



How Did India Successfully Reform Women's Rights? Part II: Answers from the Movement on Protection from Violence

Julia Constanze Braunmiller,* Isabel Santagostino Recavarren,*
Aparna Mittal,** and Tanvi Khatri**

This two-part policy brief series traces the development and reform of law in India related to three critical areas that affect women's rights and economic opportunities: women's property rights, domestic violence, and sexual harassment in the workplace. It explores the underlying factors and driving forces that led to reforms as well as the broad processes and extensive timelines required for change. It also highlights remaining gaps, including the absence of robust implementation as well as how inadequate administrative and infrastructural support for reform hinder true gender equality in a deeply patriarchal society. The achievements in India, which are the result of years of concerted efforts and thought leadership by multiple governmental and nongovernmental players, private actors, and women's rights activists, could function as a "how to" guide for other countries that may want to carry out similar reforms in the future. This second Brief in the series explores the decades-long journey that led to the adoption of the 2005 Domestic Violence Act and the 2013 Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, and highlights remaining legal and implementation gaps in the effective elimination of violence against women.

Guaranteeing women's freedom from violence is key to achieving inclusive economic growth

Legal frameworks play a significant role in expanding women's economic participation and empowerment. The World Bank Group's (WBG) *Women, Business and the Law* project shows the critical links between gender equality under the law and positive outcomes for women's employment and entrepreneurship. Better performance in the areas measured by the *Women, Business and the Law* index, including domestic violence and sexual harassment in employment, is associated with better development outcomes (World Bank 2023).

Reforming legislation to prevent violence against women is key given that any sustained growth requires the equal socioeconomic participation of both men and women; this, in turn, rests on a foundation of guarantees of basic conditions of safety. The impact of violence on women's physical and mental health is devastating. It can lead to economic dependence of the survivor and affect a woman's capacity to remain or progress in the labor market, ultimately affecting women's labor force participation. Recent studies show the detrimental effect of sexual harassment, and the negative spillover effect of domestic

violence, not only on individuals, but also on firms and societies as a whole (CWW 2020; Deloitte 2019). Judicial, medical, and police expenses (Rhys et al. 2019), as well as reduced women's labor force participation and productivity, lead to a significant cost and losses for economies, which amount to hundreds of billions per year (EIGE 2021; Yount et al. 2022).

Successful reforms on violence against women in India shared several common factors

India's reforms in the areas of domestic violence and sexual harassment are remarkable, and are the hard-won result of successful engagements among a wide variety of public and private stakeholders. Nonetheless, several gaps remain in the existing legal framework and in terms of implementation of the laws. For instance, while India was among the first signatories and ratifiers of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it has yet to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 of 2019. Interviews with women's rights experts from local civil society organizations (CSOs), the public and private sectors, lawyers, and academics in India, as well as three panel discussions with these experts,

Affiliations: *World Bank, Development Economics, Women, Business and the Law. **Samana Centre for Gender, Policy and Law. For correspondence: jbraunmiller@worldbank.org; isantagostino@worldbank.org

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Objective and disclaimer: This series of Global Indicators Briefs synthesizes existing research and data to shed light on a useful and interesting question for policy debate. Data for this Brief are extracted from the WBL database and supplemented by information gained through interviews and panel discussions conducted between December 2021 and January 2022 with women's rights experts from local civil society organizations (CSOs), the public and private sectors, lawyers, and academics in India, as well as desk research. This Brief builds on the information collected to reconstruct the development of the legal reforms and the success factors that allowed the reforms to pass. This Brief carries the names of the authors and should be cited accordingly. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of the World Bank Group, its Executive Directors, or the governments they represent. All Briefs in the series can be accessed via: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/global-indicators-briefs-series>.

revealed the path and common factors of reforms and the role of key players, as well as current areas for improvement; this Brief draws from these sources.

