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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND LEGAL PROTECTION UNDER THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT, 2005

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence remains one of the most pervasive yet underreported forms of gender-based violence in India, affecting millions of women across socioeconomic, cultural, and geographic boundaries. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and dignity, women in domestic settings continue to face physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, often perpetuated by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and familial power structures. The enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA) marked a watershed moment in Indian legal history by providing a comprehensive civil remedy framework designed to protect women in domestic relationships, moving beyond the limited scope of criminal provisions under Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. This paper undertakes a detailed legal analysis of the PWDVA, examining its definitional scope, protective mechanisms, institutional framework, and remedial provisions including protection orders, residence orders, monetary relief, and custody orders. Adopting a doctrinal research methodology, the study analyzes statutory provisions, judicial pronouncements, and scholarly literature to assess both the strengths and limitations of the Act. The paper identifies several critical challenges in implementation, including delays in judicial proceedings, inadequate infrastructure for Protection Officers and service providers, low awareness among beneficiaries, societal stigma discouraging complaints, and limited enforcement of court orders. Through examination of landmark judicial decisions and comparative analysis with international frameworks, the paper recommends comprehensive reforms including strengthening institutional capacity, enhancing judicial efficiency, and promoting community-based prevention programs.

KEYWORDS – Domestic Violence, Gender Rights, Protection of Women, PWDVA 2005, Legal Protection, Women's Rights, Civil Remedies, Gender-Based Violence

1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence constitutes one of the most fundamental violations of human rights, threatening the dignity, safety, and autonomy of individuals, predominantly women and girls across all societies. The United Nations defines domestic violence as a pattern of behavior in any relationship used to gain or maintain power

and control over an intimate partner, encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and psychological actions or threats.³⁴ In India, the problem is particularly acute, embedded within a social fabric characterized by patriarchal family structures, unequal gender relations, economic

³⁴ United Nations, *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* art. 1 (1993).

dependence of women, and cultural norms that often normalize violence within the domestic sphere.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) reveals that approximately thirty percent of women aged 18–49 years have experienced physical violence since age fifteen, with the majority occurring within domestic settings.³⁵ These statistics likely underrepresent the true magnitude given significant underreporting attributable to stigma, fear of retaliation, economic dependence, and lack of awareness about available legal remedies. The National Crime Records Bureau data further indicates that crimes against women within domestic environments constitute approximately one-third of all reported offenses against women.³⁶

For decades, Indian law addressed domestic violence primarily through criminal provisions that proved inadequate in providing comprehensive protection. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, 1860, introduced in 1983, criminalized cruelty by a husband or his relatives toward a married woman.³⁷ While this provision represented significant acknowledgment of domestic abuse as a legal concern, its scope was inherently limited. It applied exclusively to married women, thereby excluding women in live-in relationships, divorced women still residing in shared households, and other women facing abuse in domestic settings. Furthermore, being a criminal provision, it required proof beyond reasonable doubt and often resulted in protracted litigation without providing immediate relief.³⁸

Recognizing these limitations, and responding to sustained advocacy by women's rights organizations, the Indian Parliament enacted

the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA), which came into force on October 26, 2006.³⁹ The Act represented a paradigm shift by providing a comprehensive civil law framework addressing diverse dimensions of abuse experienced by women within domestic relationships. It broadened the definition of domestic violence to include physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and economic abuse, expanded protection beyond married women to any woman in a domestic relationship, and created institutional mechanisms involving Protection Officers, service providers, and Magistrates.

The PWDVA was shaped by international commitments including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which obligates state parties to eliminate discrimination against women.⁴⁰ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action similarly called upon states to adopt legislation addressing violence against women.⁴¹ The constitutional foundation is equally significant, with Article 14 guaranteeing equality, Article 15 prohibiting discrimination on grounds of sex, and Article 21 guaranteeing the right to life and personal liberty, interpreted expansively to include the right to live with dignity.⁴²

Despite these progressive developments, a significant gap persists between legal requirements and actual protection for women. Implementation studies reveal inconsistent application across states, with women continuing to face substantial barriers in accessing justice.⁴³ This raises important questions about the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks in achieving genuine protection outcomes.

³⁵ Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)*, India Report 2019–2021 542.

³⁶ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India: Statistical Report* (2022).

³⁷ Indian Penal Code, 1860, § 498A.

