

Empowering Survivors: An Analysis of India's One Stop Centre Scheme


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Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a vital problem of our society. Every day, a major part of the population experiences some kind of violence against them. In the context of India, gender-based violence takes on various forms, ranging from domestic and sexual violence, such as rape, to harmful customs like dowry, honor killings, acid attacks, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, trafficking for sexual exploitation, child marriage, sex-selective abortion etc. Government of Indian is taking important steps not only to curb the incidents of violence but also to provide assistance to the survivors of incidents of violence. One of the most important initiatives from the Government of Indian is the launch of One Stop Centre Scheme (2015) to provide integrated care, shelter and rehabilitation services to the survivors of GBV. These services include medical aid, police assistance, legal aid/case management, psychosocial counselling, and temporary support services. The present study is proposing a comprehensive analysis of the One Stop Centre Scheme and its effectiveness in form of legal, medical and security assistance to the survivors of GBV. For the purpose of analysis, descriptive research design will be used. The researcher will also try to identify the implementational aspect of One Stop Centre scheme.

Keywords: gender-based violence, survivors, one stop centre scheme, integrated care

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1. Introduction

Women make up nearly half of our nation's population. However, in a society dominated by men, violence is frequently employed as a means of control and oppression against women. It is estimated that approximately 35% of women experience physical, sexual, social, or psychological violence at some point in their lives.[1] Gender-based violence can manifest in various forms, from domestic violence within homes to sexual harassment and rape in public spaces.

The Nirbhaya rape case in December 2012 was a particularly harrowing incident that deeply affected the nation's conscience.[2] In response to this tragedy, the government established the Nirbhaya Fund, a dedicated financial resource aimed at enhancing the safety and security of women. This fund, amounting to 1,000 crore and non-lapsable each year, is managed by the Department of Economic Affairs within the Ministry of Finance.[3]

In addition to the fund, the Ministry of Home Affairs formed a Commission of Enquiry, led by retired Justice Usha Mehra, to investigate the various facets of the brutal incident from 2012 and to recommend measures for improving women's safety. The commission submitted its findings on February 22, 2013, highlighting the necessity for a "one-stop centre" at designated hospitals to assist survivors of sexual assault and to ensure prompt justice for offenders.[4]

The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, launched the One Stop Centre Scheme in 2015 to offer care, shelter, and rehabilitation services to survivors of gender-based violence. One Stop Centres (OSCs) are designed to assist individuals affected by violence in both private and public settings. Survivors of gender-based violence, regardless of their gender, age, class, caste, educational background, marital status, race, or culture, will receive support and avenues for redress. Those experiencing any form of violence, including attempted sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honor-related crimes, acid attacks, or witch-hunting, who seek help or are referred to the OSC, will have access to specialized services.

2. Literature Review

In an article titled "Analytical Review of the One-Stop Centre Scheme of the Ministry of Women and Child Development", by Jyoti, C. A. (2022) has explored various aspects of the one-stop centre scheme. The objective of this scheme is to provide comprehensive support and assistance to women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces, all under one roof. These centres aim to offer emergency and non-emergency access to a wide range of services, including medical, legal, psychological, and counselling support, in the fight against all forms of violence against women.[5]

A study by Nileena Suresh (2023) titled "One Stop, Many Challenges: Sakhi Centres Struggle to Support Women Survivors of Violence," highlights the objectives of the Sakhi One Stop Centre scheme, which is a part of the WCD ministry's efforts under the Nirbhaya Fund. This scheme aims to provide support and assistance to women who face violence in both public and private spaces, including instances of spousal violence. Despite its potential to positively impact the lives of countless women and its operational existence for over seven years, there are several obstacles that hinder the effectiveness of the centres and the overall scheme in effectively addressing domestic violence and providing adequate support to survivors. Notably, less than half of the funds allocated by the Union Government for the Sakhi One Stop Centre scheme were utilized between 2015 and 2022. Furthermore, the failure to integrate other systems such as the Women's Helpline significantly diminishes the value and effectiveness of this service. Additionally, a lack of awareness among key stakeholders, such as the police, further limits the reach and impact of this vital support system.[6]

