

Abuse in India: A Comprehensive Research Analysis

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ABSTRACT

India confronts a multifaceted abuse crisis affecting individuals across all demographic groups and socioeconomic strata. Current epidemiological data indicate that approximately 30% of married women experience domestic violence, more than half of children report sexual abuse, and 85% of children encounter cyberbullying. This comprehensive analysis examines abuse patterns across five primary domains: domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, workplace harassment, and digital threats. The research synthesises prevalence data, victim vulnerability factors, psychological impacts, legal frameworks, and evidence-based recommendations for systemic intervention. Regional variations demonstrate that cultural and policy interventions can significantly reduce abuse rates, suggesting preventive pathways through coordinated governmental, institutional, and community-level responses.

Keywords: *Abuse in India, Domestic Violence, Child Sexual Abuse, Workplace Harassment, Cyberbullying, Victim Support, Prevention Interventions*

Abuse represents a pervasive social crisis in contemporary India, transcending age groups, socioeconomic strata, and geographic boundaries. The National Family Health Survey (2019-2021) documented that approximately 30% of married women aged 18-49 experience domestic violence, with additional millions facing abuse in educational institutions, workplaces, public spaces, and digital environments [1] [2]. This research provides a systematic analysis of India's abuse landscape, examining prevalence patterns, perpetrator characteristics, psychological consequences, legal responses, and evidence-based recommendations for prevention.

The abuse crisis encompasses interconnected forms of victimisation: intimate partner violence within homes; systematic abuse of children in institutional and domestic settings; targeted harassment of elders; workplace sexual harassment across industries; cyberbullying targeting vulnerable populations; and systematic harassment of young women navigating educational and professional environments. Understanding these abuse forms requires integrated analysis recognising their shared risk factors, overlapping victim populations, and potential for coordinated intervention.

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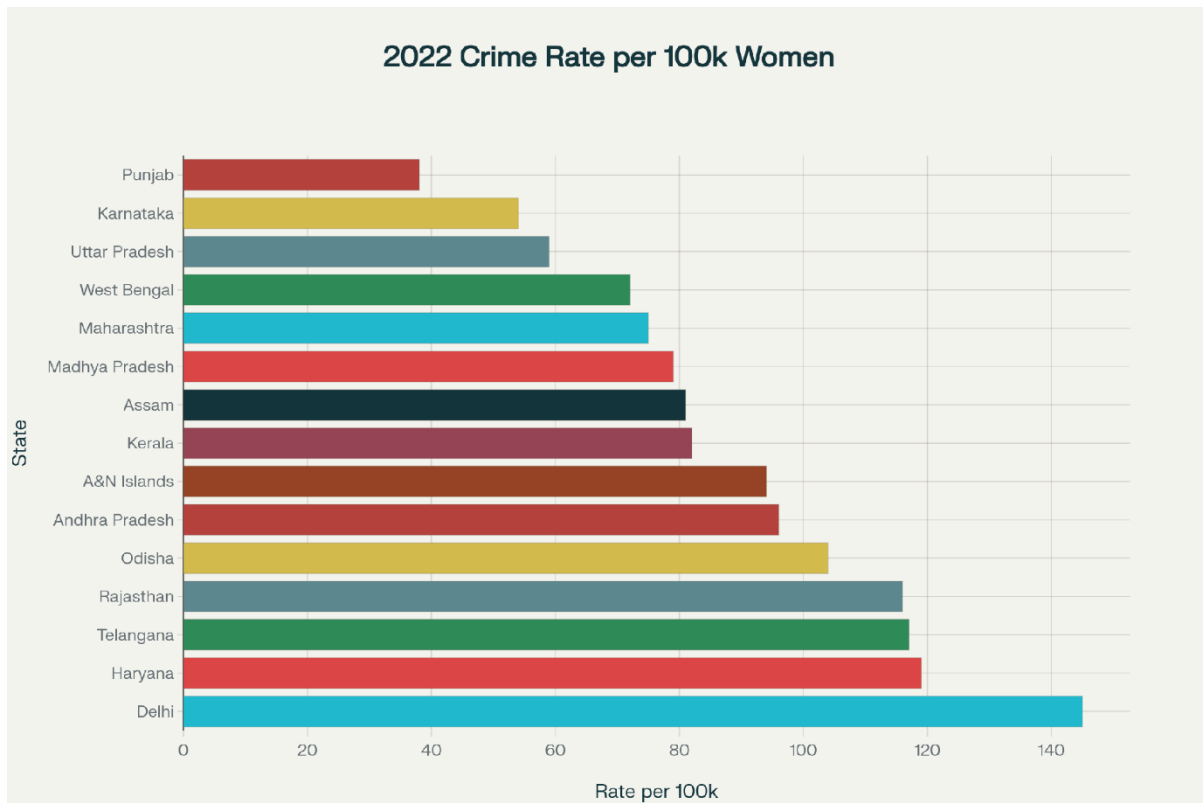
Prevalence and Epidemiology of Abuse in India

