



Women Helpline: An Endeavour to Dent Crimes Against Women

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ABSTRACT

The world has inequality of many types. The inequality in society is based on class, caste, and gender. The inequality based on gender is very important to be addressed because it cuts across class and caste. Innocenti Research Centre, UNICEF, (2000) has reported that female child population in the age group of 0-6 years was 78.83 million in 2001 which declined to 75.84 million in 2011. The population of girl child was 15.88 per cent of the total female population of 496.5 million in 2001, which declined to 12.9 per cent of total number of 586.47 million women in 2011. This data provides an insight into the inequalities faced by women and girls in the society, right from their birth and sometimes pre-embryonic stages as well. Women empowerment is a way to counter the challenge of gender inequality. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women. Women empowerment helps women to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, as well as the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. This has given rise to the circumstances which now demands gender justice which will put an end to the prevalent discrimination towards women. This should ensure their equality in the society along with maintenance of their gender specific prerequisites. Empowerment simply does not mean the transfer of power from one section of society towards other, but providing one section with the powers and privileges that are same as those enjoyed by the other classes. Women need to be empowered to make the vision of gender equality a true one. They should be empowered so that they can be at parity with men in all aspects of society. This should not just refrain to political, cultural, economical, or social but on a much broader sphere. It is not only the question of parity or equality but that they should not suffer from any threats and violence of any kinds in any aspects in society.

Keywords: aggrieved person, women helpline, crime against women

Threats and violence against women:

Threats and violence is observed in general on children, adults with deformities and disabilities, and stunted mental development and happens in different settings such as at residence, workplace, hospitals, jails, governmental and nongovernmental homes for the under privileged, and in the community. It occurs in all socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Women too suffer various types of threats and violence in society. Crimes towards women such as rape, blackmail, cyber crime, sexual harassment of women at workplace, sexual harassment at home, molestation, acid attacks, trafficking, abandonment of women, physical and mental/ emotional torture by husbands, friends, other family members, and other persons of the society are observed.

Legal protection to women:

Although women may be victims of any of the general crimes such as *murder, robbery, cheating*, etc. only the crimes which are directed specifically against women are stated as *crimes against women*. Various new rules have been brought and existing laws are being amended with a view to handle these crimes effectively. These are broadly classified under two categories: (i) the crimes under the Indian Penal Code (ii) the crimes under the special and local laws. These categories are explained as follows:

(i) The crimes under the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

1. Rape: Sec. 376
2. Attempt to commit rape: Sec 376/511
3. Kidnapping & abduction of women (K&A): Section 363,364,364A, 366
 - 3.1 K&A under section 363
 - 3.2 K&A in order to murder
 - 3.3 K&A for ransom
 - 3.4 K&A of women to compel her for marriage
 - 3.5 K&A for other purposes

4. Dowry deaths: Section 304B
5. Assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty: Sec. 354
 - 5.1 Sexual harassment: Sec.354A
 - 5.2 Assault on woman with intent to outrage her modesty: Sec. 354C
 - 5.3 Voyeurism: Sec. 354D
 - 5.4 Others
6. Insult to the modesty of women: Sec. 509
7. Cruelty by husband or his relatives: Sec. 498A
8. Importation of girl from foreign country (up to 21 years of age): Sec. 366 B
9. Abetment of suicide of women: Sec. 306

(ii) The crimes under the Special & Local Laws (SLL)

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. The gender specific laws for which crime statistics are recorded throughout the country are as follows:

- a) The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
- b) The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986
- c) The Commission of Sati Prevention Act, 1987
- d) The Protection of women from domestic Violence Act, 2005
- e) The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956.

The situation in India with respect to violence against women is alarming. National Crime Records Bureau, 2011 reports crime against women as : Cruelty by husband and their relatives 43.4% for molestation ,18.8% for rape , 10.6% for kidnapping and abduction, 15.6% for sexual harassment, 3.7% for dowry death, 3.8 for Immoral Traffic Act, 1.1% for Dowry Prohibition Act, and others - 0.2%.This has given rise to the circumstances which now demands gender justice which will puts an end to the prevalent discrimination towards women. This should ensure their equality in the society along with maintenance of their gender specific prerequisites. In this radical feminism is discernible in matters that relate closely to sexual slavery within marriages, Rape laws, female foeticides, Dowry Abuse, Dowry tortures and also deaths in many cases. But these violence and crime against women can be understood and dealt with in general humanitarian manner.