The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, three years after the country's independence in 1947, introduced the foundations of gender equality as a fundamental right. By establishing the principle of equality before the law, prohibiting discrimination on multiple grounds, including sex, and allowing for affirmative action measures for gender equality, the new and progressive Constitution set the foundation for reforms in favor of women's safety in India. The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961 was one of the consequences of this new constitutional mindset of progressive social reform and promotion of gender equality, aiming at restraining and regulating the custom of dowry and its devastating impact on women.

A significant factor in the law reform process has been India's thriving civil society, which set in motion and significantly contributed to the legal reforms discussed in this Brief. It includes academics, lawyers, judges, nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, women's rights organizations, activists, and the general public. Collectively, they all have contributed to the intellectual process of critiquing deficiencies in existing law, drafting legislation, and forming a consensus on the direction the law should take by organizing public opinion and reinforcing democratic processes through campaigns, discussions, and protests. For instance, CSOs, in particular Lawyers Collective and Action India, were instrumental in the government of India's enactment of the 2005 Domestic Violence Act. CSOs' role spanned different stages of the process, from drafting the law, to mobilizing and organizing campaigns, to collecting signatures.

In addition, the Supreme Court of India, the highest court of the country (often referred to as the constitutional court), has played a pivotal role in upholding the rule of law and constitutional values. It has progressively interpreted ambiguities and conflicts in provisions of laws, enhanced the purview of constitutional rights, and prescribed guidelines in the absence of statutory laws. For example, in the area of sexual harassment of women in the workplace, the Vishaka Guidelines issued by the Supreme Court ultimately became the basis for the subsequent enactment of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act of 2013.

Two key bodies of the government of India also played a critical role in the reforms highlighted in this Brief: the Law Commission of India, and the National Commission for

Women. In particular, the work of the National Commission for Women was key for the advancement of India's legal framework on violence against women. This government body is mandated to strengthen legal rights and protection for women and tasked with reviewing the constitutional and legal framework on women's rights, making recommendations for reform, and advising the government of India on all policy matters affecting women. It prepared the first draft law on the protection of women from sexual harassment at work (upon request by the government of India) in consultations with lawyers and CSOs.

A five-decade journey toward specific legislation against domestic violence

India's journey of sociolegal reforms to address domestic violence followed a unique path spanning nearly five decades, starting from addressing dowry-related offenses (box 1), to recognizing additional offences in the criminal law, to enacting the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act in 2005 (2005 DV Act). The landmark legislation represented a significant step toward the advancement of women's rights in the country, in alignment with international law on the subject, and created for the first time a comprehensive framework to address domestic violence by enabling protective rights and welfare measures for all women in the country, regardless of their religion.

From a focus only on dowry-related violence to a comprehensive definition of domestic violence

After almost eight years of debate on the need to control the practice of dowry to avoid its adverse implications, in 1961, the Parliament of India enacted the Dowry Prohibition Act. The goal of the law, was to prohibit and penalize the practice of dowry, and to curb the associated violence against women in their matrimonial homes (box 1). However, the shortcomings and loopholes in the Dowry Prohibition Act became rapidly evident, given the alarming rise in “dowry deaths”, the narrow definition of dowry provided by the law, as well as the lack of reference in the law to any associated form of cruelty, violence, and harassment against women. Following the heavy criticism by women's rights activists and CSOs, and a persistent series of rallies and protests, as well as the continuous alarming reports of deaths of married women under suspicious circumstances, in 1983 the Law Commission of India undertook, of its own initiative, a study on the topic and on the adequacy of the laws and regulations (Law Commission of India 1983). Taking

Box 1 What does dowry have to do with domestic violence?

Dowry is the practice of a bride's family giving gifts, assets, property, and money to the groom or his family upon marriage. It has been prevalent in India for many generations, centuries before the country achieved independence in 1947. The roots for this practice were linked to the traditional and religious custom of “*stridhan*” (gift to a woman), consisting of voluntary gifts given by families to their daughters upon their marriage for their enjoyment and financial security, in a social background where women had very limited property rights.

