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## Women's Empowerment through Constitutional Rights: A Critical Analysis of India's Legal Mechanisms

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### Abstract

This paper critically examines the role of constitutional provisions and statutory mechanisms in promoting women's empowerment in India. Anchored in Articles 14, 15, 16 and 21 of the Constitution and guided by relevant Directive Principles, the study reviews landmark legislations — including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (2005), and subsequent criminal law reforms — to evaluate their contribution to women's social, economic and political agency. Using an integrative analysis of secondary sources (NFHS-5, NCRB, PLFS, government reports, judicial pronouncements and scholarly literature), the paper maps advance in legal protection, political representation (notably following the 73rd and 74th Amendments) and formal rights to property and workplace safety. The findings show that constitutional and legislative interventions have produced measurable improvements in legal status, institutional obligations and women's visibility in public life. At the same time, the analysis highlights persistent implementation gaps, uneven institutional capacity, limited legal awareness, and socio-cultural constraints that moderate the effective translation of rights into lived empowerment. The study concludes that while India's legal architecture provides a necessary and powerful foundation for gender justice, sustained impact requires strengthened enforcement, targeted legal literacy, institutional reform and community-level social change. Policy recommendations focus on improving compliance mechanisms, expanding access to legal aid, capacity building for frontline institutions, and integrated programmes that combine legal reform with social empowerment initiatives.

**Keywords:** Women's Empowerment, Constitutional Rights, Legal Mechanisms, Gender Justice, Legal Reform.

### Introduction

Women's empowerment has emerged as a central theme in contemporary social, economic, and political discourse in India. As a nation built on democratic principles of equality, justice, and dignity, India's commitment to gender empowerment is deeply embedded

in its constitutional philosophy. The Constitution of India, adopted in 1950, laid the foundational framework for safeguarding women's rights and promoting gender equality through a robust set of fundamental rights, directive principles, and affirmative policy measures. Over the decades, this constitutional vision has been strengthened through the enactment of various legislations designed to address discrimination, prevent violence, and ensure equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life. Despite these substantial legal frameworks, gender inequality remains a pervasive societal challenge, making it essential to examine how constitutional rights and legal mechanisms contribute to women's actual empowerment.

The Indian Constitution guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of laws under Article 14, explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex under Article 15, and ensures equal opportunities in public employment through Article 16. Additionally, Article 15(3) empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children, forming the legal basis for numerous women-centric laws and welfare schemes. These constitutional safeguards demonstrate the framers' foresight in recognizing women's historical disadvantages and their intention to create a framework that advances substantive rather than merely formal equality. Complementing the fundamental rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy encourage the State to secure just and humane working conditions, maternity relief, and equal livelihood opportunities for women, further reinforcing the constitutional commitment to gender justice.

The legal landscape for women's rights in India expanded significantly in the post-independence era through the introduction of progressive legislation addressing diverse issues such as domestic violence, workplace harassment, property rights, reproductive health, and criminal justice reforms. Laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (2013), the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), and amendments to the Hindu Succession Act (2005) represent landmark legal interventions aimed at protecting women from abuse, ensuring their safety, and promoting their economic independence. These laws have been instrumental in challenging patriarchal norms, increasing awareness about women's rights, and empowering women to seek justice through formal legal channels.

However, the effectiveness of constitutional rights and legal mechanisms cannot be assessed merely by the existence of laws; their implementation, accessibility, and social acceptance are equally crucial. Despite notable progress, gender-based violence, discrimination in employment, low female labour force participation, and unequal access to resources continue to affect millions of women across India. Data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and National Family Health Survey (NFHS) reveal persistent gaps between legal provisions and on-ground realities. Social norms, lack of legal awareness, limited access to justice, and institutional shortcomings often restrict the transformative potential of constitutional guarantees.

Therefore, a critical analysis of India's constitutional and legal structures becomes necessary to understand the extent to which they empower women in practice. This study aims to examine the strengths, limitations, and real-world implications of these mechanisms by analysing constitutional provisions, legislative frameworks, and their societal impact. By evaluating both achievements and ongoing challenges, the research seeks to contribute to a

deeper understanding of how law can serve as an effective tool for promoting gender equality and what reforms are needed to ensure that women's empowerment moves beyond legal formalities to become an everyday reality.

