls under the category of "Cruelty by a spouse or his relatives," followed closely by "Assault on women with an aim to outrage her modesty" at 20.8%, along with kidnapping and abduction at 17.6%, and rape at 7.4%. The gravity of these offenses is underscored by the fact that Assam recorded the highest rate of crimes against women in 2021, with other states such as Odisha, Haryana, Telangana, and Rajasthan also reporting distressingly high figures. Uttar Pradesh emerges as the state with the highest actual number of cases filed in 2021, followed by Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Odisha. These statistics shed light on the pressing need for targeted interventions and a concerted nationwide effort to address the root causes of these crimes and implement effective measures to safeguard the rights and well-being of women. In 2021, Rajasthan emerges with a troubling distinction, recording the highest rate of rape at 16.4%. In contrast, Nagaland stands out positively, showcasing the lowest recorded offenses against women over the past three years. When considering Union Territories, Delhi reports the highest rate of crime against women in 2021, reflecting an increase over the preceding three years. The safety landscape for women in the national capital took a distressing turn last year, with an alarming revelation that two minor girls were raped every day, solidifying Delhi's status as the most unsafe metropolitan city for women in the country, as per the report. The grim statistics further expose the vulnerability of women in the city, with Delhi recording a staggering 13,892 cases of crimes against women in 2021, reflecting a disconcerting surge of over 40% compared to the previous year. Following Delhi, Mumbai, the financial capital, reported 5,543 such instances, while Bengaluru documented 3,127 cases. In addition to the high incidence of rape, Delhi also stands out for recording the highest number of cases related to kidnapping, cruelty by husbands, and girl child rapes among metropolitan cities, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions and comprehensive measures to address the safety concerns of women in the capital.

In 2021, Uttar Pradesh reported an alarming 56,083 cases, making it the state with the highest incidence of crimes against women, followed by Rajasthan with 40,738 cases, Maharashtra with 39,526 cases, West Bengal with 35,884 cases, and Odisha with 31,352 cases. Shockingly, 48 incidents in Uttar Pradesh involved murder with rape. Dowry deaths under Section 304B of the Indian Penal Code numbered 2,222 in UP and 1,000 in Bihar, while Rajasthan recorded the highest number of rape cases, totalling 6,337 incidents in 2021. Cruelty by husbands and their relatives under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code emerged as another prevalent crime, with 19,952 cases in West Bengal, 18,375 cases in Uttar Pradesh, and 16,949 cases in Rajasthan. A total of 3,40,731 cases were registered under the IPC across all states. In comparison to the 56,083 cases in UP, only 10,133 were disposed of by the police. Delhi recorded 14,277 cases, marking an increase of approximately 4,000 cases compared to 2020. Jammu & Kashmir ranked second with 3,937 cases, and the highest number of rape cases were reported in Delhi, with 1,250 cases. The total number of IPC cases for crimes against women in Union Territories was 16,940. Nationwide, a total of 4,28,278 cases were recorded, comprising 31,677 rape cases, 75,369 kidnappings, and 89,200 assaults on women with the intent to outrage their modesty. Out of the 3,57,671 cases registered under the IPC, only 30,861 cases were disposed of by the police. Additionally, 1,324 cases of rape were recorded against Scheduled Tribes, while 3,870 cases were reported against Scheduled Castes.

For a more granular perspective, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) extends its analysis to 19 cities with populations exceeding 2 million. Among these urban areas, Jaipur takes the lead with the highest rate, trailed by Delhi, Indore, and