However, over time this practice became alarmingly extortionary, with immense financial pressure and demands put on the bride's family (in a society that attaches immense social stigma to a woman remaining unmarried). This has led to the perpetuation of gender inequality in India—considering women as less valuable than men and strengthening the preference of male over female children—as well as gender-based violence, financial demands, and harassment by the husband and his family, often resulting in the death of the wife.

Victims of “dowry deaths” invariably involve a young, recently married woman, known to be unhappy because of demands of dowry, where the death took place behind closed doors and under suspicious circumstances, such as burns sustained in a fire, injuries, or poisoning, reported by her husband and in-laws as a suicide or accident. The rights enshrined in the 1950 Constitution, paired with a very active civil society, gave rise to the anti-dowry movement, where individuals and many groups joined hands to create awareness, organize campaigns and protests, and build pressure on the government of India to reexamine and reform the laws.

Source: Butalia 2020; Calvi and Keskar 2021; Law Commission of India 1983; Nair 2017.

note of the peculiarities of “dowry deaths,” the Law Commission’s report of 1983 not only recognized the gaps in the 1961 Dowry Prohibition Act but also called for the creation of specific offences in the criminal law statute, such as “subjecting a woman to cruelty” and the presumption of a “dowry-related death.” During the 1980s, Parliament introduced additional amendments to the laws, including the Indian Penal Code (figure 1), in alignment with the recommendations made by the Law Commission. However, these changes also fell short in addressing the challenges and ground realities and did not result in any substantial change for women experiencing dowry-related pressure and domestic violence (Jaising 2009).

Leading feminist lawyers such as Indira Jaising (founder of the NGO, Lawyers Collective) and Flavia Agnes pointed out to the Law Commission and to the government of India multiple limitations in the then existing laws and regulations (Jaising 2009). In particular, the focus on dowry and related deaths, violence, and cruelty was considered rather narrow because it did not take into account other forms of violence in both matrimonial and non matrimonial relationships, such as sexual abuse, emotional abuse, or economic abuse. Moreover, criminal and civil laws did not establish a comprehensive mechanism to provide for the well-being, safety, protection, and rehabilitation of women who were facing domestic violence or cruelty. While not a direct remedy, women were allowed to seek divorce on the grounds of cruelty under applicable personal laws.

In 1993, the National Commission for Women requested the Lawyers Collective to prepare a draft bill to comprehensively address domestic violence (Jaising 2009). The organization presented two drafts in 1994 and 2001 to both the National Commission for Women and the Ministry of Women and Child Development (Saheli 2005). This process was accompanied by nationwide campaigns and deliberations, including a national colloquium, aimed at providing more visibility to the proposed bill and to the issue of domestic violence, and creating consensus among lawyers and judges on the seriousness of the issues and on the inadequacy of the existing laws and regulations (Jaising 2009; Ghose 2021).

In March 2002, the government of India presented its own draft of the bill to Parliament. The proposed bill disappointed

women’s organizations and activists because it contained many provisions that were not aligned with the recommendations contained in the Lawyers Collective bills (Saheli 2005). The bill was not received well on grounds that its scope was narrow, the relief measures not comprehensive, its purview was limited to matrimonial relationships, and it required domestic violence to be reiterated to constitute a crime (Jaising 2009). This led to another phase of nationwide campaigns and discussions (Saheli 2005).

