



CRIME AGAINST WOMEN VIS-A-VIS LAWS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA

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Paper Received On: 26 OCT 2023

Peer Reviewed On: 29 OCT 2023

Published On: 01 NOV 2023

Abstract

Crime is an illegal act that has existed in our society for all of recorded time. Historically, these acts have always been committed against the most vulnerable members of society as a whole. Women are one of these weaker groups. In the twenty-first century, women's situation in traditional Indian society is abhorrent. Rape, murder, dowry deaths, human trafficking, kidnapping, and abductions against women are on the rise despite the existence of multiple laws and sanctions. While women face numerous challenges from the embryonic to their deathbed, the Indian Constitution's Article 14 and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Article 7 both mention equality before the law. Despite the fact that numerous laws and regulations have been created to protect women, the number of crimes committed against them rises daily and annually. Around 1 crore cases of crimes against women were registered under the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) in the last five years till 2023. In India as well as throughout the world, violence against women is on the rise; these victims are harmed sexually, physically, mentally, and financially. The disturbing global scope of this violence was brought to light by numerous studies that emphasized its prominence and called for an increasing amount of research. Studies have also shown that some categories of women—minority groups, women from indigenous and migrant communities, women incarcerated or in institutions, women with impairments, women with young children, and elderly women—are more vulnerable than others. Although there is yet no cure for crime, there is a treatment for it. The first step toward a better society with fewer violent episodes is educating girls. Campaigns to alter attitudes and raise awareness about gender inequity among men and boys are useful instruments. As responsible citizens and individuals, we must raise awareness of and report any acts of violence against women that we come across.

Key Words: Crime, Gender Violence, Women, Gender, Spatial Variations, Policies, Abuse, Special Laws.



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1. INTRODUCTION:

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man’s injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power then woman is immeasurably man’s superior. Has she not greater intuition is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance has she not greater courage? Without her man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?”

-Mahatma Gandhi¹

Crime against women is a global outbreak. It is one of the most prevalent violation of human rights. Various attempts has been made for affirmative provisions against gender discrimination. Every civilized society accepting the significance of equality of sexes. But still, equality between men and women continues to be an eluded goal.

Crime against women has attracted the attention of media and the public. It is a need of this hour to protect and ameliorate the status of women in the society. The women are the soul of our nation, they are inspiration for the family, and they also create morale in their children and blueprint for the society to follow. Crime against women is considerable impediment to finish discrimination against women and gender inequality. The cases of dowry death, outraging modesty of women, sexual harassment at workplace, rape or gang rape, cruelty by husband and his relatives, female foeticide and female infanticide, molestation of women and eve teasing, kidnapping and abduction and immoral traffic in women and girls, honor killing, domestic violence are increasing day by day. A statistics of crime against women shows that every year the curve of violence or crime against women is getting higher and higher. Even there are numerable cases where atrocities against women are not registered. In India, women are perhaps the worst and most perennial victims of personal violence in India. Dowry is a deep rooted custom in Indian society, it is a social menace. Dowry death cases rose up by more than 7.1 thousand in 2021.

2. WHAT IS CRIME?

Before discussing what crime is, we must know about law, this is because these two terms are intertwined. Traditionally, we know Law as a command of Sovereign. **Austin** defines a law as —*a rule laid down for the guidance of an intelligent being by an intelligent being having power over him.*”

¹ Mahatma Gandhi, —To the Women of India|| , *Young India*, Oct. 4, 1930.

The concept of crime is inevitable in human society. The inevitability and universality of the phenomenon of crime has been described by *Emile Durkheim* in the following words:-

—There is no society that is confronted with the problem of criminality. Its form changes; the acts thus characterized are not the same everywhere; but, everywhere and always, there have been men who have behaved in such a way as to draw upon themselves penal repression...No doubt it is possible that crime itself will have abnormal forms, as for example, when its rate is unusually high. This excess is indeed undoubtedly morbid in nature. What is normal, simply, is the existence of criminality, provided that it attains and does not exceed, for each social type, a certain level.