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence constitutes the most widespread form of abuse affecting Indian women. The National Family Health Survey (2019-2021) documented that 29.3% of married women between ages 18-49 have experienced domestic or sexual violence, representing millions of individuals exposed to systematic abuse within intimate relationships [1].

Physical violence dominates domestic abuse presentations, with 28.5% of women reporting physical violence. Sexual violence affects 5.7% of women, while emotional violence impacts 13.1% [3]. State-level variations reveal significant geographic disparities: Karnataka has the highest prevalence at 47.3%, followed by Bihar (42.0%) and Manipur (40.4%) [4]. Regional analysis demonstrates that Delhi records 145 cases per 100,000 women, followed by Haryana (119) and Telangana (117), while states like Nagaland report only 5 cases per 100,000 women, highlighting the influence of cultural, policy, and socioeconomic factors [2].

A critical gap exists between abuse incidence and help-seeking behaviour: 87% of married women experiencing marital violence do not seek help, indicating massive underreporting and normalisation of abuse [5]. Institutional response demonstrates similar inadequacy, with 136,000 cases registered under the Indian Penal Code Section 498A (cruelty by husband) but only 507 cases filed under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 [6].



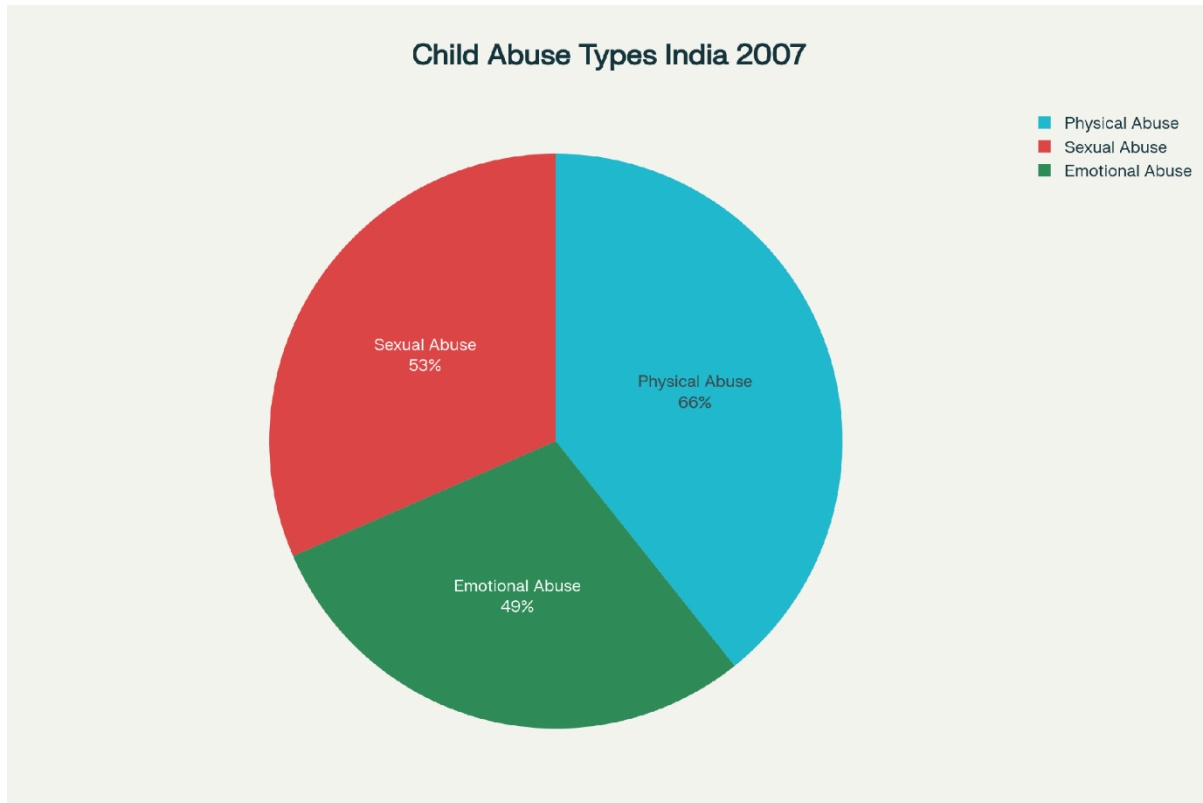
Graph 1. Crime Against Women Rates by Indian States in 2022