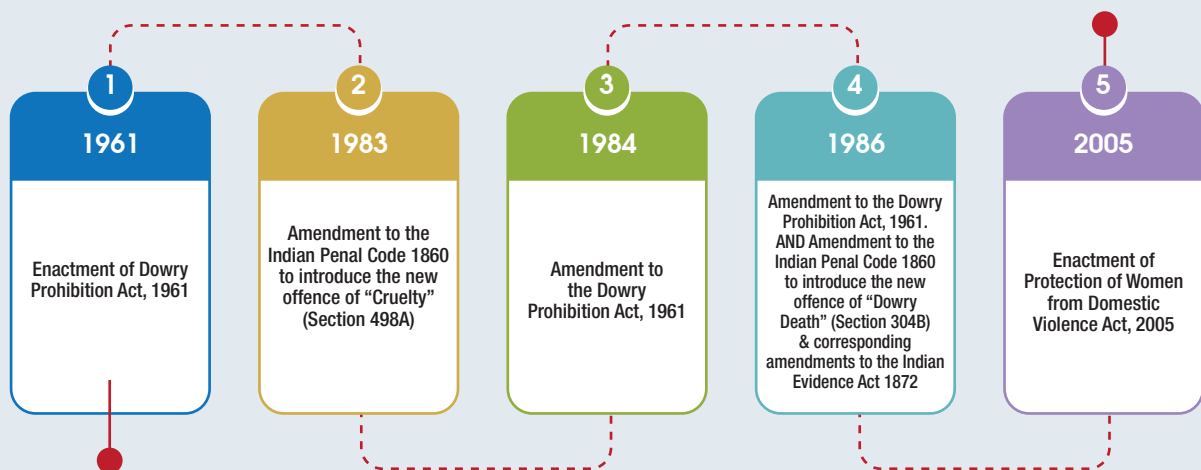
In response to the feedback, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resource Development was tasked with the examination of the bill, and the committee submitted its report to Parliament in 2002. However, the dissolution of Parliament in 2004 stalled the process. In the meantime, civil society demanded the passage of the bill, with Action India collecting more than 250,000 signatures to pressure the government (Action India 2016; 124th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2002; Jaising 2009).

In 2004, once the new government of India was formed, the bills were taken up again, and, in a culmination of what had been nearly 12 years of advocacy and several rounds of drafting, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act was finally passed in 2005 (figure 1). The 2005 DV Act represented an innovative piece of legislation, the result of years of advocacy aimed at eradicating artificial classifications and barriers in women’s access to justice, no matter their religion and caste. Key innovations in the 2005 DV Act included a new definition of “domestic violence” that recognized any form of physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse; a broader definition of “domestic relationship” to include not only husbands, but also siblings, parents, children, members of the joint family they live with, and even cohabiting or intimate partners; and different types of protection orders, as well as the provision of services for survivors.

After the adoption of the Domestic Violence Act of 2005, reporting rates of dowry-related and domestic violence have been increasing

While the reporting rates of incidents of dowry, cruelty and domestic violence have been increasing, over time the number of dowry deaths has been slowly decreasing (230th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2021; NCRB 2020, 2021). The increase over time in reporting rates may signal a

Figure 1 A decades-long reform process toward specific legislation on domestic violence



Source: Women, Business, and the Law database.

shift in social norms and higher accessibility to and trust in the justice system, as more women are willing to come forward, and it also indicates the alarming prevalence of domestic violence. For instance, in 2001 only 3,222 cases were reported under the Dowry Prohibition Act versus 13,568 in 2021 (figure 2 panel b). Furthermore, between 2001 and 2021, the majority of domestic violence cases in the country were filed under “cruelty by husband or his relatives,” a number almost tripling over 20 years (136,234 cases in 2021, versus 49,170 in 2001) (figure 2 panel a). Overall, since 2001 reported numbers increased not only in absolute terms, but also relative to the population, in particular of working-aged women (aged 15 to 64 years old). Also, only 6.8 percent of the cases filed completed trials in 2018, with most perpetrators being acquitted, which shows that the judicial response may be inadequate (Mascarenhas 2022; NCRB 1995, 2020, 2021). Further, while cases have been decreasing over time, in 2020 alone, 19 women were murdered for dowry every day, for a total of 6,966 cases (NCRB 2020).