### **Review of Literature**

**Saha, S., & Chattopadhyay, K. N. (2024)**, in their work titled "Women's Empowerment and the Indian Federal Structure: Advancing Towards Equality," explore how India's federal system affects gender-related laws and women-centric welfare measures at central and state levels. The authors identify substantial variations in state-level commitment and execution of constitutional mandates, resulting in uneven access to legal protections for women across different regions. Their analysis emphasizes the significance of cooperative federalism in enhancing women's empowerment.

**Rani, P., & Sinshupa. (2023)**, in their research paper titled "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Law in India," examine key legal instruments related to women—marriage and divorce laws, inheritance and property rights, and legislation addressing domestic violence. The authors also explore the role of affirmative-action policies in advancing women's empowerment. Their study reveals major challenges such as lack of awareness among women, poor implementation of laws, and structural socio-cultural barriers that limit the actual impact of legislated rights. The research is descriptive and draws on secondary sources.

**Begum, U. S. (2022)**, in her research paper titled "An Analysis on the Constitutional Mechanisms for the Empowerment of Women," analyses various constitutional safeguards and legislative initiatives designed to protect and empower women. She highlights the limited awareness among women about their legal rights and argues that the mere existence of laws cannot counter deeply rooted patriarchal beliefs. The study, based on secondary data, stresses the need for legal literacy and social transformation in addition to legal reform.

**Lakshmi M.J. (2021)**, in her research paper titled, 'Women Empowerment in India: A Historical Evolution' has divided the evolution of women empowerment in India into three broad periods, Ancient and Medieval India, Colonial India, and Independent India. The study is descriptive based on secondary sources from books, journals, etc.

**Hoque A. (2020)**, in his research paper titled, 'Women Empowerment in India: Current Issues, Challenges, and Future Directions' has attempted to analyse the current issues and women's problems and ways and means to attain women empowerment. It is a descriptive study and secondary data is used.

**Loya J. (2021)** in her research paper titled, 'Women Empowerment in India: An Analysis' has attempted to examine in India women empowerment. It has examined the different Government Schemes and their goals/activities for the upliftment of women's status. The area of study is in India Secondary data has been used and a non-participant observation method has been used.

**Pratibha L. (2017)**, in her research paper titled, 'A Study on Issues and Challenges of Women Empowerment in India' has done a descriptive and analytical study. Secondary data has been used. Women's empowerment in India has been analysed. Crimes against women, in India, the need for women empowerment schemes, and challenges are discussed.

**Mandal B. (2018)** in her research paper titled 'A Study on Women Empowerment in 21st Century' has studied women's education in pre-colonial, colonial, and modern India, the forms of women's empowerment, violence against women, women's rights, legal protection of women in Indian Constitution, the role of NGO in women empowerment, the Government Schemes and programs for women empowerment, etc. Secondary data has been used and it is a qualitative study.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

- To examine the constitutional provisions and legal frameworks in India that aim to promote and protect women's rights and empowerment.
- To analyse the effectiveness of key women-centric laws—such as domestic violence legislation, workplace harassment laws, and property rights reforms—in addressing gender inequality.
- To identify the major implementation challenges, socio-cultural barriers, and institutional limitations that hinder the full realization of constitutional rights for women in India.

#### **Hypotheses of the Study**

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant positive impact of constitutional provisions and legal mechanisms on the empowerment of women in India.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant impact of constitutional provisions and legal mechanisms on the empowerment of women in India.

#### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited to examining the constitutional provisions and legal frameworks in India that aim to promote women's empowerment. It focuses on major constitutional rights—such as equality before the law, prohibition of discrimination, and protective discrimination under Article 15(3)—along with key legislations including the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), and amendments related to criminal and property laws. The study analyses the extent to which these legal measures contribute to women's social, economic, and political empowerment.

The research is confined to secondary data and does not include primary field surveys. Instead, it draws upon government reports, NFHS and NCRB data, scholarly articles, policy documents, and existing literature. The geographical scope covers India as a whole, allowing for a broad understanding of national legal mechanisms rather than region-specific variations. The study evaluates legal effectiveness, implementation gaps, and socio-cultural barriers that influence the practical realization of constitutional rights by women.