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Lucknow. Notably, Chennai and Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu record the lowest rates, underscoring regional variations in the prevalence of crimes against women and emphasizing the need for targeted interventions at both the state and city levels to ensure the safety and well-being of women across the country. According to a TOI report, in August 2023, the victim assistance unit (VAU) of the Goa state government revealed a concerning statistic: on average, two women and children fell victim to crimes daily. The state reported a total of 63 cases of crimes against women and children during the month, with sexual abuse constituting the highest proportion of these cases. Disturbingly, teenagers emerged as the primary targets of sexual abuse, as highlighted in the report. Beyond sexual abuse, the reported cases encompassed various offenses, including domestic violence, kidnapping, assault, and cybercrimes. Notably, an alarming spike was observed in cases of alleged sexual harassment, molestation, outraging modesty, and harassment involving perpetrators who were educators, ranging from school to university levels. This data underscores the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address and prevent crimes against women and children, with particular attention to safeguarding vulnerable groups and addressing abuse within educational institutions.

Under the Domestic Violence Act, a mere 507 cases were officially registered, revealing a stark underreporting of incidents. This figure underscores the likelihood that a significant number of cases involving domestic violence may go undocumented, emphasizing the importance of addressing barriers to reporting and ensuring effective implementation of legal mechanisms to protect victims. The low number of registered cases may indicate a broader issue of reluctance or obstacles faced by survivors in seeking legal redress for domestic violence, highlighting the need for increased awareness, support systems, and advocacy to address this pressing societal concern.

The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), by its own acknowledgment, recognizes certain limitations inherent in its data collection methods. These limitations include a reliance on First Information Reports (FIRs) registered, which may not capture the full extent of criminal incidents due to underreporting or other factors influencing the reporting process. Additionally, the application of the 'Principle Offence Rule' introduces another layer of complexity, as it focuses on categorizing an incident based on the most severe offense reported, potentially overlooking or downplaying additional offenses associated with the same incident. While the NCRB remains a crucial source of crime statistics, these acknowledged limitations underscore the need for a nuanced interpretation of the data. Policymakers and analysts must consider these constraints to draw accurate conclusions and design effective strategies for crime prevention and intervention. As the NCRB continues to refine its methodologies, there is an ongoing effort to address these limitations and enhance the reliability and comprehensiveness of the data provided.

### **CONVICTION FOR CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN**

The 2021 conviction rate for crimes against women in India was a concerning 26.5%, down from 29.8% in 2020. Shockingly, the pendency rate of cases reached 95%, implying that only 5% of cases were disposed of by the courts. It's noteworthy that 2021 marks the first year of a slight decrease in the pendency rate in the past five years, albeit by a small margin.

These figures highlight significant challenges within the Indian criminal justice system, especially regarding the accountability of perpetrators in crimes against women. Factors such as delayed investigations, resource shortages, legal complexities, and societal barriers affecting victim reporting contribute to these statistics. Additionally, issues like witness protection, evidence collection, and the overall efficiency of the legal system play pivotal roles in determining conviction rates.

Information from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) paints a disheartening picture, revealing that seven states in India have a conviction rate below 10%. Among these, West Bengal has the lowest conviction rate, standing at a mere 2.5%. The report reveals a staggering 2,121,755 cases of crimes against women filed in 2021. Out of these, 23,243 resulted in convictions, while 60,290 ended in acquittals. West Bengal reported the highest number of cases at 337,924, whereas Ladakh had the lowest with 41 cases. In 2021, 428,806 individuals were arrested for crimes against women, with 555,089 being charge sheeted. Among these, 33,725 were convicted, while 107,324 were acquitted. Focusing on rape cases specifically, there were 30,016 registered cases last year. The highest numbers were reported in Rajasthan (6,337), followed by Madhya Pradesh (2,947), Uttar Pradesh (2,845), and Maharashtra (2,496).

While the marginal reduction in the pendency rate is a positive development, addressing the root causes of the challenges faced by the legal system is crucial. Reforms in law enforcement, improvements in the judicial process, and increased support and awareness for victims are essential components of this comprehensive approach. To create a more responsive criminal justice system, concerted efforts are needed, encompassing legislative changes, enhancements in law enforcement practices, and societal transformations in attitudes towards crimes against women. Recognizing and addressing these issues collectively will contribute to building a more robust and effective legal framework.