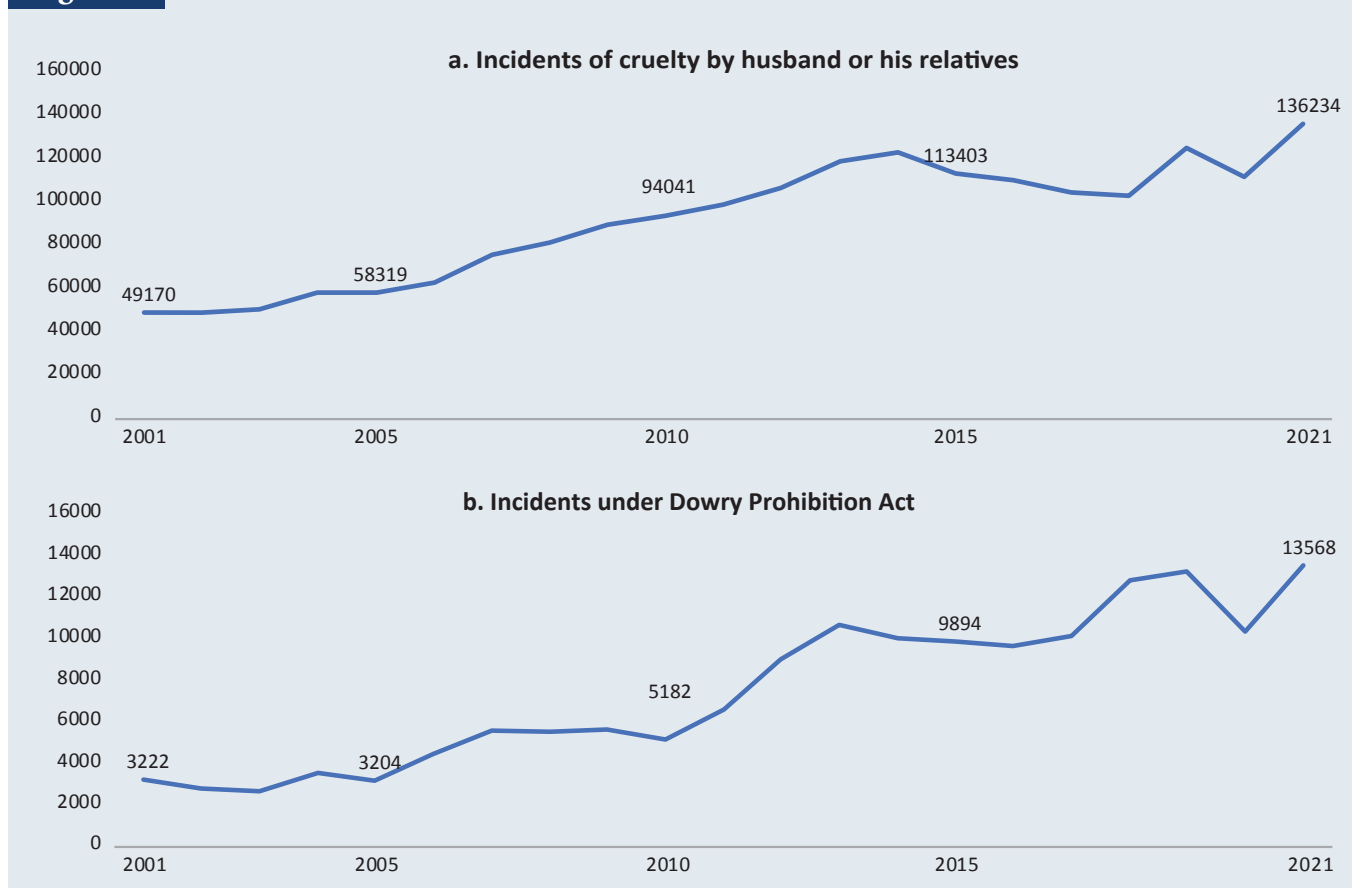
Given these alarming figures, in 2021 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, after assessing the current state of women’s safety in the country, reiterated the commitment of the government of India to bringing to an end all kinds of atrocities and crimes against women and children (230th Report of the Standing Committee, 2021). Some of the report’s recommendations included: (1) enhancing the presence of women in the police force; (2) studying the efficacy of exclusive women police stations already set up across the country; (3) increasing awareness among public and ground-level officials about the 2005 DV Act; (4) setting up additional shelter homes for survivors of violence, providing adequate food, clothing, medicine, and other basic amenities;

(5) setting up additional one-stop centers, and at least one one-stop center at every subdivisional level; (6) introducing procedures to file complaints irrespective of the jurisdiction where the offence was committed (Zero-First Information Reports); (7) strengthening helplines and raising awareness about their presence, (8) providing adequate public funding and improving the utilization of the funds; and (9) mapping all NGOs to establish a reliable network of support (230th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2021).