Child Abuse

Child abuse has reached epidemic proportions in India. The 2007 Ministry of Women and Child Development study surveying 125,000 children across 13 states revealed alarming

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prevalence: 66% of children experience physical abuse, 53% experience sexual abuse, and 49% experience emotional abuse [7][8].



Graph 2. Prevalence of Child Abuse Types in India (2007 Survey)

Gender-specific analysis challenges conventional assumptions about victim demographics. Boys constitute 52.94% of sexual abuse victims, with 57.3% of severe sexual abuse cases involving male children [9]. Sexual assault victims show similar patterns, with 54.4% being boys [10]. These findings necessitate gender-inclusive protection frameworks.

Recent trends demonstrate escalating abuse: the National Crime Records Bureau reported 162,000 child abuse incidents in 2022, representing an 8.7% increase from the previous year [11]. Sexual violence against children surged 96% from 2016 to 2022, with kidnapping and abduction constituting 46% of crimes against children [12]. Maharashtra leads in Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act cases with 8,503 cases during 2017-2019, followed by Uttar Pradesh (6,978), Madhya Pradesh (5,348), Karnataka (4,339), and Gujarat (4,228)[13].

Elder Abuse

Elder abuse, frequently overlooked in public discourse, affects 5.2% of adults aged 60 and above nationally, with 3% experiencing abuse within their households [14]. State-wise analysis reveals regional variations: Bihar demonstrates 11.6% overall prevalence with 6.79% household abuse; Karnataka shows 10.1% overall prevalence with 6.42% household abuse; and West Bengal exhibits 7.55% overall prevalence with 4.51% household abuse [15]. Verbal abuse and disrespect constitute the most common forms. Key risk factors include: living alone (increasing risk by 109%), lower education levels (increasing risk by 83%), functional limitations (increasing vulnerability by 58-96%), and chronic diseases