### **AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND DATA GAPS**

Violence against women and children manifests in various forms—visible or invisible, overt or covert, and can be physical, emotional, or mental, occurring both within and outside the home. Data on sexual, physical, and emotional violence is sourced from the National Family Health Survey, drawing from a sample of never-married women and ever-married women. However, the information provided regarding the perpetrators of violence is limited. The available data is presented at the national and state levels,

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lacking granularity for districts and lower administrative units. According to a Livemint report based on the National Family Health Survey (2015-16), it was calculated that over 99% of rape cases in India go unreported. The primary deterrents preventing victims from coming forward include social stigma and the fear of retaliation. These factors contribute significantly to the underreporting of such crimes, highlighting the complex societal challenges and barriers faced by survivors in seeking justice and support.

The persistently low conviction rate has been a longstanding concern, largely attributed to the limited involvement and agency of victims in the legal processes surrounding crimes against women. A significant proportion of these cases involves perpetrators known to the victims. In 2021, 1,594 cases were registered as rape committed by relatives, guardians, or individuals in positions of trust. This dynamic often leads to victims altering their statements during court proceedings, and a substantial number of cases end up being settled out of court. Unfortunately, these settlements frequently occur without the genuine consent or will of the victim. The reluctance or inability of victims to actively participate in legal processes, coupled with the influence of social dynamics and power imbalances, contributes to the challenges in achieving justice in cases of crimes against women. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive efforts to empower and protect victims within the legal system and society at large.

In the absence of regular large-scale surveys, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) becomes a primary source for information on crimes against women. It is important to note that the data presented by the NCRB only covers states that have provided information. This reliance on crime records highlights the need for more comprehensive and localized data collection mechanisms to better understand the prevalence and patterns of violence against women and children at various levels of governance.

### **HOW CAN EDUCATION EMPOWER WOMEN?**

According to Statista Report, as of 2021, India reported a notable disparity in the nationwide literacy rates between men and women. The literacy rate among men stood at 84.4%, while for women, it was slightly lower at 71.5%. This gender literacy gap was more pronounced in rural areas, where only 66% of women aged between 15 and 49 years were literate. In contrast, over 81% of men in the same age group demonstrated literacy in rural regions. This discrepancy highlights the challenges and disparities in educational opportunities and access, particularly affecting women in rural areas. Closing this gender literacy gap is crucial for achieving greater gender equality and empowering women through education.

Promoting education among women serves as a powerful tool with multifaceted benefits. Firstly, it acts as a potent force in eliminating illiteracy, empowering women with the ability to read, write, and engage in educational pursuits. Education contributes significantly to the development of self-esteem and self-confidence, fostering a sense of empowerment among women. Knowledge about their bodies and sexuality becomes accessible through education, allowing for informed choices and a deeper understanding of personal well-being.

Crucially, education equips women with the skills to make independent decisions and negotiate effectively in various aspects of life. It enhances women's awareness of their civil rights, enabling them to advocate for themselves and others. Education also plays a pivotal role in providing practical skills for income generation, thereby enhancing economic independence.

Moreover, an educated woman is better positioned for effective participation in the community and society at large. This not only leads to social development but also ensures that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes. Education acts as a catalyst, instilling courage and inner strength in women, enabling them to confront and overcome challenges in every sphere of life. In essence, the promotion of education for women is a comprehensive approach to fostering empowerment, equality, and positive societal transformation.