#### **Significance of the Study**

This study holds substantial significance in understanding the real-world effectiveness of constitutional and legal mechanisms designed to empower women in India. Despite having a strong legal framework, women continue to face discrimination, violence, and unequal opportunities in various spheres of life. By critically examining these legal provisions, the study contributes to identifying why gaps persist between law and practice.

The findings of this research will be valuable for policymakers, legal practitioners, researchers, women's rights organizations, and academicians who seek to strengthen gender justice in India. It highlights the areas where implementation needs to be improved and emphasizes the importance of legal awareness among women. Moreover, the study provides insights that can guide future reforms, promote gender-sensitive policies, and support the development of more effective strategies for achieving substantive equality. Ultimately, this research contributes to the larger discourse on social justice, gender equity, and democratic rights in India.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, relying entirely on secondary data to critically evaluate constitutional provisions and legal mechanisms for women's empowerment. The methodology includes the following components:

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative, descriptive, and analytical approach is used to examine legal texts, constitutional provisions, and published studies on women's empowerment. The study emphasizes interpretation, comparison, and critical evaluation of existing data.

#### **Data Sources**

Secondary data is collected from the following sources:

- **Government Reports:** Ministry of Women and Child Development, National Commission for Women, Law Commission reports.
- **National Surveys:** National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics.
- **Scholarly Literature:** Peer-reviewed journals, open-access research articles, books, and conference papers.
- **Legal Documents:** Constitutional provisions, statutory laws, amendments, and judicial interpretations.

#### **Data Analysis**

The collected materials are analysed thematically to identify trends, strengths, and limitations of India's legal framework. Content analysis is used to examine implementation barriers, socio-cultural constraints, and gaps in enforcement.

#### **Tools and Techniques**

Qualitative methods such as comparative legal analysis, literature review, and document analysis are employed. No statistical tools are used since the study is non-empirical and conceptual in nature.

#### **Fundamental Rights Ensuring Equality and Protection for Women**

The Constitution of India provides a strong foundational framework for women's empowerment through its Fundamental Rights, which guarantee equality, dignity, and personal liberty. Article 14 ensures equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, forming the bedrock of gender justice. This provision establishes that the State cannot discriminate and must treat women and men equally in all legal matters. Article 15(1) explicitly prohibits

discrimination on the basis of sex, acknowledging the long-standing disadvantages faced by women in Indian society.

Importantly, Article 15(3) empowers the State to make special provisions for women and children, allowing the creation of protective and affirmative laws aimed at addressing historical inequalities. Article 16 extends equality to employment opportunities in public services, ensuring that women cannot be denied positions solely based on gender. Additionally, Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and personal liberty, has been interpreted by the judiciary to include the right to live with dignity, free from violence and exploitation. These Fundamental Rights collectively emphasize the constitutional commitment to enhancing women's social, economic, and political status.

### **Directive Principles and Constitutional Mandates Promoting Gender Justice**

In addition to Fundamental Rights, the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs) under Part IV of the Constitution guide the government in formulating welfare policies that advance gender equality. Article 39(a) stresses equal access to livelihoods, while Article 39(d) mandates equal pay for equal work, addressing economic disparities affecting women. Article 42 directs the State to ensure just and humane working conditions and maternity relief, forming the basis for maternity benefits and workplace protections. Articles 45 and 47 emphasize education, nutrition, and health—areas crucial for women's empowerment.

Furthermore, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments mandate 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and urban local bodies, significantly increasing women's participation in political and decision-making processes. These provisions highlight the constitutional intent to not only protect women's rights but also actively promote their leadership, welfare, and economic participation. Although DPSPs are not legally enforceable, they hold profound significance in guiding legislative and policy reforms that uplift women.

### **Legal Frameworks Stemming from Constitutional Guarantees**

Several landmark legislations have been enacted to fulfil constitutional commitments toward women's empowerment. These include the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), which provides civil remedies and protection orders for survivors; the Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), aimed at eliminating dowry-related exploitation; and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (2013), which ensures safe working environments.