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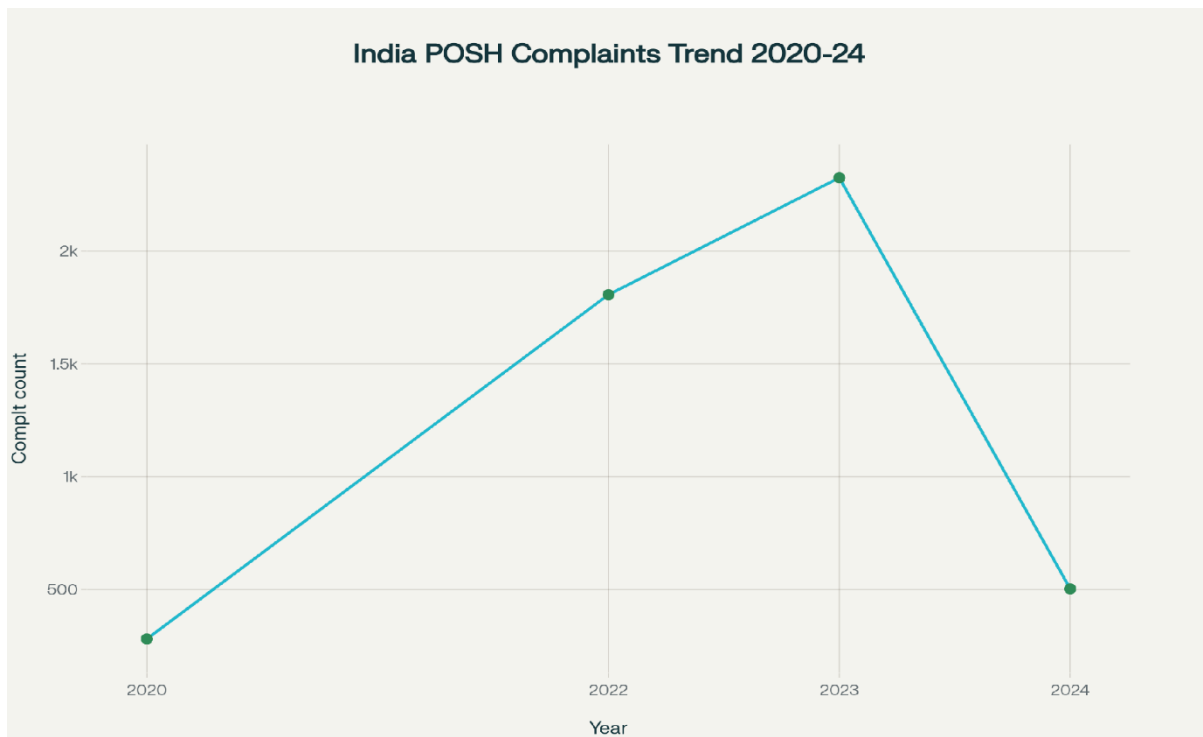
(elevating risk by 31-43%) [16]. Elder abuse victims demonstrate twice the likelihood of experiencing depressive symptoms, indicating severe mental health consequences [17].

Workplace Sexual Harassment

Workplace harassment demonstrates upward trends across corporate India. Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) complaints increased 79% in India's top 10 companies over five years, rising from 281 complaints in FY2020 to 503 in FY2024 [18]. Analysis of 700 NSE-listed companies revealed 2,325 POSH complaints in FY2023-24, representing a 29% year-over-year increase, with pending complaint resolutions increasing by 67%, indicating systemic failures [19].

The services sector demonstrates the highest vulnerability, with significant complaint rates in construction materials, metals, and mining sectors [20]. IT sector companies show substantial harassment: TCS reported 110 complaints, HCL Technologies 87, and Infosys 64 [21].

Among working women, 28.8% experience harassment, with younger women disproportionately affected [22]. Healthcare sectors show 35.2% harassment rates, while retail/sales environments reach 45% [23]. Women under 25 years comprise 37% of workplace harassment victims, indicating elevated vulnerability during early career phases [24].



Graph 3. Trend in Workplace Sexual Harassment Complaints in India (2020-2024)

Cyberbullying

India faces the world's highest cyberbullying prevalence, with 85% of children experiencing cyberbullying, according to McAfee Corporation data, compared to global averages of 17-21% [25]. Cyberbullying manifestations include: 45% of children cyberbully strangers; 48% cyberbully known individuals; 42% face racist cyberbullying; 36% experience trolling; and 30% face sexual harassment and personal threats [26]. Research documents cyberbullying

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prevalence ranging from 3.3% to 60.56% across different studies, with variations attributable to methodological differences [27].