Initiatives for protection of women against violence and threats:

At international level, United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) for progressive development. The issue of Gender Equality was on number 5 of the list. SDGs were developed in accordance to the preceding Millennium Development Goals but on a rather more holistic and broader perspective. Despite such sustained and continuous efforts violence is faced by women in the entire world without an exception. In India, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2012), ranked states on the parameter for safety of women. This rank was given by calculating incidences of rate of assault per population of 100000 in the given states. Gujarat State was ranked 4th safest state in country with a score of 2.62. The same report for 2013 claimed a direct 50% hike in the incidences of assault on women in the state of Gujarat. The report state that 36.92% cases of rape in the state were committed against girls of up to 18 years where as 52.59% crimes were committed against women in age group 18-30 years of age. This necessitated the need for introducing and strengthening initiatives for protection of women against violence and threats. Women's helpline is one such initiative.

Crime Rates in India

Rank	State	Cognizable Crime Rate (per 100,000) 2015	Cognizable Crime Rate (per 100,000) 2012
U/T	Delhi	175.8	283.3
U/T	Chandigarh	186.5	235.4
U/T	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	157.9	133.4
U/T	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	64.4	84.6
U/T	Daman and Diu	94.1	83.9
U/T	Lakshadweep	62.5	77.3
1	Kerala	723.2	343.6
2	Madhya Pradesh	348.3	298.8

3	Assam	321.8	250.0
4	Haryana	310.4	240.4
5	Telangana	290.7	-
6	Rajasthan	273.9	246.9
7	Tamil Nadu	271.2	294.8
8	Maharashtra	231.2	176.7
9	Arunachal Pradesh	227.8	192.1
10	Karnataka	224.0	222.5
11	Chhattisgarh	220.9	221.1
12	Andhra Pradesh	215.6	224.5
13	Mizoram	211.2	173.1
14	Gujarat	203.6	216.6
15	Himachal Pradesh	198.5	182.6
16	Odisha	197.3	164.8
17	West Bengal	193.0	178.2
18	Jammu and Kashmir	191.2	206.5
19	Bihar	171.6	147.4
20	Goa	156.4	196.7
21	Manipur	149.5	150.3
22	Meghalaya	148.2	96.1
23	Jharkhand	135.1	147.4
24	Punjab	131.2	127.4
25	Tripura	123.5	170.6
26	Sikkim	119.3	84.9
27	Uttarakhand	97.2	87.7

Table: 1, Crime Rates in India, National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2012)

Women's helpline (WHL)

Helpline is a term which refers to a telephonic conversation between a person who needs help and the person/body that can help. Helplines in the area of social care support have their origins in intervention efforts by benevolent organisations, especially in the field of suicide prevention, to provide counselling support to people in distress. Organisations such as the Salvation Army operating in the early twentieth century were, for example, among the first to provide an organised support service (Mishara & Daigle, 2001) and form part of a tradition of philanthropy to provide mutual aid to individuals in crisis. In the aftermath of World War II, the first telephone helpline was opened in London in 1953 by the Reverend Chad Varah. This quickly became known as the now famous Samaritan helpline, a '999 for the suicidal'. This model for counselling support has extended rapidly to a variety of areas of social support including health care, clinical practice and mental health counselling (Sanders & Rosenfield, 1998). Helpline has its roots in hotline. It was based on the concept of telephone by Alexander Graham Bell. Hotline was refereed as a source of direct communication between the concerned parties which was preceded by Bat's Telephone. Hotline is used till date and hotline has become diversified in several branches and helpline is one such branch. Helplines primarily offer support via telephone and while new technologies have created different channels for communication and contact, the advantages of the telephone as a medium for counselling support are frequently cited in the literature (Reese, Conoley, & Brossart, 2006; Rosenfield & Smillie, 1998).