The Lawyer-Sociologist *Paul W. Tappan* has defined crime as “*an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law, committed without defense or justification, and sanctioned by the law as felony or misdemeanor.*”²

It is not always necessary for act or omission to be intentional in order to be crime. Based on the principle of strict responsibility, crime could be punishable on the grounds of knowledge, recklessness, rash or negligence or without including the mental element of the wrongdoer.

Justice *Dalveer Bhandari* of the Supreme Court has said, “*Every criminal act is an offence against the society. The crime is wrong done more to the society than to an individual. It involves a serious invasion of rights and liberties of some other person or persons.*”³

3. WHAT IS CRIME AGAINST WOMEN?

Crime against women are as old as civilization and has happening since time immemorial and still the graph of crime against women increasing. *Ravana* had abducted *Sita* and taken her to his Lanka, the *Kauravas* had insulted *Draupadi* (the wife of Pandavas) in the Raj Darbar. *Draupadi* was disrobed by *Dushasan* in the presence of all the elders and members of the Raj Sabha, this happened because *Yudhisitir* had put *Draupadi* as a pawn in gamble and had lost *Draupadi* in gambling. *Draupadi* begged for justice in the Raj Sabha but no one did raise their voices against the injustice that was being perpetrated.

The United Nation defines Crime against women as:-

“*Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.*”

² Ahmed Siddique, *Criminology, Penology and Victimology*, 7th ed. 2016, Reprinted with Supplement 2021, p. 20.

³ *Md. Shahbuddin v. State of Bihar & Ors.*, Cri. Appeal no. 591 Of 2010.

To break the soul of women, men is indulging in raping women of any age, even the girl child in the cradle and the old lady who is waiting for her death time. Even the pregnant women are not same. In *Pratap Mishra v. State of Orissa*⁴, a women who was five month pregnant, was staying in guest house; was raped by three men, one after the other and she aborted.

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a global Pandemic. One out of three women and girls (35%) worldwide between the ages of 15 and 49 has experienced physical violence, sexual violence or both.

Violence against women is a major threat to universal public health and women's health during pandemic. Intimate partner violence is the most ordinary guise of violence. Globally, 1 in 3 women over world have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by any perpetrator in their lifetime and most of them are the intimate partner violence.

Wife battering or spousal abuse is found in ever increasing and menacing proportion in our civilized society. Men has objectified the women, he treats women as an object or like his own property; or as a chattel which undermines the women's assertion of equality and dignity. Women and girls are the victims of most heinous or worst crimes like rape, murder and cruelty etc.

4. CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN IDENTIFIED UNDER INDIAN PENAL CODE, 1860 (Act No. 45 of 1860)

Crime against women include crime carried out by individual as well as states. Some of the forms of crime perpetrated by individuals are rape; prenatal sex selection, obstetric violence and mob violence; as well as harmful customary or traditional practices such as honor killings, dowry crimes, female genital mutilation, marriage by abduction and forced marriage etc. and rest are:

- 1) Rape (S. 375, 376, 376A, 376B, 376C, 376D, AND 376E IPC);
- 2) Attempt to commit rape (S. 376/511);
- 3) Kidnapping and abduction for different purposes (Ss. 363-373 IPC);
- 4) Homicide for dowry, dowry deaths, or their attempts (Ss.302/304B IPC);
- 5) Torture, both mental and physical (S. 498A IPC);
- 6) Cruelty by husband or his relatives (S. 498-A);
- 7) Insulting the modesty of a woman (S. 509);
- 8) Procurement of minor girl (S.366-A);

⁴ (1997) 3 SCC 41.