³⁸ Kirti Singh, *Violence Against Women and the Indian Law*, in *Violence, Law and Women's Rights in South Asia* 78 (Savitri Goonesekere ed., Sage Publications 2004).

³⁹ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, § 1(3).

⁴⁰ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women art. 2 (1979).

⁴¹ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Strategic Objective D.1 (1995).

⁴² Constitution of India arts. 14, 15, 21.

⁴³ Lawyer's Collective Women's Rights Initiative, *Staying Alive: Fifth Monitoring Report on PWDVA* 12 (2012).

1.1 RESEARCH GAP

While considerable literature exists on the PWDVA, most studies focus primarily on statutory provisions and definitional aspects. Limited attention has been given to the gap between legal mandates and practical implementation. Issues such as weak enforcement mechanisms, inadequate institutional infrastructure, judicial delays, low awareness, and societal barriers remain underexplored from a comprehensive legal perspective. This paper seeks to address these gaps by critically analyzing both the strengths and limitations of India's domestic violence protection framework.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the legal framework governing protection from domestic violence in India
2. To analyze key provisions of the PWDVA, 2005
3. To identify challenges in implementation
4. To evaluate the role of the judiciary in shaping domestic violence jurisprudence
5. To suggest reforms for strengthening protection mechanisms

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology involving systematic analysis of statutes, case laws, constitutional provisions, and regulatory guidelines. The research is based on secondary sources including academic literature, government reports, and institutional publications. Key legislations, constitutional provisions, and judicial decisions have been examined to understand the legal framework comprehensively. The study follows an analytical and descriptive approach, focusing on identifying gaps between legal provisions and their implementation.

1.4 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The paper is structured as follows:

Section 2 discusses the legal framework governing domestic violence protection

Section 3 examines challenges in implementation

Section 4 analyzes judicial contributions

Section 5 provides comparative international perspective

Section 6 offers recommendations and conclusion

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK GOVERNING PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The legal framework governing protection from domestic violence in India has evolved through a combination of constitutional principles, criminal law provisions, civil legislation, and judicial pronouncements. These diverse legal sources collectively shape remedies available to women facing abuse within domestic relationships. While this multi-layered structure provides multiple avenues for relief, it has also resulted in certain inconsistencies and implementation challenges.

The central component of domestic violence protection is the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, which provides comprehensive civil remedies unavailable under earlier criminal law frameworks. One of the most significant contributions of this legislation is its expansive definition of domestic violence under Section 3, encompassing physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal and emotional abuse, and economic abuse.⁴⁴ This marked a fundamental departure from the narrow understanding that previously focused primarily on physical harm and dowry-related cruelty.

Physical abuse under the Act includes any act causing bodily pain, harm, or danger to life, limb, or health.⁴⁵ Sexual abuse encompasses

⁴⁴ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, § 3.

⁴⁵ Id. § 3, Explanation I(i).

any conduct of a sexual nature that abuses, humiliates, degrades, or violates the dignity of a woman.⁴⁶ Verbal and emotional abuse includes insults, ridicule, humiliation, name-calling, and accusations regarding failure to bear a male child.⁴⁷ Economic abuse involves deprivation of financial resources, disposal of household assets, and restriction on access to facilities.⁴⁸ This comprehensive definition ensures that the full spectrum of abusive behavior is legally recognized.

The Act significantly expands the category of protected persons beyond married women. Section 2(a) defines "aggrieved person" as any woman who is or has been in a domestic relationship with the respondent.⁴⁹ The term "domestic relationship" under Section 2(f) includes relationships through consanguinity, marriage, adoption, or joint family membership.⁵⁰ This broad definition extends protection to women in live-in relationships, widowed daughters-in-law, sisters, and mothers residing in the shared household.

The concept of "shared household" under Section 2(s) is central to the Act's protective framework, defined as a household where the aggrieved person lives or has lived in a domestic relationship, including households owned or tenanted by either party.⁵¹ This inclusive definition ensures that a woman's right to residence is not contingent upon property ownership, recognizing the reality that most women in India reside in homes owned by their husbands or in-laws.