A progressive law on domestic violence on the books is being hampered by lack of implementation, adequate infrastructure, and awareness

While the 2005 DV Act has been hailed as a progressive law, its full potential has not been explored or utilized, in part due to the lack of implementation, adequate infrastructure, and awareness (Hughes 2017). One area for improvement that needs to be addressed is the lack of support services and mechanisms. There are still not enough Protection Officers trained to effectively respond to cases of violence against women. Further, while the 2005 DV Act envisages a whole range of support services, such as shelter homes, medical and legal aid, and service providers, among others, lack of adequate infrastructure and funding (UN Women Asia and the Pacific 2012) has led to such facilities being inadequate. Another area for improvement is removing barriers within the judicial system. The approach of the judges and magistrates has been inconsistent. While in some cities such as Delhi, there is more willingness to provide comprehensive relief to the victim than in other states where judges and magistrates are often unwilling to do so. Sensitization efforts and training for members of the judiciary should

Figure 2 A 20-year sample of crimes against women, 2001 to 2021



Source: 230th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2021; NCRB 2020, 2021.

therefore be a priority. Further, as court backlogs continue to grow, legal redress to survivors is not fully available on a timely basis (UN Women Asia and the Pacific 2012).

An active partnership between India’s civil society and government in the adoption of the sexual harassment law

The Supreme Court and a thriving civil society played a key role in the adoption of legislation on sexual harassment in employment.

In the early 1990s, the brutal gang rape of social worker Bhanwari Devi, in the course of her official work to combat the practice of child marriage in a village in Rajasthan, led to nationwide uproar and demand for laws protecting women from sexual violence at the workplace (Pandey 2017). As a result, the Supreme Court, in its landmark decision of 1997, *Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan*, issued the Vishaka Guidelines. For 16 years, these filled the void in statutory law until the adoption of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act in 2013. Women’s rights organizations—in particular, Vishakha, Women’s Rehabilitation Group, Jagori, and Kali—affirming that this was an attack on Bhanwari Devi during her work as an employee while performing her duties (Nathan 2018), filed a writ petition as a class action suit before the Supreme Court of India, with an aim to enforce the constitutional and fundamental right of gender equality and fill the legal vacuum on this topic (*Vishaka vs. State of Rajasthan* 1997).

The then-existing legal framework provided redress measures for sexual crimes against women such as obscenity or outraging the modesty of women, but the laws did not specifically address the issue of sexual harassment in employment. Further, multiple factors such as the lack of sensitization of the police personnel, the lengthy time frame for the culmination of criminal cases, and the standard of proof beyond reasonable doubt, dissuaded women from seeking legal justice (Human Rights Watch 2020).

In 1997 the Supreme Court of India, in response to the writ petition, recognizing the urgency for robust legislation to prevent and redress sexual harassment of women at the workplace, laid down detailed guidelines (the Vishaka Guidelines) to address sexual harassment at all workplaces. The Vishaka Guidelines had the value of law until the Parliament of India enacted the appropriate legislation. They required the employer to provide a safe working environment, making it mandatory for all organizations, both in the private and public sectors, to establish an internal mechanism (in the form of a complaints committee) for redressal of complaints of sexual harassment, and to take measures for creating awareness for its prevention. After the issuance of the Vishaka Guidelines, some companies, especially in the public sector, started setting up internal committees (ICs), and courts issued multiple judgments on the scope of the guidelines (Parliamentary Debates 2011).