In a study titled "Working System of One Stop Centre Scheme – A Study", by Dr. Suresh Devath (2018) conducted a critical assessment of the effectiveness of the one-stop centre. Despite the noble intentions and objectives behind the launch of the Sakhi OSC scheme, it has not been able to reach its intended beneficiaries as anticipated. This can be attributed to several factors such as women who have experienced violence often lack sufficient awareness about the existence and functions of the one-stop centres. Although women victims are seeking assistance from the one-stop centers, they are not receiving the appropriate care they need because of lack of staff and funds.

Overall, these challenges have hindered the effectiveness of the one-stop centre scheme in providing the necessary support and justice to women affected by violence.[7]

The report titled "Health Sector Response to Gender-Based Violence: An Assessment of the Asia Pacific Region" by the UNFPA (2010) critically examines the one-stop centre (OSC) model of care providers. It highlights that one drawback of the OSC model is its higher maintenance cost. Moreover, OSCs require dedicated staff, spaces, and funding sources, which may not be feasible in financially constrained and in rural areas. The OSC model primarily caters to survivors of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual violence (SV), but it fails to consider the specific needs associated with different forms of violence. For instance, non-partner violence often necessitates immediate forensic evidence collection, while partner violence often requires legal aid. These perspectives indicate that the OSC cannot adopt a 'one size fits all' approach if it aims to address the diverse and specific needs of all survivors of violence.

3. Research Methodology

This paper is a descriptive study in nature. It is based on secondary information. The secondary data and information have been comprehensively analysed for preparing this paper. The secondary information has been collected from different scholars' articles published in different journals and newspaper articles.

4. Objectives of the study

One Stop Centres is a major initiative of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (GoI) to help victims of gender-based violence. The primary objective of the present study will be to have a comprehensive analysis of the One Stop Centre Scheme.

The specific objectives of the study, drawn from the above broad objective are as follow:

- To understand the structural aspects of OSC scheme.
- To recognize the specific assistance provided to the survivors of gender-based violence.
- To analyse the effectiveness of the OSC scheme in form of legal, medical and security assistance to the survivors of gender-based violence.

5. One Stop Centre Scheme

The One Stop Centre Scheme received approval for implementation starting on April 1, 2015. This initiative is designed to provide women affected by violence with access to a comprehensive array of services, including medical assistance, police support, legal aid and case management, psychosocial counselling, and temporary support services. The plan includes the establishment of One Stop Centres across the nation in a phased approach.

One Stop Centres (OSCs) are dedicated to assisting women who have experienced violence in both private and public settings, including within families, communities, and workplaces. Women suffering from various forms of abuse be it physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, or economic will receive support and avenues for redress, regardless of their age, class, caste, educational background, marital status, race, or culture. Those who have experienced violence related to sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, honor-based crimes, acid attacks, or witch-hunting and have sought help or been referred to the OSC will be offered specialized services.

The OSC is committed to supporting all women, including girls under 18 years of age, who are victims of violence, without discrimination based on caste, class, religion, region, sexual orientation, or marital status. For minors, the OSC will collaborate with institutions and authorities established under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2000, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012.

5.1 Services under OSC scheme

a. Emergency Response and Rescue Services: One-Stop Centers (OSCs) offer rescue and referral services for women experiencing violence. They establish connections with existing systems such as the National Health Mission (NHM), the 108-emergency service, and local police (PCR Van).

b. Medical Assistance: Women who have faced violence are directed to the nearest hospital for medical evaluation and treatment, following the protocols set forth by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

c. Assistance with FIR/NCR/DIR Filing: OSCs assist women in the process of filing FIRs, NCRs, or DIRs.

d. Psycho-Social Support and Counselling:

Trained counsellors are available to provide psycho-social counselling services via phone call. These professionals adhere to established ethical standards, guidelines, and protocols while delivering their services.