The Act provides multiple forms of relief addressing different dimensions of domestic violence. Protection Orders under Section 18 empower the Magistrate to prohibit the respondent from committing domestic violence, entering the aggrieved person's workplace, communicating with her, alienating assets, or

causing violence to her dependants.⁵² Residence Orders under Section 19 protect the aggrieved person's right to reside in the shared household regardless of ownership rights.⁵³ Monetary Relief under Section 20 covers loss of earnings, medical expenses, property damage, and maintenance.⁵⁴ Custody Orders under Section 21 grant temporary custody of children, while Compensation Orders under Section 22 provide damages for injuries including mental torture and emotional distress.⁵⁵

The Act establishes an institutional framework to support implementation. Protection Officers under Section 8 are appointed by State Governments with duties including assisting in filing complaints, obtaining medical examination, accessing shelter homes, and ensuring order implementation.⁵⁶ Service Providers under Section 10 are voluntary associations assisting with legal aid, counseling, and shelter.⁵⁷ The Magistrate under Section 12 receives applications and grants relief, with Section 23 enabling ex parte interim orders in urgent situations.⁵⁸ The Act mandates disposal within sixty days, and Section 31 criminalizes breach of protection orders as a cognizable and non-bailable offense.⁵⁹

Constitutional provisions form the foundational basis for domestic violence protection. Article 14 guarantees equality before law, Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex while enabling special provisions for women, and Article 21 guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.⁶⁰ The judiciary has interpreted Article 21 expansively to include the right to live with dignity, free from violence and abuse.⁶¹ These constitutional principles inform interpretation of statutory provisions and have

⁴⁶ Id. § 3, Explanation I(ii).

⁴⁷ Id. § 3, Explanation I(iii).

⁴⁸ Id. § 3, Explanation I(iv).

⁴⁹ Id. § 2(a).

⁵⁰ Id. § 2(f).

⁵¹ Id. § 2(s).

⁵² Id. § 18.

⁵³ Id. § 19.

⁵⁴ Id. § 20.

⁵⁵ Id. §§ 21–22.

⁵⁶ Id. §§ 8–9.

⁵⁷ Id. § 10.

⁵⁸ Id. §§ 12, 23.

⁵⁹ Id. § 12(5), 31.

⁶⁰ Constitution of India arts. 14, 15, 21.

⁶¹ *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi*, (1981) 1 SCC 608.

been invoked in expanding protection for women.

In sum, the legal framework governing domestic violence protection in India is comprehensive but fragmented. While significant progress has been made through the PWDVA and constitutional jurisprudence, the absence of a unified approach continues to pose challenges. The effectiveness of this framework ultimately depends on how well these laws are implemented in practice.

3. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal framework, actual implementation of domestic violence protection in India remains uneven and often ineffective. One of the most significant challenges lies in weak institutional infrastructure. The Act envisions Protection Officers as the primary link between aggrieved women and the legal system, responsible for facilitating access to relief, assisting in complaint preparation, and ensuring compliance with court orders. However, many states have failed to appoint sufficient numbers of Protection Officers, and in numerous districts, the role is assigned as additional charge to existing officials carrying heavy workloads.⁶² This results in inadequate attention to cases, delayed responses, and lack of specialized engagement with victims.

Studies monitoring PWDVA implementation reveal that Protection Officers often lack adequate training on the Act's provisions, gender-sensitive approaches, and understanding of complex dynamics in abusive relationships.⁶³ Many are unfamiliar with procedures for obtaining medical examination, accessing shelter homes, or coordinating with other agencies. The absence of dedicated staff, office infrastructure, and operational budgets further constrains their effectiveness.

Service providers registered under the Act similarly face severe resource constraints. Many

operate with limited funding, insufficient trained personnel, and inadequate facilities, particularly in rural areas.⁶⁴ The shortage of shelter homes meeting basic standards of safety and dignity remains a critical concern, with available facilities often overcrowded, poorly maintained, or inaccessible to women in remote areas.

Closely linked to weak infrastructure is the chronic problem of judicial delays. The Act mandates disposal of applications within sixty days from the first hearing date, reflecting the urgent nature of domestic violence matters.⁶⁵ However, this statutory timeline is rarely adhered to in practice. Magistrate courts face enormous caseloads, and domestic violence applications compete for judicial time with numerous other matters. Adjournments are frequent, and proceedings often extend over months or years.⁶⁶ These delays are particularly detrimental in domestic violence cases where the safety of the aggrieved person requires prompt resolution.