- 9) Importation of girls from foreign country (up to 21 years of age, S. 366-B IPC);
- 10) Selling minor for purpose of prostitution (S. 372);
- 11) Buying minor for purpose of prostitution (S. 373);
- 12) Cohabitation caused by a man inducing a belief of lawful marriage (S. 493);
- 13) Acid attacks (S. 326A and 326B);
- 14) Outraging the modesty of women (S. 354 IPC);
- 15) Assault on women with intent to disrobe a woman (S. 354B);
- 16) Voyeurism (S. 354C);
- 17) Stalking (S. 354D);
- 18) Honor Killing (S. 300).

5. THE CRIME AGAINST WOMEN RECOGNISED UNDER SPECIAL LAWS (SLL).

There are various legislations which only deal with women and discuss that how to have an effective prevention of social evils prevalent in Indian society which promote gender biasness and curb the up-liftment of the women. Although all laws are not gender specific, the provisions of law affecting women significantly have been reviewed periodically and amendments carried out to keep pace with the emerging requirements. Some acts which have special provisions to safeguard women and their interests are:-

- i. The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017
- ii. Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956
- iii. Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 (modified as on 3rd December, 2018)
- iv. The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021
- v. The Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994 (as amended by amendment of 2002 w.e.f., 14.02.2003)
- vi. The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1979 (includes The Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021)
- vii. Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- viii. Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987

- ix. Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013
- x. Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005.

6. HISTORICAL BRIEFING:-

Crimes against women are growing worryingly at local, regional, national and worldwide levels. It is rooted in gendered social structures rather than individual and random acts; it cuts across age, socio-economic, educational and geographic boundaries; affects all societies; and is a major obstacle to ending gender inequality and discrimination in our country `

The entire topic of crime against women in this work revolves around the fact that, while the problem is as old as the institution of family and society, perception of its negative features is relatively new. An examination of historical archives reveals that femininity has been revered as the embodiment of maternal power in India from antiquity. Women occupied a position of honour and respect in the Vedic and Upanishadic periods, and were equalized with men in society.

The glorious position of women eventually degraded as a result of the introduction of various social bad habits that pervaded in society with the sanction of *Smritis*, *Puranas*, *Sutras*, and so on. The Brahminical authors of later Vedic literature projected what was considered desirable for their own class rather than depicting the actual state of affairs. The shift in societal attitudes, as well as the impact of periodic invasions by foreign powers, exacerbated the already-existing problem. Puranic literature advocated the austere ideal and painted ladies in black to accomplish their goal and deter men from marrying. Their world-destroying notions were bolstered by the ideas of renowned thinkers who likewise regarded women as the source of all problems. Neither religious reformation movements nor new religions such as Buddhism or Jainism have succeeded.

The child marriage system persisted due to the impact of religious injunctions in later Vedic literature. Girls were illiterate and were restricted within the four walls of the husband's house under the *Purdah* regime. Widow re-marriage has been prohibited. The bad rituals of *Sati*, *Devadasi*, *dowry*, and *female infanticide*, among others, persisted on a vast scale. These bad habits in heightened kinds of crime gradually impacted women's positions, and they were criminally exploited in all aspects of their lives.

After the British arrived in India and managed to dominate the country for almost 200 years, certain adjustments were made to better the position of women. They had a modern attitude regarding

women. It should also be noted that several reformers, such as *Raja Rammohan Roy*, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar*, *Joytirav Phule*, and *Swami Dayanand Saraswati*, raised their voices and campaigned for the advancement of women during the British Raj. In 1829, *Raja Ram Mohan Roy's* efforts resulted in the ban of *Sati* Practice by Governor-General *William Cavendish Bantick*. *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar's* crusade for the betterment of widows resulted in the **Widow Remarriage Act of 1856**.