e. Legal Aid and Counselling: To ensure that women affected by violence can access justice, OSCs offer legal aid and counselling through a network of empanelled lawyers or the National/State/District Legal Service Authority. It is the duty of the lawyer or prosecutor to clarify legal processes for the affected woman and advocate for her exemption from court appearances.

f. Shelter Services: OSCs provide temporary shelter for women in distress. Women affected by violence, along with their children (girls of any age and boys up to 8 years), can stay at the OSC for a maximum of five days. For longer-term shelter needs, arrangements are made with Swadhar Greh or Short Stay Homes operated by government or NGOs. Women utilizing the temporary shelter are provided with essential amenities, including food, medical care, and clothing. Each woman receiving shelter is given a basic kit containing items such as soap, shampoo, hair oil, sanitary pads, a sewing kit, a comb, toothbrush, toothpaste, and diapers for infants. The OSC can accommodate up to five women at any given time.

g. Video Conferencing Facility: To ensure efficient and seamless police and court proceedings, the OSCs offer video conferencing capabilities (utilizing platforms such as Skype and Google Conferencing). This service allows the aggrieved woman to record her statement for police or court directly from the OSCs, employing audio-visual electronic methods as outlined in sections 161(3), 164(1), and 275(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as well as section 231(1) in accordance with Order XVIII Rule 4 of the Code of Civil Procedure.

5.2 Service Delivery Framework – Roles and Responsibilities

The service providers of the One Stop Centres have following responsibilities:

a. Centre Administrator – The First Point of Contact: The Centre Administrator, a qualified woman, oversees the operations of the One-Stop Centre (OSC). She serves as the initial point of contact for women seeking assistance at the OSC.

Her responsibilities include listening to grievances, documenting case histories, and registering cases in the online case management system to generate a Unique Identity Number (UID). The Centre Administrator supervises each case, ensuring it reaches a logical resolution and follows up with the affected woman afterward. Additionally, she reviews and approves the quarterly reports prepared by the IT staff for submission to the Management Committee (MC) and meets with the MC monthly for guidance and support.

b. Case Worker: Case Workers operate in shifts to ensure 24-hour service availability at the OSC. They assist the Centre Administrator in providing services to women accessing the OSC and are also tasked with additional responsibilities as assigned by the Centre Administrator.

c. Police Facilitation Officer (PFO): The Police Facilitation Officer supports women in initiating necessary police actions against their abusers. If a woman facing violence is denied the opportunity to file a First Information Report (FIR) or receive assistance at the police station, the PFO works to speed up the process and, in special circumstances, escalates the issue to the Superintendent of Police and other relevant authorities. If the aggrieved woman cannot visit the police station to file her complaint or FIR, the PFO ensures that her information is recorded from her home, the OSC, or a hospital, after obtaining the necessary permissions.

d. Legal Support Personnel/Lawyer: This individual educates and guides the woman regarding her legal rights, assisting her in initiating legal action against the abuse or violence she has experienced. They collaborate with the Public Prosecutor to provide ongoing support even after the case is filed, ensuring that there is consistent follow-up until the case reaches a resolution. Additionally, they facilitate efficient police and court processes by utilizing video conferencing for recording statements from women who have faced violence.

e. Medical Support Personnel: The Para Medical Personnel operates in shifts to ensure round-the-clock service at the One Stop Centre (OSC). They administer first aid and other medical care to the woman survivor until she can be transported to a hospital. Furthermore, they accompany the woman to the hospital and, in instances of sexual violence, ensure adherence to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's protocols for forensic examinations and other necessary tests.