As the time and society progressed from these stages, the crimes and exploitation of Women kept on increasing thus urging the need of a source of effective redressal mechanism which will function directly between the woman and the safety organizations. Keeping all these aspects in mind, the government of India launched its first helpline as Child Line 1098 under the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 1998. This move proved very effective and thus broadening the horizon for future helplines in diversified concerns. The women Helpline was thus developed in the country. Women Helpline is the helpline that is designed for Women's safety in face of increasing adverse situations against them as a means of safety, protection, rehabilitation and the like. Several women helplines are functional and active throughout the country today, like; Stree Sanman in Mumbai for protection of women from harassment on social media 8888809306, Women in Distress 1091, 181, New Delhi; Vanitha Sahayavani 8022943225, Bangalore; women power line in Uttar Pradesh 1090; Punjab Women's Helpline 9781101091; and Rajasthan Nirbhaya Sambhali Helpline 18001200020.

Objectives of the women helpline

- i. To provide 24x7 free of charge immediate response to women in distress.

- ii. To provide legal, social, and psychological support using existing technology and infrastructure of successful 108 technologies.
- iii. To provide counselling and guidance to women against crisis due to anti-social elements, events and activities.
- iv. To bridge the gap between various Govt. & Non-Govt. Agencies and activate whole machinery for a focussed and positive outcome in area of Women upliftment.
- v. To create situation wherein women become fearless through support such as immediate rescue, help, and assistance in case of domestic, or other types of violence, misbehaviour, or eve-teasing for
 - Gender Equality
 - Glass ceiling effects demolition in organised and unorganised sector.
 - Equal opportunities across the society.
 - Healthy society with women rights safe guarded and respected.

This is an important step towards ensuring safety of women in the state and fights back the social evil and take huge leaps towards a progressive and safe nation for all the citizens here.

Women's Help line in Gujarat (181)

Ministry of Women and Child Welfare launched Women Helpline 181. In December 2012, the Indian Department of Telecommunications released the toll-free phone number 181 across India, and mandated that every state government develop infrastructure for this number that would address the needs of women experiencing gender-based violence. This has been done in Gujarat with collaboration with GVK EMRI (Emergency Management and Research Institute). The government of Gujarat has launched a unique source for women helpline under the title 'Abhayam' which means fearless that functions actively in Gujarat for the aid and rescue of women in any kind of distress including domestic violence. The concept of women helpline emerged in the face of increasing number of crisis faced by women all over India. The idea was to set up an integrated system through which the women could access and ensure their safety effectively over the entire country with a single uniform toll-free number. This system works by means of referral system. This system will be established by means of the One Stop Centre Scheme (OSCS) under which there will be a One Stop Centre (OSC) established in every state, and union territory of India which will address all issues of women like violence, harassment, torture and like under a single roof with effective redressal mechanism.

The salient features of this helpline number which is functioning are:

- This service is easily accessible by anyone with any band of communication they possess. Due to its effective working it has gained wide popularity and social acceptance.
- It is a one stop destination for all women related problems in the society.
- The effective workforce has effectively rescued and addressed the problems and crisis of Women time and again.
- 'Abhayam' has clear operating procedure as well as a healthy knowledge support.
- Technology integration and well coordinated response mechanisms.
- Prompt and affectionate response.
- Proper Feedback mechanism with proper implementation.
- The information and data that are collected or acquired are kept confidential without any exception.
- No discrimination in handling of cases.
- Proper documentation procedure with well maintained records library.
- Active 24x7 and is toll free.
- Functions actively in all distress situations.
- Provides facilities of Rehabilitation, Counselling and Nurturing.
- Have female counsellors to build comfort level for women in distress.
- Has linked operations with several Government and Non-Government Organizations.
- Have rescue vehicles in each district for rescue and relocation of women in distress.
- Legal Advising.

Women's help line in Delhi (181)

The helpline was launched on 31st December 2012 by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Delhi, Smt. Sheila Dixit. The helpline was launched to effectively strengthen the measures for safety of women in India.

The salient features of this helpline number which is functioning are:

- The teams in the women helpline have been divided into two teams viz. The Front Team and The Back Team to efficiently smoothen the functioning of the helpline in the U/T.
- This division of teams ensures stringent monitoring practices throughout the modus operandi of the helpline.