Another major challenge is the limited enforcement of court orders once obtained. Protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief orders are only effective if actually implemented. Reports indicate that respondents frequently violate court orders with relative impunity, particularly in rural areas where law enforcement presence is limited.⁶⁷ While Section 31 criminalizes breach of protection orders, the process of filing fresh complaints for breach imposes additional burdens on victims. The absence of proactive monitoring mechanisms means compliance depends largely on the aggrieved person's ability to report violations.

A further significant issue relates to low awareness among potential beneficiaries. A substantial proportion of women, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, remain unaware of

⁶² Lawyer's Collective Women's Rights Initiative, *Staying Alive* 45 (2012).

⁶³ National Commission for Women, *Annual Report 2021–2022*.

⁶⁴ Lawyer's Collective Women's Rights Initiative, *Staying Alive* 58 (2012).

⁶⁵ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, § 12(5).

⁶⁶ Jaya Sagade, *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: A Critical Analysis*, 42 *Econ. & Pol. Wkly.* 63, 66 (2007).

⁶⁷ National Crime Records Bureau, *Crime in India: Statistical Report* (2022).

their rights under the PWDVA.⁶⁸ Limited legal literacy, combined with inaccessibility of legal institutions, means that many potential beneficiaries never approach the system. Language barriers, geographic distance from courts, and costs associated with proceedings further restrict access.

Societal and cultural barriers represent perhaps the most deep-rooted challenge. In many communities, violence within the home is normalized as a private family matter or legitimate exercise of male authority.⁶⁹ Women are socialized to endure abuse silently, prioritize family honor over personal safety, and view legal action as bringing shame upon the family. Women seeking legal recourse frequently face intense pressure from family members, community elders, and informal mediation bodies to withdraw complaints.⁷⁰ The stigma associated with being identified as a domestic violence victim, concerns about impact on children, and economic dependence all act as powerful deterrents to pursuing cases.

Another emerging challenge is the limited scope of protection across diverse relationship types. While the Act extends protection to women in relationships "in the nature of marriage," judicial interpretation has established criteria that may exclude vulnerable women in informal or short-term relationships.⁷¹ These socio-cultural barriers often prove more formidable than legal obstacles and require sustained efforts at social transformation alongside legal reform.

4. JUDICIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE JURISPRUDENCE

The Indian judiciary has played a crucial role in shaping domestic violence jurisprudence, particularly in interpreting the PWDVA's provisions, addressing statutory ambiguities, and expanding protection through constitutional interpretation. Through landmark

decisions, courts have clarified key concepts and developed principles guiding implementation.

One of the most significant judicial contributions relates to interpretation of "relationship in the nature of marriage" under Section 2(f). In *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal*, the Supreme Court established specific criteria: parties must hold themselves out as spouses to society, be of legal marriage age, be otherwise qualified to enter legal marriage, and have voluntarily cohabited for a reasonable period.⁷² While providing clarity, this interpretation has been criticized for potentially excluding vulnerable women in informal relationships.

The Supreme Court further elaborated in *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma*, considering women in relationships with married men.⁷³ The Court recognized that such relationships warrant consideration of women's vulnerability, identifying various categories of live-in relationships and their implications for protection.

The interpretation of "shared household" has been another contested area. In *S.R. Batra v. Taruna Batra*, the Supreme Court restrictively held that shared household must belong to the respondent husband, and a house belonging to the mother-in-law could not be treated as shared household.⁷⁴ This interpretation was criticized as undermining the Act's protective intent.

However, the Supreme Court revisited this in *Satish Chander Ahuja v. Sneha Ahuja*, where a larger bench clarified that Section 2(s) is wide enough to include households belonging to any relative of the husband with whom the woman has lived in a domestic relationship.⁷⁵ The Court emphasized that the Act must be interpreted to advance its protective purpose. This decision significantly expanded residence rights for aggrieved women.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, *National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)* (Women's Empowerment Chapter).

⁶⁹ Flavia Agnes, *Law and Gender Inequality* 156 (Oxford Univ. Press 2011).

⁷⁰ Indira Jaising ed., *Men's Laws, Women's Lives* 89 (Women Unlimited 2005).

⁷¹ *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal*, (2010) 10 SCC 469.

⁷² *Id.* paras 31–33.

⁷³ *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma*, (2013) 15 SCC 755.