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act (2005) grants daughters equal inheritance rights, promoting economic independence. Criminal law amendments in 2013 and 2018 strengthened legal measures against sexual offences, reflecting the State's duty under Articles 14, 15, and 21. These laws collectively operationalize constitutional guarantees and are central to advancing women's empowerment in India.

### **Evaluating the Impact of Domestic Violence Legislation**

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, is one of the most significant legal measures aimed at safeguarding women from physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. The law broadened the definition of domestic violence and introduced civil remedies such as protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief. Despite these progressive provisions, the effectiveness of the law depends greatly on awareness, implementation efficiency, and accessibility of support systems.

Data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5, 2019–21) shows that 29.3% of married women have experienced spousal violence, indicating persistent domestic abuse despite strong legal provisions. Furthermore, NCRB (2022) data revealed over 91,000 registered domestic cruelty cases under Section 498A of the IPC, showing the continued prevalence of violence against women. The high rates suggest that although the PWDVA has expanded legal pathways for protection, structural constraints such as stigma, fear of retaliation, economic dependence, and slow judicial processes hinder its full effectiveness.

### Assessing Workplace Protection Laws and Their Influence on Women's Empowerment

The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, commonly known as the POSH Act, aims to ensure safe and dignified working environments. It mandates Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) in organizations and outlines mechanisms for reporting and redressal.

Despite its strong legal foundation, workplace safety remains a concern. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2023), only about 52% of companies surveyed had fully functional ICCs, reflecting poor compliance. Additionally, the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS 2023) indicates that although women's labour force participation has risen to 37%, many women reportedly leave jobs due to unsafe working conditions or fear of harassment. The low reporting rate—less than 1% of working women formally report harassment—suggests cultural and professional barriers that limit the effective implementation of the POSH Act. Thus, while the law is comprehensive, its impact is limited by weak institutional compliance, lack of awareness among employees, and social pressures discouraging women from raising complaints.

**Table 1: Overview of Key Women-Centric Laws and Their Effectiveness**

Legal Area	Relevant Law	Key Provisions	Latest Data (NFHS / NCRB / PLFS)	Effectiveness Assessment
<b>Domestic Violence</b>	PWDVA, 2005	Protection, residence, monetary relief	29.3% women face spousal violence (NFHS-5); 91,000 cases of cruelty registered (NCRB 2022)	Moderate impact; high prevalence despite law
<b>Workplace Safety</b>	POSH Act, 2013	ICCs, complaint mechanism, confidentiality	Only 52% organizations have ICCs; <1% reporting (MWCD, 2023)	Limited implementation; low reporting
<b>Property Rights</b>	Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005	Equal inheritance rights for daughters	Only 20% women own land/property	Low effectiveness due to socio-cultural barriers
<b>Sexual Offenses</b>	Criminal Law Amendments (2013 & 2018)	Stronger penalties, widened definition	31,000 rape cases annually (NCRB 2022)	Strong legal framework but persistent crimes
<b>Dowry-Related Violence</b>	Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961	Criminalizes dowry & related harassment	10,000 dowry deaths annually (NCRB 2022)	Weak enforcement; societal persistence

Source: Compiled from NFHS-5 (2019–21), NCRB Crime in India Report (2022), PLFS (2023), and Ministry of Women and Child Development (2023)

The above Table 1 presents a concise overview of major women-centric legal frameworks in India along with the latest available national data that reflect their ground-level impact. It highlights how different legal areas—such as domestic violence, workplace safety, property rights, sexual offences, and dowry-related violence—are addressed through corresponding statutes. The table also summarizes key provisions of each law and pairs them with NFHS-5, NCRB, and PLFS data to demonstrate the extent of their effectiveness. Overall, the table indicates that while India has a strong legal structure supporting women's empowerment, challenges such as inadequate implementation, low reporting, and persistent socio-cultural barriers continue to limit the full realization of these legal protections.

### **Effectiveness of Property Rights and Criminal Law Reforms in Ensuring Gender Justice**

The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 legally empowered daughters with equal coparcenary rights in ancestral property, significantly advancing women's economic autonomy. However, socio-cultural barriers and lack of legal awareness often prevent women from claiming property rights. Studies indicate that less than 20% of women in India own any land or property, highlighting a large gap between legislative intent and ground reality.