They also assist in compiling the medical history of the women impacted by violence.

f. Psychological Counsellor: The counsellor offers psychological support and guidance to women who have experienced violence, providing referrals to appropriate services based on their individual needs. They also assist in documenting the case history of the women affected by violence.

g. IT Staff: The IT Staff operates in shifts to ensure continuous 24-hour support at the OSC. They are tasked with generating Unique IDs for women impacted by violence using web-based software. The IT Staff meticulously documents case histories as provided by the Centre Administrator, Counsellor, Paramedic, Lawyer, and Police Facilitation Officer, while also recording proceedings for effective case management. Additionally, they develop web-based data systems, assist with video conferencing, and manage data entry tasks. Adhering to strict protocols, they maintain the confidentiality of the data generated, ensuring that the names and personal details of affected women remain protected throughout the documentation process. Furthermore, they are responsible for drafting monthly and quarterly reports.

h. Multi-purpose Helper: The Multi-purpose Helper operates in shifts to deliver round-the-clock service at the OSC. Her primary role involves ensuring hygiene and sanitation standards are upheld within the facility. This includes daily cleaning of toilets to maintain cleanliness, managing waste disposal, and changing bed linens and pillow covers weekly in the shelter rooms. She also provides water to visitors, maintains the visitor register, and supplies information regarding legal aid, police, and medical assistance to women. Additionally, she prepares basic kits containing essential items such as soap, combs, shampoo, sanitary pads, toothbrushes, toothpaste, diapers for infants, and sewing kits for women utilizing the temporary shelter services at the OSC. She assists other staff members with referrals and performs any additional tasks as requested by the Centre Administrator.

i. Security Guard/Night Guard: The Security Guard/Night Guard works in shifts to ensure 24-hour security at the OSC. Their primary responsibility is to safeguard the overall security of the facility, which includes protecting all capital assets, furniture, and equipment within the OSC.

6. Implementational Aspect of One Stop Centre Scheme

One stop centre scheme is undoubtedly one of the most necessary and important steps from government of India towards making the country a better place for women. This particular scheme provides women survivors of gender-based violence some comfort by giving them a single place to go and address the issues they are facing. But, like many other government schemes, this also has some problems which needs to be discussed. Primarily, the issues of proper and speedy financing are most common among OSCs. Even after the promise of 100% financial support from central government, these centres are struggling around the country. Providing multiple care system to GBV survivors requires a lot of funds specifically the shelter facility at these centres needs a great deal work and money. The delay or sometimes absence of financial support from the government can shambles the proper functioning of these centres.

Apart from financial issues, the lack of coordination among different departments can also affect the implementation of the scheme and disturb the functioning of One Stop Centres. These centres rely on various government departments like NIPCCD, District Magistrate office, civil society groups, Mahila Police Volunteers etc for training and sensitization of different personnels working in One Stop Centres. Furthermore, Gender Cells and Women's Studies Centres within universities could play a significant role by offering technical support through training and capacity-building initiatives aimed at women survivors of gender-based violence.

Awareness generation about the existence of One Stop Centres is also one of the most important aspects of the scheme. It is the responsibility of the state government to provide proper signage of generate awareness regarding OSCs. The signage for the OSC which prominently features the term "Sakhi – One Stop Centre" should be presented in English, Hindi, and the local language. Without effective awareness generation programmes, the chances of success of these centres are very small specially in a country where countless women are not properly educated and made aware of different government schemes.

7. Conclusion

In India, women consist of almost half of the population of the country. Being a male dominated society, violence is often used against women as a tool to control and also oppress them. Gender based violence against women may range from domestic violence within the walls of their homes to sexual harassment and even rape at public places. The introduction of One Stop Centre Scheme offered a ray of hope for women dealing with these different forms of gender-based violence around the country. These women survivors can avail various services from OSCs including legal assistance, medical assistance, psychological assistance as well as shelter facility. However, without proper implementation this huge step from the government of India can be futile. For the impeccable success of the scheme, every element of the scheme needs to work together. The financial activity, organisational collaboration, and training and capacity building workshops for women survivors as well as for individuals working in OSCs is very important. At last, it is hoped that the information and analysis presented in this paper will help in extending the understanding of this very important initiative of government of India i.e. One Stop Centre Scheme.

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