During the twentieth century, the freedom struggle provided an opportunity for the women's community to unite, and since then, they have been fighting for their liberty. The free India Constitution was drafted with the goal of, among other things, eradicating criminal exploitation of women. The world's apex body, the United Nations, has also inspired governments to defend the fair sex from time to time through its resolutions. As a result, numerous laws were enacted, as well as policies and programmes aimed at eliminating criminal exploitation of the weaker sex. The literacy rate among women has increased as a result of women-oriented programmes and policies. Even at the General Assembly's twenty-third special session in June 2000, titled Gender Equality, Development, and Peace for the Twenty-First Century, violence against women remained a major concern.

Many other International Conventions made it mandatory for states to take aggressive steps to protect women from all forms of abuse and to punish such violence in the twentieth century. Such obligations are contained in the **Universal Declaration on Human Rights, 1948; Convention on the Political Rights of Women, 1953; Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, 1957; the Declaration on Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 1967; the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of the Discrimination against Women, 1979; the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993; the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 1999, and United Nations Millennium Declaration 2000** etc.

In independent India, women now have the same position as men in all sectors of life. The Preamble to the Indian Constitution guarantees, among other things, the dignity of the individual. **Article 21** guarantees the right to life and personal liberty. Since *Maneka Gandhi vs. Union of India AIR 1978 SC 597*, the dimensions of **Article 21** have been increased on a large scale and the Apex Court is consistently proclaiming in a catena of cases that the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity. In the landmark case of *Francis Coralie Mullin vs.*

Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi AIR 1981 SC 7846 at 752-753, Justice *Bhagwati* observed:

"The right to life enshrined in Article 21 cannot be restricted to mere animal existence. It means something much more than just physical survival. -Every limb or faculty through which life is enjoyed is thus protected by Article 21. Any act, which damages or injures or interferes with use of any limb or faculty of a person, either permanently or even temporarily, would be within the inhibition of Article 21 the right to life includes the right to live with human dignity and all that goes along with it."

Article 14 clearly states that equality before the law and equal protection under the law are guaranteed. **Article 15** requires the state to follow a non-discrimination policy based on religion, race, caste, gender, or place of birth, or any combination of these factors. **Article 15 (3)** gives the State the authority to establish specific provisions for women and children. **Article 16** guarantees equal opportunity for all and forbids discrimination against women. **Articles 39 (a), (d), (e), 42,** and **51-A (e)**, among others, state that the state shall ensure a just social order for women.

Furthermore, in accordance with **Article 51** of our Constitution, Indian Courts have used international human rights norms as facts of the constitutionally sanctioned fundamental rights. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan AIR 1998 SC 3011*, the SC relied heavily on international tools to fill the legislative void and interpret women's fundamental rights under *Articles 14, 15, 19(1) (g),* and *21* of the Constitution. It viewed:

"Any international Convention not inconsistent with the fundamental rights and in harmony with their spirit must be read into these provisions to enlarge the meaning and content thereof, to promote the objects of the constitutional guarantee."

As a result, the Indian Constitution, in conjunction with the international legal framework, has provided sufficient foundation for the legislature to create a solid edifice of gender equity.

Study reveals that there are various measures included in the **Indian Penal Code, 1860, the Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, and the Evidence Act, 1872**, not only to protect women from exploitation, but also to allow courts to punish perpetrators.

Recently, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) released a report titled 'Crime in India – 2020'.

- The impact of a pandemic: In 2020, typical crimes such as theft, robbery, and assault on women and children decreased as a result of the Coronavirus epidemic and ensuing lockdown.

Disobedience to government commands increased dramatically, owing mostly to violations of COVID-19 principles

- Registered cases-In 2020, a total of 66,01,285 cognizable offences were registered, with 42,54,356 IPC crimes and 23,46,929 Special and Local Laws (SLL) crimes.

In 2020, India recorded an average of 80 murders per day, totaling 29,193 deaths, with Uttar Pradesh topping the list of states.

Across the 19 metropolitan cities, a total of 35,331 cases of crime against women were registered during 2020, showing a decrease of 21.1% over 2019 (44,783 cases).