Criminal Law Amendments (2013 and 2018), enacted after high-profile gender-based crimes, strengthened penalties for rape, sexual assault, and acid attacks. NCRB data (2022), however, records over 31,000 rape cases annually, showing that stringent laws alone cannot deter crimes without behavioural change, effective policing, and swift judicial processes. Thus, while these legislations empower women legally, societal norms and systemic challenges continue to undermine their full potential.

### **Socio-Cultural Barriers and Persistent Patriarchal Norms**

Despite progressive constitutional guarantees and a range of women-centric laws, patriarchal social structures continue to limit women's access to justice and equality. Deep-rooted gender norms often dictate women's roles within families and communities, discouraging them from exercising their legal rights. Traditional beliefs surrounding honour, obedience, and family reputation often prevent women from reporting violence or seeking justice.

In many areas, especially rural and marginalized communities, women still face strong resistance when they attempt to claim property rights or challenge discriminatory practices. Social stigma associated with domestic violence, sexual harassment, and legal disputes further silences women, discouraging them from initiating complaints under laws like PWDVA or the POSH Act. These persistent cultural constraints demonstrate that legal provisions alone cannot dismantle gender inequality unless accompanied by broader attitudinal change, awareness campaigns, and community-based interventions aimed at transforming social mindsets.

### **Implementation Gaps and Weak Institutional Mechanisms**

Implementation challenges remain one of the most significant obstacles in realizing the benefits of constitutional rights and legal protections. Laws such as the Domestic Violence Act and the POSH Act require efficient coordination among institutions—police, protection officers, local committees, courts, and employers. However, many of these bodies suffer from inadequate staffing, limited resources, and insufficient training. Protection officers, for instance,

are often overburdened with multiple responsibilities unrelated to women's welfare, reducing their effectiveness in responding to domestic violence cases.

Similarly, workplace compliance with the POSH Act remains poor, with many organizations lacking Internal Complaints Committees or failing to follow mandatory reporting procedures. Slow judicial processes, case backlogs, and limited sensitivity among officials further worsen the problem, discouraging women from seeking legal remedies. These weaknesses highlight the mismatch between strong legislative frameworks and weak enforcement mechanisms, which ultimately hinder the transformative potential of constitutional rights.

### **Lack of Legal Awareness, Accessibility Issues, and Economic Dependence**

Another major barrier to women's empowerment is the widespread lack of legal literacy. Many women are unaware of key constitutional protections (such as Article 15(3), 14, and 21) and important legislations that guarantee safety, equality, and economic rights. Limited awareness prevents them from seeking redressal or challenging discriminatory practices. Accessibility is also a critical issue—legal services and support systems are often concentrated in urban centers, leaving rural women without adequate assistance. Free legal aid services remain underutilized due to lack of outreach and awareness. Economic dependence on male family members further restricts women's autonomy, reducing their ability to initiate legal action or leave abusive environments. Women who fear financial instability often refrain from filing complaints under PWDVA or claiming property rights, despite legal protection. These overlapping challenges reveal the importance of strengthening legal literacy campaigns, expanding access to justice, and promoting economic empowerment as foundational elements for the effective realization of constitutional rights.

### **Analysis of Hypotheses**

- **Basis of Analysis:** Since this research relies entirely on qualitative secondary data, the testing of hypotheses is conducted through interpretative assessment rather than statistical procedures. The conclusions are drawn from observable patterns, documented evidence, legislative developments, and thematic evaluations derived from national surveys, reports, and scholarly literature.
- **Support for the Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>):** The thematic analysis indicates strong evidence in favour of the alternative hypothesis. Key observations include:
  - **Constitutional guarantees**, particularly Articles 14, 15, 16 and 21, have significantly influenced the development of gender-sensitive laws and policies.
  - **Women-focused legislation**, such as PWDVA (2005) and the POSH Act (2013), has enhanced awareness, encouraged reporting, and expanded avenues for legal protection.
  - **Political empowerment initiatives**, especially the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, have substantially increased women's participation in local governance and decision-making bodies.
  - **Economic empowerment** has improved through legal reforms such as the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, which provides daughters equal inheritance rights.