They have developed some mechanisms to function more effectively which are as follows:

- **CALL RECEIVER:** The receiver attends the call and does primary referrals, data entry and forwards cases with critical issues to the floor supervisor.
- **SENIOR CALL REVEIVER:** The Sr. Receiver supports the supervisor in follow up and report writing procedures. In absence of supervisor and occurrence of contingencies, her role expands to managing the floor.
- **FLOOR SUPERVISOR:** Her primary job is to follow up the cases and talk with the concerned authorities and departments as per the requirements of the cases. She also provides counselling to the women in distress, also provides guidance to her team members, and makes daily report to ensure further follow up. She helps the consultant in team training and report writing.
- **HUMAN RIGHTS CONSULTANT**

They would be doing advocacy and networking with the state and central agencies such as:

- Delhi police
- CAW cell
- Delhi legal aid service authority
- DCW rape crisis centre
- DCW mahila panchayats
- GRC legal aid cells
- Other women's group providing support to women
- Awaz uthao groups
- Protection officer
- Hospitals
- Other concerned agencies

Women Helpline in Uttar Pradesh (1090)

The helpline was launched on 15th November 2012 by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of the state. The helpline was launched to effectively combat eve-teasing, Repetitive harassment in public places, passing of lewd comments and remarks by anti-social elements towards Women in the state.

They follow the *Panchatatva*, encompasses below five points:

- The complainant's identity will never be disclosed anytime.
- The call will be always answered by Women Police Officer.
- The complainant or the aggrieved will never be called at any police station/ police outpost.
- The complainant must be a female only otherwise the complaint will not be entertained.
- The victim will be in observation of authorities of helpline even after the redressal.

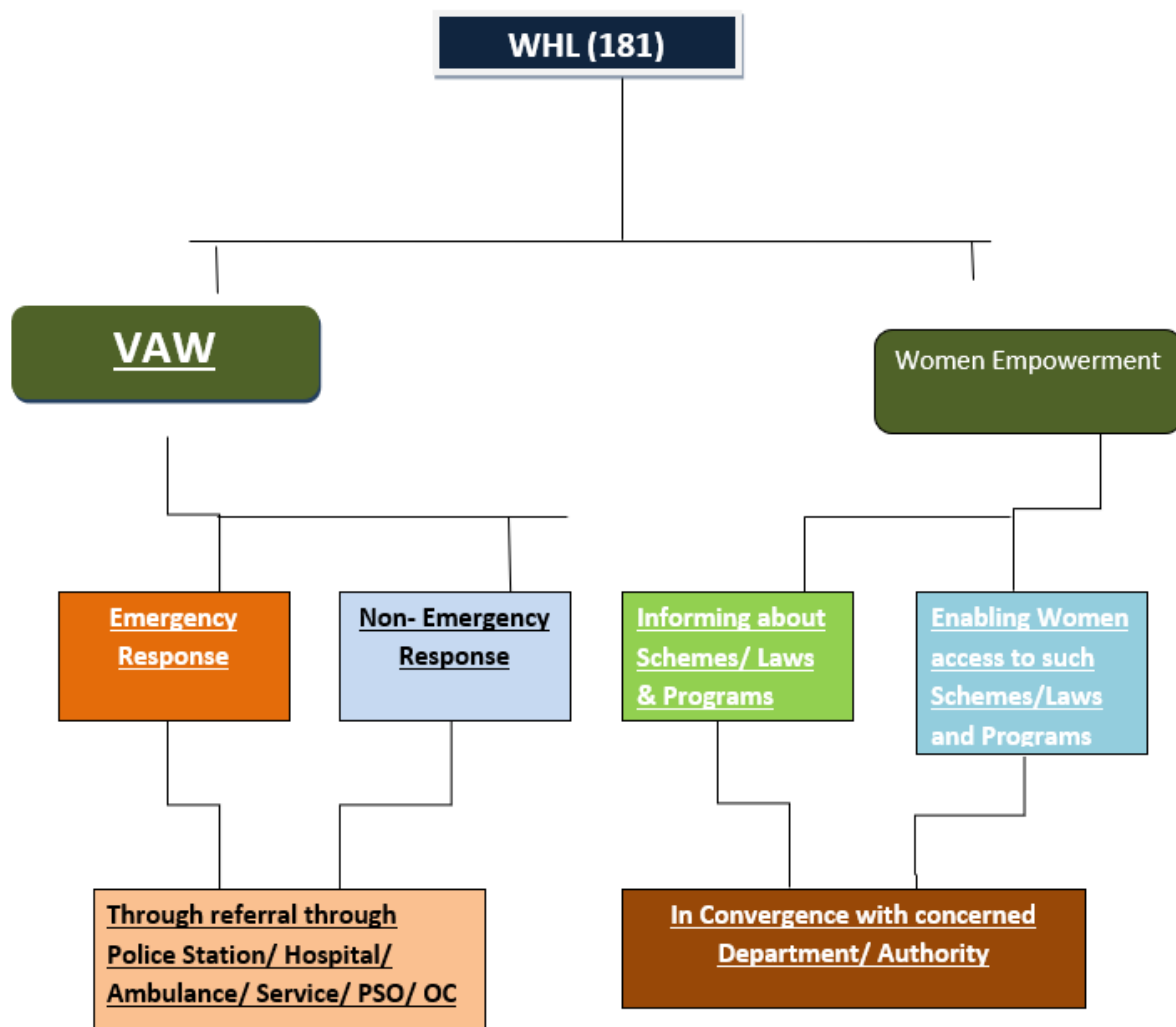
The salient features of this helpline number which is functioning are:

- The 1090 is moving ahead by developing young collegians as Power Angels in the state to guide students and prevent cases of eve teasing and sexual harassment of female students.

- ‘Power Angels’ as a concept, is indigenous to Women Power Line 1090, and aims to foster a police-citizen partnership to create safer public spaces for women.
- The Power Angels will be appointed as special police officers who will be entrusted with the task of acting as a link between the police and the society, of enabling better communication between the police and women from various rural and urban areas, spread awareness regarding women’s concerns and build up an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.
- Power Angels; have been set up to act as the face of 1090 in society. The idea is to empower and motivate women and girls, to speak up against harassment, register a strong voice and not find themselves at the receiving end of societal victimization, alienation or pressures that restrain them from registering their dissent.

Functioning of women’s help line

As the victim or the women in trouble contact the helpline, or someone on their behalf does so; it would be received and tended by the response person designated there. Carefully listening the urgency and requirement of the caller, the respondent will refer her to emergency services like medical aid, police, or by redirecting the call to One Stop Centre (OSC) for professional counselling, rehab centre etc. If the situation is very dire then PCR van/ Ambulance from nearest police station/hospital will be dispatched to rescue them. Women Helpline will provide information about the various laws, legislations, facilities, schemes that are meant for women betterment and this information is used by the women to protect themselves from certain mishaps. The diagrammatic representation of the process is given below



Flow chart no. 1: functioning of women helpline

The following hurdles are faced by the officials of women helpline while executive of all requests

- During the crisis, the caller is most of the time in a panic state of mind and hence cannot provide the exact location of victim this create hindrance by time delay for the women helpline to locate and reach out to the victim.
- Due to several unaccounted problems, the women helpline team is not able to maintain time efficiency sometimes.
- Fraud calling is another very common problem faced by the women helpline. In such cases the caller falsely accuses the other party with an intention to defame him or her, or satisfy own vested interest, in such cases the police takes more time due to the ambiguity of justice to be delivered.
- The aggrieved lodges a complaint but due to the undue influences of the society and/or coercion used by the family members forces them to reverse their statements this creates troubles as the helpline officials cannot interfere in the matter anymore.
- Lack of initiative by the aggrieved by the redressal of the problems and reoccurrences.

Conclusion:

Despite all the hurdles and problems faced by the women helpline 181, it is functioning very efficiently. In the phase of increasing crime against women the women helpline has done a commendable job in efforts to contain the crimes. The facilities and initiatives taken by the women helpline across the states, Gujarat, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh have embolden the spirits of women to take a stand for themselves and speak up against the age old exploitation they are facing, e.g. anonymity, continued feedback, rehabilitation, etc. the women helpline has been functioning on approaches that are centred around the regional difficulties and harassment faced by the women.

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