The majority of crimes against women were registered under ‘cruelty by husband or his relatives (30.2%) followed by ‘assault on women with intent to outrage her modesty (19.7%), ‘kidnapping and abduction of women (19.0%) and ‘rape’ (7.2%). Despite the fact that new laws have been enacted and current laws have been amended, violence, sexual assaults, rape, and other forms of violence are on the rise.

7. GOVERNMENT SCHEMES AND POLICIES FOR GIRL CHILD AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Ensuring that the next generation is qualified, fairly represented, and able to continue the growth heritage is essential to a nation's future. Although gender inequity has long existed in our nation, the government is trying to address that by empowering, educating, and encouraging girls. Central and State Government policies and schemes that are targeted at improving the lives of girl child in India are mentioned below:

1. Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme;
2. One Stop Centre Scheme;
3. Women Helpline Scheme;
4. UJJAWALA : A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation;
5. Working Women Hostel;
6. Ministry approves new projects under Ujjawala Scheme and continues existing projects;
7. SWADHAR Greh (A Scheme for Women in Difficult Circumstances);
8. NARI SHAKTI PURASKAR ;
9. Awardees of , 2014 & Awardees of Nari Shakti Puruskar ;

10. Awardees of Rajya Mahila Samman & Zila Mahila Samman;
11. Mahila police Volunteers;
12. Mahila Shakti Kendras (MSK);
13. NIRBHAYA.⁵

8. RATIONALE BEHIND THE STUDY:

There was no dearth of innovative topics around me where the researcher could work with. But being a girl, the researcher was always inclined towards the women's status around the globe. As the crime against women is rapidly increasing; horrendous and blatant acts are happening with them, which disgraces the very soul of human being. With the growth of education and awareness, women have been able to break free from the four walls of their homes and enter and establish their worth in practically every aspect of life that was previously reserved for men in our patriarchal society.

As a result of the recent wave of instances involving women's issues in India, it was considered that an effective method to deal with the situations on an immediate basis was required. Because we live in a modern culture that is continually changing, women's conditions are changing as well, with new offences appearing on a daily basis. In other words, societal developments have an impact on numerous aspects of society's everyday routine. As a result, the current study is an attempt to shed some light on the numerous increasing crimes against women, as well as their causes, and to provide some important recommendations for stakeholders.

9. OBJECTIVES BEHIND THE STUDY:

The present study is proposed to be conducted with following objectives:-

1. To know the status of women in the society.
2. To study the historical perspective of women in India.
3. To know the classification of crime against women.
4. To study the international perspective of crime against women.

10. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodologically, the present study is purely, doctrinal, based on critical analysis of primary as well as secondary sources. Nature of the Research includes Descriptive, Critical and Explanatory study. This research tries to dig deep into various issues of crime against women in India and other

⁵ Available at: <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1795471> (Last retrieved on 23 Oct. 2023).

measures taken by Judiciary and legislature in enhancing protecting their rights. Further, the study provides various solutions and implementation that can be done. The researcher has use multi-pronged approach to collect as much relevant information as possible through the above said sources. The study is purely exploratory and evaluative in nature. As a primary source for the presentation and analysis of information, the relevant original texts of legislations, judgments, national and International Conventions, policy documents and committee reports have been examined. Some of the Primary Legislations utilized by the researcher are Indian Penal Code 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure 1973, Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1986, Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987, The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, Information Technology Act 2000, The Sexual Harassment of Woman at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, The Prevention and Protection from Witch Hunting, Pre-Conception & Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act, 1994, The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006, Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and The Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013.

Books, journals, periodicals, reports and NCRB data related to crime against women have been used as secondary source materials. Further the news items from various newspapers and news magazines have be utilized as secondary source.