⁷⁴ *S.R. Batra v. Taruna Batra*, (2007) 3 SCC 169.

⁷⁵ *Satish Chander Ahuja v. Sneha Ahuja*, (2020) 12 SCC 742.

In *V.D. Bhanot v. Savita Bhanot*, the Supreme Court held that the Act applies to situations where the aggrieved person was in a domestic relationship at complaint time, even if violence occurred before the Act's commencement.⁷⁶ This ensured women subjected to prolonged abuse were not excluded merely because violence began before 2006.

The landmark decision in *Hiral P. Harsora v. Kusum Narottamdas Harsora* struck down "adult male" from the respondent definition under Section 2(q) as unconstitutional, violating Articles 14 and 15.⁷⁷ The Court reasoned that domestic violence could be perpetrated by female relatives, and restricting the definition would leave women without remedy against female perpetrators.

The judiciary has consistently upheld Magistrates' power to pass *ex parte* interim orders under Section 23 in cases requiring immediate protection.⁷⁸ Courts have recognized that domestic violence situations often involve urgent threats that cannot await completion of hearing procedures.

Constitutional jurisprudence has significantly contributed by recognizing domestic violence as a fundamental rights violation. Courts have held that Article 21 includes the right to live with dignity, free from violence and abuse.⁷⁹ This constitutional dimension elevates domestic violence from a statutory concern to a fundamental rights issue, reinforcing the state's obligation to provide effective protection.

Despite these contributions, judicial engagement has limitations. Courts address issues case-by-case, making comprehensive systemic reforms difficult. Prolonged litigation timelines reduce effectiveness of judicial remedies, and ensuring compliance with judgments remains challenging due to weak enforcement mechanisms.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

A comparative analysis of domestic violence frameworks in other jurisdictions provides valuable insights into strengthening India's approach. Several countries have moved beyond basic protection orders toward comprehensive prevention and response systems, reflecting a global shift toward greater accountability and survivor support.

The United Kingdom has emerged as a leader through the Domestic Abuse Act, 2021, introducing a statutory definition encompassing physical, sexual, violent, threatening, controlling, coercive, economic, psychological, and emotional abuse.⁸⁰ Particularly significant is the inclusion of controlling or coercive behavior as a distinct criminal offense under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act, 2015.⁸¹ The UK framework established the Domestic Abuse Commissioner, an independent office holder tasked with monitoring responses and promoting best practices.⁸²

The European Union has proposed the Directive on Combating Violence Against Women, seeking to establish minimum standards for criminalizing various forms of violence and requiring accessible support services.⁸³ The emphasis on coordinated multi-agency responses reflects recognition that legal provisions alone are insufficient without supporting institutional infrastructure.

The United States addresses domestic violence through the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), providing federal funding for programs supporting victims, establishing grants for law enforcement training, victim services, transitional housing, and legal assistance.⁸⁴ A distinctive feature is emphasis on coordinated community responses bringing together law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, victim

⁷⁶ *V.D. Bhanot v. Savita Bhanot*, (2012) 3 SCC 183.

⁷⁷ *Hiral P. Harsora v. Kusum Narottamdas Harsora*, (2016) 10 SCC 165.

⁷⁸ Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, § 23.

⁷⁹ *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi*, (1981) 1 SCC 608.

⁸⁰ Domestic Abuse Act 2021, c. 17, § 1 (UK).

⁸¹ Serious Crime Act 2015, c. 9, § 76 (UK).

⁸² Domestic Abuse Act 2021, pt. 2 (UK).

⁸³ European Commission, *Proposal for a Directive on Combating Violence Against Women* (2022).

⁸⁴ Violence Against Women Act of 1994, 42 U.S.C. § 13701.

advocates, and social service agencies.⁸⁵ Specialized domestic violence courts feature trained judicial officers and streamlined procedures.

Australia addresses domestic violence through federal and state legislation, with the National Plan to Reduce Violence providing coordinated policy framework.⁸⁶ Australian legislation adopts broad definitions including controlling behavior, and specialized family violence courts have been established with integrated services. Risk assessment frameworks provide standardized tools for identifying domestic violence risk.⁸⁷

The Domestic Violence Act, 1998 of South Africa was one legislative model considered during PWDVA drafting.⁸⁸ Significantly, it imposes specific duties on police officers to assist complainants, including informing them of rights, assisting with shelter, and obtaining medical treatment.⁸⁹ This proactive law enforcement role provides a model for strengthening police responses.

