

Standing Committee Report Summary

Atrocities and Crimes against Women and Children

- The Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Chair: Mr. Anand Sharma) submitted its report on the subject 'Atrocities and Crimes against Women and Children' on March 15, 2021. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Registration of crimes:** The Committee highlighted that crimes against women and children are often not registered at police stations. It recommended: (i) conducting decoy operations at police stations to ensure that FIRs are registered timely, (ii) developing and promoting online registration of FIRs, (iii) filing zero FIRs, and (iv) recording reasons in case of delay in filing FIRs. It also recommended taking strict actions against police personnel and individuals registering false cases.
 - **Conviction rate:** The Committee noted that the conviction rate in crimes against women and children is low. Against a target of 1,023 fast track courts for cases related to rape and matters under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO), only 597 courts are operational. It recommended: (i) implementing the Online Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences provided to law enforcement agencies to track police investigations, (ii) setting up at least one forensic laboratory in every state capital, (iii) setting up fast-track courts in a time-bound manner, and (iii) providing law enforcement with public prosecutors.
 - **Women from disadvantaged communities:** The Committee noted that women from Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) face difficulty in getting cases of atrocities and crimes registered. It recommended law enforcement agencies to include provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 while registering cases such as rape and sexual harassment against women from SCs and STs.
 - **Measures for safety and prevention:** The Committee noted that the government has established helpline numbers and women and children helpdesks, among other measures to receive complaints on crimes against women and children. It highlighted that a low number of calls are received on helpline numbers and recommended: (i) establishing an integrated three-digit pan-India helpline number, (ii) publicising and promoting the use of the helpline. It also observed that state governments maintain post-incidence services such as shelter homes and recommended increasing their number to ensure post-incidence care for women.
- **Cyber-crimes:** The Committee recommended empowering law enforcement agencies to take action against those found to be committing cyber-crimes, regardless of state boundaries. It recommended identifying and permanently blocking virtual private networks used to bypass cyber security walls with the aid of Internet Service Providers. The Committee further highlighted that with increasing dependency on cyber tools, adequate training must be imparted to law enforcement agencies.
- **Representation of women:** The Committee highlighted that 10.3% of the police force is female despite repeated advisories issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs to ensure that 33% of police forces are women. It recommended conducting special recruitment drives for posts at all levels.
- **Institutional mechanisms:** The Committee recommended reforms, which include: (i) collecting data on atrocities against women on the basis of social parameters like caste, (ii) creating a database for criminals engaged in crimes including molesting, and (iii) creating a national database of destitute women and children to help provide shelter.
- **Nirbhaya Fund:** The Committee observed that only 39% of funds allocated for the fund have been disbursed. It recommended establishing a Committee at the central level to oversee utilisation of the fund. Further, the fund is consistently diverted towards other schemes.
- **Legal changes:** The Committee recommended amending the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 to prevent misuse based on false complaints. It stated that sexual offences by juveniles are increasing and recommended reducing threshold age for applicability of POCSO from 18 years to 16 years.
- **Impact of COVID-19:** The Committee highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown led to an increase in domestic violence, and trafficking. It recommended: (i) extending cash transfers to women, (ii) instituting a moratorium on interest rates for female led self help groups, and (iii) increasing women's participation in economic activities. It suggested establishing a National Anti-Human Trafficking Bureau to investigate cases of trafficking across states and countries.

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