11. HYPOTHESIS:

Despite many statutory frameworks and court guidelines in the country, the hypothesis in this dissertation appears that there is no dearth of laws in to deal with escalating crime against women in the country but it's about the effective implementation of these laws. Many victims of violence claims that criminal justice system is patriarchal and unconcerned about their plight. In their different positions as daughter, sister, wife, mother, partner, or single women, women in India suffered abuse and discrimination in one form or another. It is said that the progress of any society depended on its ability to safeguard and promote the rights of women. But the judicial view regarding crime against women appears to be shifting in recent years, which could be due to societal, socio-political changes. No single law can save our society from the evil on its own, it is the responsibility of each and every citizen of our country to lend their support and raise their voices in support of our cause so that we can eradicate this cultural cancer.

12. CONCLUSION:

“No nation can ever be worthy of its existence that cannot take its women along with the men. No struggle can ever succeed without women participating side by side with men. There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women.”

—Muhammad Ali Jinnah

Women must be treated with respect and given the place they deserve in society. It is vital to modify society's attitude in order to achieve this goal. Although there is no discrimination against women in the government's goals and programmes on paper, poor women have historically been at the bottom of the development ladder. They have a lesser salary and, in general, have a lower social rank. In order to economically empower women, government institutions should have attempted to employ them in gainful jobs. It is said that we cannot be considered civilised unless both men and women are treated equally. I believe our attitudes have shifted, and we now blame women for crimes in which she is the victim rather than the culprit. Because no single law or group can save our society from this evil on its own, it is the responsibility of each and every citizen of our country to lend their support and raise their voices in support of our cause so that we can eradicate this cultural cancer.

To transform India into a developed country, gender equality and crimes against women are the most important things to be focused on. Legends like Malala Yousafzai have repeatedly inspired women all over the globe and left an inevitable imprint on the human race. The country now demands a dire need for the upliftment of the basic mentality of looking at women differently. It is critical that the government strive diligently toward this goal. Recent initiatives announced by the Government for financial inclusion of everyone will be possible only when everyone is educated. The creation of a fund for women who are suffering is a reactionary measure. Women must be protected in a proactive manner. Making laws isn't enough; increasing public knowledge of laws and ensuring their correct application is even more critical. I am convinced that increasing women's literacy and employment will solve many of their problems.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. Training in police sensitization, sufficient police manning, and the appointment of additional women to the force. Punishing police officers for failing to file complaints due to issues of authority, caste, and other considerations.

2. In-camera trials are required in rape cases under **S. 327(2)** of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. To protect the victim's identity, the clause must be complied with. If the condition is met, the presiding Judge may, nevertheless, grant a written request for a support person to accompany the victim. Such a request should be granted if recording the victim's testimony is in the best interests.
3. 5. We must make sure that cases of rape, molestation, kidnapping, dowry murder, abuse by spouses or family members, and trafficking of girls are reported to Fast Track Courts.
4. The creation of tribunals that are kid-friendly and comprise only women is a huge advancement. Conversely, training for judicial officers and other court employees ought to include gender-sensitive instruction.
5. Rules should be published to inform female employees of their rights at work.
6. Crime, Atrocities, and Violence Against Women: All women should be trained to defend themselves against any attempts to offend their modesty
7. People's attitudes must be changed, and this can be done through education. Examples of this include curriculum changes in schools, social awareness workshops, and the development and outfitting of state apparatus to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.
8. To address such atrocities against women, we also need strong and efficient legislation, as well as a sensitive legal system, an alert women's organization, and an enforcement machinery.
9. Matters involving women or children must be given priority in courts, with early listing and hearings without needless postponements. Justice not served is justice postponed.
10. Instruction provided to medical professionals and nurses who see survivors initially in order to support them in their legal battle.

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Cite Your Article as:

Naini Choudhary. (2023). *CRIME AGAINST WOMEN VIS-A-VIS LAWS AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR WOMEN IN INDIA*. In *Scholarly Research Journal for Interdisciplinary studies* (Vol. 12, Number 79, pp. 23–36). Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10057010>