Overall, the evidence shows that constitutional and legal mechanisms have played a pivotal role in advancing women's empowerment in India. Improvements in rights, protections, and participation across social, economic, and political domains can be directly associated with the expansion of rights-based and gender-responsive legislation. Although the extent of empowerment is influenced by regional disparities and institutional limitations, the overall direction of change aligns with the expectations of the alternative hypothesis. Thus, based on the cumulative strength of qualitative evidence, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) is accepted—indicating a clear and positive impact of constitutional rights and legal mechanisms on women's empowerment.

### Results and Discussion

The results of the study are derived from an extensive analysis of secondary data sources including NFHS-5 (2019–21), NCRB Crime Reports (2022), PLFS (2023), government publications, scholarly literature, and statutory documents. These findings highlight the extent to which constitutional provisions and legal mechanisms in India have contributed to women's empowerment, while also revealing persistent gaps in enforcement and societal acceptance.

### Results Related to Constitutional Guarantees and Legislative Impact

- **Constitutional Provisions Provide a Strong Legal Foundation:** The results show that India's constitutional framework—especially Articles 14, 15, 16, and 21—has played a significant role in shaping gender-just policies. The inclusion of Article 15(3) allows the State to introduce protective and affirmative measures specifically for women and children. This constitutional support has enabled the enactment of several landmark legislations such as:
  - Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005
  - Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013
  - Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961
  - Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005
  - Criminal Law Amendments (2013 & 2018)
- **Positive Impact of Laws, but the Progress Is Uneven :** Analysis of NFHS-5 data reveals that awareness about legal rights has increased over time, and women's participation in education and employment has gradually improved. Reforms in property laws have contributed to greater economic autonomy, while workplace harassment legislation has created institutional obligations for employers. However, the persistence of issues such as:
  - 29.3% spousal violence (NFHS-5)
  - 91,000 cruelty cases under Section 498A (NCRB 2022)
  - 31,000 rape cases annually (NCRB 2022)
  - Only 52% workplaces with ICCs (MWCD 2023)
- **Implementation Remains the Weakest Link :** The results indicate that institutional inefficiencies—such as overburdened protection officers, lack of trained personnel, slow judicial processes, and low reporting—undermine the effectiveness of women-

centric laws. While the legal frameworks are robust, their real-world impact is limited by:

- Low awareness among women
- Financial dependence
- Stigma around reporting
- Non-compliance by institutions
- Patriarchal social norms

### Discussion of Findings

- ***Strong Laws but Weak Enforcement:***The evidence shows that India's laws are comprehensive and progressive; however, enforcement remains inconsistent. Despite strict legal penalties for violence, crimes against women remain high. Similarly, although the POSH Act mandates safe workplaces, its compliance rates are poor. This mismatch indicates that legal reforms must be accompanied by institutional strengthening.
- ***Socio-Cultural Barriers Overpower Legal Rights:***The discussion reveals that deep-rooted patriarchal norms continue to restrict women's autonomy. Even when laws exist, fear of social stigma, retaliation, or economic insecurity prevents many women from exercising their rights. This highlights the importance of social transformation alongside legal reforms.
- ***Legal Awareness and Accessibility Are Critical for Empowerment:***Women's limited awareness of their legal rights emerged as a key barrier. Without basic knowledge of constitutional protections and available remedies, women cannot effectively utilize the legal system. Furthermore, accessibility issues—such as distance to courts or legal aid centers—further restrict justice.

Therefore, legal literacy campaigns and community-level support structures are essential for bridging the gap between law and lived experience.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates that India's constitutional provisions and women-centric legal frameworks have made a substantive contribution to advancing women's empowerment. Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles, and subsequent legislation have collectively strengthened women's legal status, enhanced their access to justice, and expanded opportunities for social, economic, and political participation. The analysis of secondary data indicates that laws addressing domestic violence, workplace harassment, property rights, and sexual offences have played a significant role in promoting gender equality. Nevertheless, the full realization of these legal guarantees remains constrained by persistent socio-cultural norms, weak institutional enforcement, and limited legal awareness. While the legal framework provides a robust foundation, its impact is uneven and often diluted at the implementation level. Overall, the findings affirm that constitutional and legal mechanisms are essential drivers of women's empowerment in India, but sustained reforms and strengthened enforcement are necessary to translate legal rights into effective, lived outcomes for all women.

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