

VICTIM COMPENSATION IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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BEST CITATION – J.PON FRANCIS & MRS. P. SHONA A, VICTIM COMPENSATION IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS, *INDIAN JOURNAL OF LEGAL REVIEW (IJLR)*, 6 (7) OF 2026, PG. 487-489, APIS – 3920 – 0001 & ISSN – 2583-2344.

Abstract

Victim compensation has emerged as a crucial component of the criminal justice system in India, reflecting a shift from an offender-centric to a victim-centric approach. Traditionally, criminal law focused primarily on punishing offenders, often neglecting the needs and rights of victims. This paper critically examines the legal framework governing victim compensation in India, including constitutional provisions, statutory mechanisms under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and judicial interpretations. It further analyzes the effectiveness of State Victim Compensation Schemes and identifies key challenges such as lack of awareness, procedural delays, and inconsistencies across states. The study concludes by suggesting reforms to strengthen victim-oriented justice and ensure meaningful rehabilitation.

Keywords: Victim Compensation, Criminal Justice System, Section 357 CrPC, Section 357A CrPC, Restorative Justice, Victim Rights

1. Introduction

The criminal justice system is a vital mechanism for maintaining law and order and ensuring justice in society. However, historically in India, it has been predominantly offender-oriented, focusing on investigation, prosecution, and punishment. Victims were often reduced to mere witnesses, receiving little attention regarding their suffering, rehabilitation, or rights.

Victims of crime experience not only physical injury but also emotional trauma, financial loss, and social stigma. Crimes such as rape, acid attacks, domestic violence, and custodial violence leave long-lasting consequences. Punishment of the offender alone cannot fully address these harms. Therefore, victim compensation has become an essential element of justice.

Victim compensation refers to financial and rehabilitative assistance provided to victims to help them recover from the impact of crime. It is closely linked with the concept of restorative justice, which emphasizes repairing harm and restoring dignity rather than merely punishing offenders.

2. Objectives and Scope of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the concept of victim compensation in India and evaluate its effectiveness within the criminal justice system. The study aims to:

Analyze constitutional and statutory provisions relating to victim compensation

Examine judicial interpretations and landmark judgments

Evaluate the implementation of State Victim Compensation Schemes

Identify challenges and suggest reforms

The scope is limited to victim compensation under criminal law, particularly Sections 357 and 357A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. Civil remedies such as tort claims and insurance compensation are excluded.

3. Legal Framework of Victim Compensation

3.1 Constitutional Basis

The Constitution of India provides the foundation for victim compensation through:

Article 14 – Ensures equality before law

Article 21 – Guarantees right to life and dignity

Article 39A – Promotes equal justice and legal aid

These provisions establish that justice must include dignity, fairness, and access to remedies for victims.

3.2 Statutory Provisions

The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 provides two key provisions:

Section 357 CrPC: Empowers courts to award compensation from fines imposed on offenders

Section 357A CrPC: Mandates State Governments to establish Victim Compensation Schemes

Section 357A represents a significant development, as it ensures compensation even when the offender is unidentified or unable to pay.

4. Judicial Approach and Development

The judiciary has played a crucial role in strengthening victim compensation jurisprudence. Courts have recognized compensation as part of fundamental rights and human dignity.

Key judicial principles include:

Compensation as a remedy for violation of fundamental rights

Recognition of victim dignity and rehabilitation

Grant of interim compensation in appropriate cases

Expansion of State liability in custodial and human rights violations

Judicial activism has transformed victim compensation from discretionary relief into an essential component of justice.

5. Implementation and Challenges

Despite a strong legal framework, the practical implementation of victim compensation in India faces several challenges:

5.1 Lack of Awareness

Many victims, especially in rural and marginalized communities, are unaware of their rights.

5.2 Procedural Delays

Lengthy administrative procedures delay compensation, defeating its purpose.

5.3 Inadequate Compensation

Amounts provided are often insufficient for medical treatment and rehabilitation.

5.4 Lack of Uniformity

Different states have varying compensation schemes, leading to inequality.

5.5 Administrative Inefficiency

Poor coordination among police, courts, and Legal Services Authorities hinders implementation.

6. Research Problem and Hypothesis

The central research problem is whether the existing victim compensation framework effectively ensures justice, dignity, and rehabilitation for victims.

Hypothesis:

Although India has developed a comprehensive legal framework for victim compensation, its implementation remains inadequate, resulting in a gap between legal provisions and practical outcomes.

7. Methodology

This study adopts a doctrinal research method, based on analysis of:

Constitutional provisions

Statutory laws

Judicial decisions

Law Commission reports

Academic literature

The research is descriptive, analytical, and reform-oriented. It does not include empirical fieldwork but relies on secondary sources.

8. Suggestions and Reforms

To strengthen victim compensation in India, the following reforms are suggested:

Establish a uniform national compensation policy

Increase compensation amounts to reflect actual needs

Ensure time-bound disbursement of compensation

Improve awareness through legal aid programs

Strengthen institutional accountability and monitoring

Recognize compensation as a legal right rather than discretionary relief

9. Conclusion

Victim compensation represents a progressive shift towards a more humane and balanced criminal justice system. While India has made significant legal advancements, the gap between law and practice remains a major concern.

A justice system that neglects victims cannot be considered complete. True justice requires not only punishment of offenders but also restoration of victims' dignity and well-being. Strengthening victim compensation mechanisms is essential for achieving restorative justice, social welfare, and human rights protection in India.