

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR WOMEN

In January 1992, the National Commission for Women (NCW), was set up as a statutory body under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990 (Act No. 20 of 1990 of Govt. of India) to review the constitutional and legal safeguards for women; recommend remedial legislative measures, facilitate redressal of grievances and advise the Government on all policy matters affecting women.

As the problem of violence against women is multifaceted, the NCW has adopted a multi-pronged strategy to tackle the problem. The Commission has initiated generation of legal awareness among women, thus equipping them with the knowledge of their legal rights and with a capacity to use these rights. It assists women in redressal of their grievances through pre-litigation services. To facilitate speedy delivery of justice to women Parivarik Mahila Lok Adalats are organized in different parts of the country to review the existing provisions of the Constitution and other laws affecting women and recommending amendments thereto, any lacunae, inadequacies or shortcomings in such legislations. It organizes promotional activities to mobilize women and get information about their status and recommend paradigm shift in the empowerment of women. The Complaints and Counseling Cell of the commission processes the complaints received oral, written or suo moto under Section 20 of the NCW Act. The complaints received relate to domestic violence, harassment, dowry, torture, desertion, bigamy, rape, and refusal to register FIR, cruelty by husband, deprivation, gender discrimination and sexual harassment at work place.

NCW tackles the problems by ensuring that investigations by the police are expedited and monitored. Family disputes are resolved or compromised through counseling.

As per the 1997 Supreme Court Judgement on Sexual Harassment at Workplace, (Vishakha Vs. State of Rajasthan) every employer is required to provide for effective complaints procedures and remedies including awarding of compensation to women victims. In sexual harassment complaints, the concerned organizations are urged to expedite cases and the disposal is monitored. For serious crimes, the Commission constitutes an Inquiry Committee which makes spot enquiries, examines various witnesses, collects evidence and submits the report with recommendations. The implementation of the report is monitored by the NCW.

The complaint received by the NCW show the trend of crimes against women and suggests systemic changes needed for reducing them. The complaints are analyzed to understand the gaps in the routine functioning of government in tackling violence against women and to suggest correctional measures. The complaints are also used as case studies for sensitization programmes for the police, judiciary, prosecutors, forensic scientists, defense lawyers and other administrative functionaries.

From time to time the Commission conducts seminars, workshops and conferences and sponsors such events by providing financial assistance to research organizations and NGOs. The important areas so far covered include women in detention, violence against women; sexual harassment at

work place; educational, health and employment aspects; women in agriculture and panchayati raj sector; custodial justice and mental health institutions.

The NCW holds public hearings on issues affecting large sections of women such as crime against women, women in unorganized labour sector, women in agriculture and women of minority groups. The deposition at these enquiries helps in appreciating the problems and initiating remedial action. As a measure of arousing public awareness and breaking bureaucratic apathy, public hearings under vigilant activists like Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer and Swami Agnivesh were held to understand problems and expedite solutions in the case of Kol women of Bundelkhand; deserted women of hill districts in U.P., rape case of girl children of TamilNadu, unorganised women labour and minority communities of Tamil Nadu; creche workers' enquiry and tribal women of Dindigul, Tamil Nadu.

Special studies are conducted by the NCW on social mobilization, maintenance and divorced women, panchayat raj in action, women labour under contract, gender bias in judicial decisions, family courts, gender-component in various Commissions' reports on women, violence against women, women's access to health and education in slums to help in formulation of NCW's policies for recommendations. Special studies of NCW focus on development of health facilities among women belonging to the scheduled tribe communities; women of weaker sections - socio-economic development of scheduled caste women; mentally disabled women; credit needs of women - the Gramin Banks and the widows of Vrindavan.

The NCW also constitutes Expert Committees for dealing with such special issues as may be taken up by the Commission from time to time. Some important issues taken up by the NCW include sexual harassment at workplace, women in detention, anti-arrack movement, issues concerning prostitution and political and technological empowerment of women in agriculture.

To meet the information needs of the Commission and various interested individuals and organizations, the NCW started its own Library in 1994. It has now evolved as a de facto Resource Centre for research scholars/ activists with a collection of nearly 2300 books covering different issues relating to women's advancement. Besides, the library collection includes important reference books, like encyclopedia, Directories of NGO's as well as the complete set of Halsbury's Laws of England (4th Edition).

Besides publishing its own books from time to time, the NCW also sponsors research studies on various aspects concerning women issues and helps in getting them published. Nearly a hundred publications, both in English and Hindi, have so far been published.

The Commission undertakes visits to evaluate the progress of development of women in various states. It has so far covered Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Tripura and Manipur. Women's movement in the country was brought to the forefront by the efforts of NGOs. The Commission interacts and networks with NGOs and the State Commissions for ensuring gender equality and empowerment of women. The Commission also interacts with the media, social activists and academics to suggest ways of ensuring due representation of women in all spheres. Individuals interested in getting in touch

with the Commission may contact at its Complaints Cell. The number is 91-11-3222369. Enquiries can even be e-mailed to member secretary@ [nationalcommissionforwomen.org](mailto:membersecretary@nationalcommissionforwomen.org).

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