### **IMPACT OF EDUCATION**

The impact of women's education on their experience of violence is striking, revealing a significant correlation between educational attainment and reduced instances of violence. The data by NFHS-4 shows a substantial decline in the percentage of women reporting physical violence, dropping from 41 percent among those with no schooling to 17 percent among those with 12 or more years of schooling. Similarly, the experience of sexual violence sharply decreases with schooling, declining from 9 percent among women with no schooling to 3 percent among women with 12 or more years of education. While all forms of spousal violence exhibit a notable decline with increased schooling, it's noteworthy that approximately 18-19 percent of women with 12 or more years of schooling still report having experienced physical, sexual, or emotional spousal violence. However, there is a significant contrast in the likelihood of spousal violence based on the education levels of husbands. Husbands with 12 or more years of schooling are half as likely (21%) to commit such violence compared to husbands with no schooling (45%). Notably, the pattern of spousal violence varies similarly based on the educational levels of both women and their husbands. Furthermore, the study highlights that women in couples where both partners have equal levels of schooling are less likely (24%) to have experienced spousal violence compared to couples where neither attended school (46%) or where one partner has more schooling. This data, sourced from NFHS-4, underscores the pivotal role of education in reducing the incidence of violence against women within intimate relationships, emphasizing the importance of educational empowerment for both women and their partners.

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### **SCOPE OF IMPROVEMENT**

Education stands as a potent catalyst for social transformation and serves as a powerful tool in the fight against violence. Quality education, in particular, plays a crucial role in achieving cultural transformation by fostering attitudinal change within society. It is not merely about acquiring knowledge but about developing the capacity for critical thinking, enabling individuals to question existing norms and challenge oppressive practices.

Crucially, education has the responsibility to empower women by nurturing their agency, allowing them to make informed choices and decisions that shape their lives. This empowerment extends to creating awareness of women's rights, ensuring that they are equipped with the knowledge to assert themselves in various aspects of life.

A fundamental goal of education is to bring about a holistic empowerment that enables women to lead lives characterized by justice, fairness, and happiness. In essence, education serves as a transformative force, not only imparting knowledge but instilling the values and skills necessary for individuals, especially women, to actively contribute to a more equitable and just society. By emphasizing critical thinking, agency, and awareness of rights, education becomes a key driver for positive societal change.

### **FINDINGS**

While various government laws have been enacted to empower women in India, the data reveals an alarming situation concerning Violence Against Women (VAW), indicating that despite government efforts, challenges persist. Many women facing violence choose not to seek help, leading to a significant number of cases remaining concealed. The available data on VAW is limited, and underreporting is a pervasive issue, with only a small proportion of incidents getting officially registered. Despite an increase in the reporting of crimes, the unfortunate reality is that the conviction rate remains low and is even declining. Although the literacy rate among Indian women has seen improvement, a noticeable gap persists between male and female literacy rates. Although women are enrolling in education, data indicators, such as the Women Enrolment Rate, suggest that progress in closing the gender disparity gap is not robust enough. However, findings from NFHS-4 data present a silver lining, indicating that education has played a crucial role in empowering women to combat violence. Education has not only provided women with the tools to resist violence but has also encouraged them to come forward and report these heinous crimes. Despite the challenges, the positive impact of education on women's ability to confront and address violence is a testament to the transformative potential of education in fostering gender equality and women's empowerment.

### **CONCLUSION**

While legislative acts addressing Violence Against Women (VAW) have been enacted, their efficacy must not be confined to mere words but should translate into concrete actions. The key lies in ensuring the strict implementation of these laws and introducing corrective interventions to align with the objectives outlined in legal frameworks and policies. Recognizing the critical importance of addressing violence against women, it is imperative to conduct specific and periodic surveys regularly. This approach ensures comprehensive data collection across all age groups, social categories, and levels, including district-level information, facilitating more effective strategies to tackle the issue. Importantly, addressing VAW extends beyond legal and security measures; it necessitates social transformation achieved through quality education. While discussions often focus on the notion of quality education, a more comprehensive solution involves understanding that access to education is only an enabling factor for empowerment. To truly achieve this goal, a profound shift in attitudes toward women is essential, demanding a departure from patriarchal norms and the creation of a culture that respects and values women. By intertwining legal actions with social transformation through education, a more holistic approach can be adopted to combat Violence Against Women effectively.

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