These international developments reveal important trends. First, there is movement toward recognizing controlling and coercive behavior as distinct abuse forms. Second, institutional oversight mechanisms ensure sustained attention to implementation. Third, coordinated multi-agency responses are increasingly emphasized. Fourth, specialized courts with trained personnel improve justice quality. Fifth, standardized risk assessment tools help identify high-risk cases.

For India, these developments offer important lessons. While significant progress has been made through the PWDVA, further reforms are needed to align with global best practices. Adopting elements such as recognition of coercive control, dedicated oversight institutions, coordinated responses, and specialized courts could significantly enhance effectiveness.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that India has taken important steps toward building a legal framework for domestic violence protection, but effectiveness remains significantly limited in practice. While comprehensive laws and institutional mechanisms exist, their impact is reduced by weak enforcement, inadequate resources, fragmented implementation, and societal resistance. To make protection genuinely meaningful, a combination of legal, institutional, and social reforms is necessary.

One of the most significant changes required is strengthening institutional capacity. States must ensure appointment of dedicated, full-time Protection Officers in every district with adequate training, resources, and support infrastructure. Protection Officers should not be burdened with additional responsibilities diluting their effectiveness. Regular mandatory training covering legal provisions, gender sensitization, trauma-informed approaches, and inter-agency coordination should be institutionalized. Service provider capacity must similarly be enhanced through adequate funding and quality standards.

Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is equally critical. Proactive monitoring mechanisms, including periodic review by Protection Officers and court-mandated compliance reporting, should ensure protection orders are actually implemented and violations detected promptly. Breach consequences should be swiftly and consistently enforced to maintain framework credibility. Technology-based solutions such as electronic monitoring in high-risk cases could be explored.

Judicial efficiency must be significantly improved. Dedicated domestic violence courts or fast-track benches should be established in all districts to ensure timely disposal within the statutory sixty-day timeline. Judicial officers should receive specialized training on abuse dynamics, trauma impacts, and prompt relief importance. Case management systems

⁸⁵ UN Women, *Progress of the World's Women 2019–2020* 145 (2019).

⁸⁶ Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic) (Austl.).

⁸⁷ Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF), Victoria, Australia.

⁸⁸ Domestic Violence Act 1998 (S. Afr.).

⁸⁹ Id. § 2.

should track progress and identify delays requiring intervention.

Support services quality and accessibility must be dramatically improved. One-stop centers integrating legal aid, counseling, medical care, shelter, and economic assistance can reduce institutional barriers. These services should be available across all districts including rural areas. Economic empowerment programs including skill development and employment assistance can enhance women's ability to leave abusive situations.

Comprehensive awareness programs are essential. Mass media campaigns, community outreach, educational initiatives, and digital platforms should inform women about available protections. Information should be available in local languages and accessible formats. Legal literacy should be integrated into school curricula.

Drawing from international best practices, the PWDVA should be amended to explicitly recognize controlling and coercive behavior as a distinct domestic violence form. A dedicated national oversight institution analogous to the UK Domestic Abuse Commissioner should be established to monitor implementation, identify failures, recommend improvements, and promote best practices.

In conclusion, domestic violence protection in India represents an important recognition of the state's responsibility to safeguard women from abuse within their homes. The existing legal framework provides a strong foundation with comprehensive definitions, multiple remedies, and institutional mechanisms. However, effectiveness depends substantially on implementation, which currently falls far short of statutory promise.

A comprehensive approach combining legal reforms, effective enforcement, improved institutional capacity, enhanced judicial efficiency, accessible support services, and active community engagement can significantly strengthen protection outcomes.

The transformation required extends beyond legal measures to encompass fundamental shifts in societal attitudes that currently normalize domestic violence and pressure women to remain in abusive situations.

Ultimately, the goal of domestic violence protection should not be limited to providing remedies after harm has occurred, but to creating an environment where violence is prevented, women are empowered to seek help without stigma, and all individuals can live with dignity, safety, and freedom within their homes. This requires both sustained legal reform and fundamental social transformation in attitudes toward gender equality and women's autonomy. The challenge before India is to move beyond formal legal compliance to ensure that rights guaranteed under the PWDVA translate into lived realities of safety and dignity for all women.

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