Between 1997 and 2003, the government of India, in compliance with the ruling of the Supreme Court, took some steps to implement the Vishaka Guidelines (Parliamentary Debates 2003a): for example, by setting up a monitoring system within the Ministry of Women and Child Development, and creating and circulating a Code of Conduct for Workplaces (Parliamentary Debates 2003a). Then, in the early 2000s, as the lack of evidence about the status of implementation of the Vishaka Guidelines in the private sector became apparent, and given the government’s pending obligations under CEDAW and the Constitution of India, the government of India began drafting legislation specifically addressing sexual harassment of

women at the workplace based on the Vishaka Guidelines (239th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2011).

The government requested the National Commission for Women to prepare a draft bill, which, after consultations involving state governments, lawyers, and CSOs, was sent to the Ministry of Women and Child Development in August 2004. After a national consultation and extensive discussions, the Protection of Women against Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill was presented before Parliament in December 2010. The bill was then referred by Parliament to its Standing Committee for its recommendations, which were published in its final report in 2011 (239th Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee 2011).

By then, more than 12 years had elapsed since the Vishaka Guidelines had been issued. The law-making process was still ongoing, when the entire nation was shaken by the Nirbhaya case, the brutal gang rape and death of a young woman in the capital New Delhi on December 16, 2012. Widespread and unprecedented protests across India took place, calling for a holistic review and overhaul of laws on violence against women (Bakshi 2017). In response, the government of India appointed a committee to undertake an extensive review of the laws on violence against women in India (Verma, Seth, and Subramaniam 2013). Growing demands and pressure resulted, in 2013, in Parliament finally enacting the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (PoSH Act), and also amending the Penal Code by adding the new offence of “sexual harassment.” The new PoSH Act was built upon the Vishaka Guidelines and the consultations and recommendations received over the previous decade.

The PoSH Act: (1) mandates the constitution of an internal committee (IC) by every employer in India with more than 10 employees to inquire into complaints of sexual harassment at the workplace, in a time-bound, impartial, and confidential manner; (2) mandates the establishment by the government of a local committee (LC) in every district to deal with complaints of sexual harassment from workplaces with fewer than 10 employees, or from domestic workers, or against the employer of a workplace itself; (3) stipulates a host of duties for the employer and the government, including to adopt preventive steps and sensitize employees about sexual harassment and the PoSH Act; and (4) provides the mechanism for inquiry into the complaints, penalties, and related matters.

Government, employers, and civil society started collaborating to better implement the sexual harassment law

enactment of the PoSH Act led to extensive work across India. Employers sensitized their workforce and set up ICs in charge of handling complaints of sexual harassment (Hari 2017). The government raised awareness and pushed for employers’ compliance (Prasad 2018). In 2017 the government also set up the Sexual Harassment Electronic Box (SHe-Box, www.shebox.nic.in), an online portal developed to enable women to file complaints related to sexual harassment at the workplace (The Hindu 2017). In addition to annual filings under the PoSH Act, since 2018, it is mandatory for companies to include in their annual report (under the Companies Act) information about the constitution of ICs in compliance with the PoSH Act.

In 2021, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs recommended that: (1) regular orientation and awareness programs under the PoSH Act be conducted, especially for vulnerable working women, such as migrants and those in the informal sector; (2) district administrations conduct surveys of different workplaces and types of work that

women in their districts are involved in, and constitute LCs accordingly; (3) budgetary allocations be made for community-based behavioral change programs and services; and (4) coordination between the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Women and Child Development, and state governments be enhanced to improve the utilization of the funds allocated to them, especially under the Nirbhaya Fund, which can be utilized for projects for women safety and security (230th Report of the Standing Committee 2021).

Further, the National Commission for Women periodically conducts consultations with legal experts, academics, retired judges, and CSOs to strengthen the implementation of the PoSH Act (National Commission for Women 2018) and organizes awareness and sensitization sessions and campaigns across India, as well as press conferences, media and advocacy material, and grants (National Commission for Women Annual Report 2018–19).

Gaps remain in the legal and administrative framework to effectively prevent and combat sexual harassment of women at work

While the PoSH Act stipulates the establishment of LCs across every district in India, and the filing of complaints with LCs for sexual harassment in workplaces in the informal sector or workplaces with fewer than 10 employees, or by domestic workers, limitations to their functioning persist. LCs have not yet been set up in all districts in India, and there is still very little awareness about them. A study conducted in 2018 indicates that out of 655 districts across India, only 29 percent confirmed they had set up LCs, 15 percent had not, and 56 percent did not respond (Human Rights Watch 2020). Further, domestic workers remain the most vulnerable because they work in private homes that are not subject of any employment laws and, given their low economic status, they have very little or no bargaining power or job security. Thus, the PoSH Act specifies that complaints from domestic workers should be filed with the LCs, which would lead to police investigations under criminal law. However, this remedy has remained one on paper, due to the lack of LCs, lack of awareness about this process, and women's hesitancy in approaching the criminal law system on such matters. Finally, there is lack of credible public data with respect to how many workplaces in India are actually complying with the PoSH Act, and whether the LCs and nodal officers have been appointed and are working. While employers are required to report (anonymized) data annually, there is no visibility on what happens to these data once they are provided to the respective district officers. Further, given the geographical expanse of India and number of districts and district officers (details of which are often not easily available), filing these physical reports is inefficient and cumbersome.

Recommendations to remedy remaining gaps in India's laws regarding violence against women covered in this Brief

This Brief discussed important strides in India to increase women's protection from violence. Over the past 70 years, as a result of civil society advocacy and governmental engagement, women have gained many rights. Yet, gaps remain in the laws and their implementation to ensure that women can lead their lives on an equal footing with men.

Support the implementation of domestic violence legislation

While the 2005 DV Act is considered a progressive act and provides a comprehensive definition of domestic violence and range of protection orders, its implementation has been lacking

in multiple aspects. Some of its gaps could be filled by the following recommendations:

- Establish a special procedure (fast-track) or a specialized court for domestic violence cases.
- Increase the number of first responders, such as judicial, medical, and police personnel, Protection Officers, and NGOs, and make these numbers publicly available. Additionally, mandate first responders' training and sensitization.
- Strengthen coordination between ministries and government agencies.
- Mandate a periodic update of national and state-level plans, coupled with an implementation and monitoring and evaluation system.
- Mandate specific financing, including budget allocations by the government and tracking of actual use of funds to implement the law.
- Improve institutional infrastructure and support services such as one-stop centers, additional shelter homes with requisite facilities for victims of violence, legal aid, and health care clinics, among others.

Ensure the implementation of sexual harassment legislation

Shortcomings of the PoSH Act can be improved to ensure its full implementation. Aspects to consider include the following:

- Establish guidelines and monitoring mechanisms, as well as a system to evaluate the proper functioning of both ICs and LCs.
- Improve the reporting mechanisms for sexual harassment complaints, especially for the informal sector and domestic workers, for instance by including one-stop centers (set up by the government) and credible NGOs to provide assistance to victims.
- Mandate the provision of government services such as legal, psychological, and social support services, and the periodic publication of national and state plans, coupled with an implementation and monitoring and evaluation system.
- Mandate specific financing, including budget allocations by the government and tracking actual use to implement the law.
- Mandate the presence of an external member as mandatory quorum for ICs and LCs proceedings and stipulate that the external member must be a lawyer.
- Increase the period to make a complaint to 9–12 months.
- Centralize, streamline, and digitize the statutory filings to be made by employers, among others.

The need to continue reforming women's economic rights

While the incessant and thorough work of India's civil society, judiciary, and government led to the adoption of landmark legislations, some gaps remain across several domains in fully realizing equal rights. These challenges persist not only in the areas of women's property rights and gender-based violence, but also in other domains critical for women's empowerment. The *Women, Business and the Law* dataset shows room for improvement particularly in the area of employment, where for instance there is currently no law granting paternity leave for private sector employees across the country (World Bank 2023).

India's advancements over the past decades have shown that change is possible and can be effective. Closing the remaining gaps will require the continued participation and representation of women in public spaces and decision-making, as well as the concerted effort of civil society organizations, government, policy makers, international organizations, and the private sector.

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