Vulnerable Populations: Young Women (Ages 16-22)

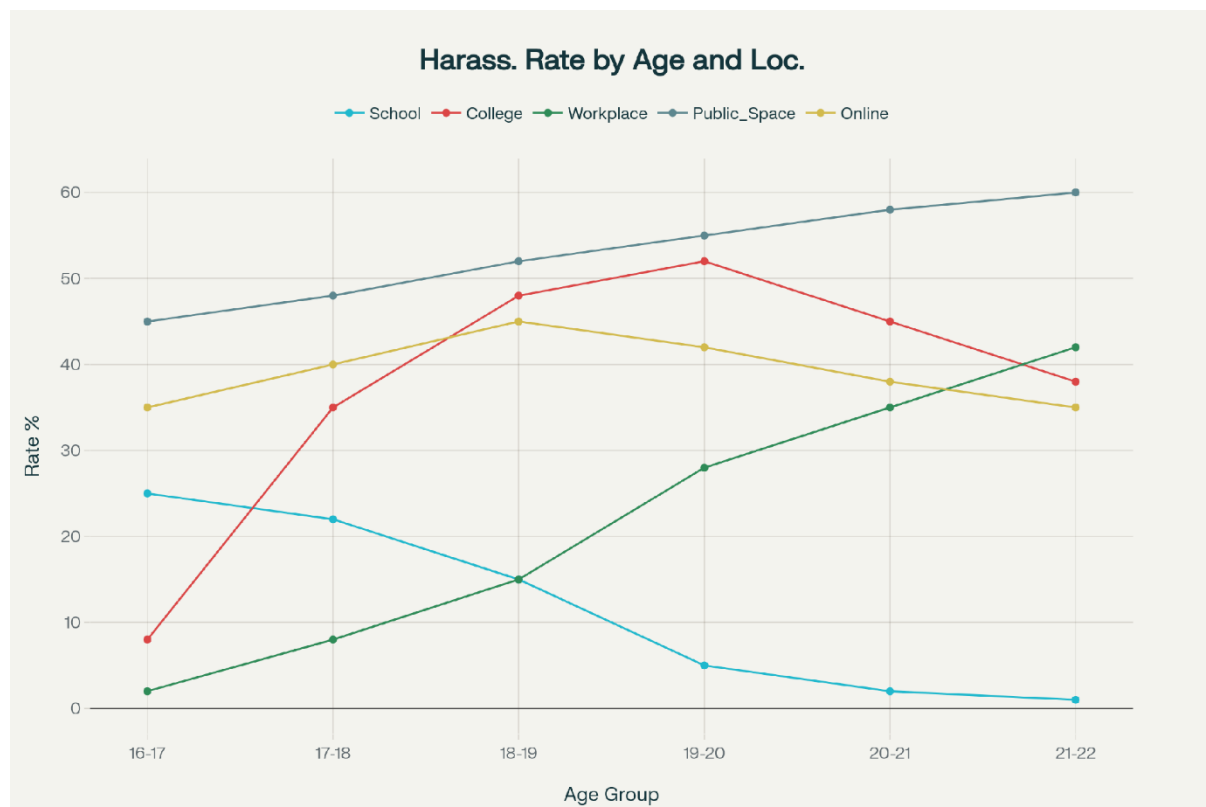
Young women transitioning through adolescence and early adulthood face systematic harassment across multiple environments. Research demonstrates distinct patterns as young women navigate educational transitions and career entry.

Age-Based Vulnerability Progression

Ages 16-17 (School Phase): School-based harassment affects 18.5% of female students, primarily through verbal harassment from male classmates and seniors [28]. Physical violence affects 6.6%, sexual violence 5.4%, and emotional violence 5.2% of adolescent girls [29]. Reporting rates remain low at 15.7%, often due to institutional indifference and fear of retaliation [30].

Ages 18-19 (College Entry Phase): College harassment peaks dramatically at 48%, representing the most dangerous educational environment [31]. A comprehensive survey of 578 college students found 48% experienced explicit sexism, including catcalling and inappropriate touching, with 10% reporting sexual assault by institutional members (87.71% by students; 12.28% by faculty) [32]. Only 15.7% filed formal complaints [33]. **Ages 19-20 (Peak Vulnerability Phase):** This period represents maximum vulnerability, with college harassment reaching 52% and workplace harassment climbing to 28% [34]. Young women experience the most severe harassment forms during this transition.

Ages 20-22 (Early Career Phase): Workplace harassment increases to 42% as young women enter professional environments, while college harassment declines [35].



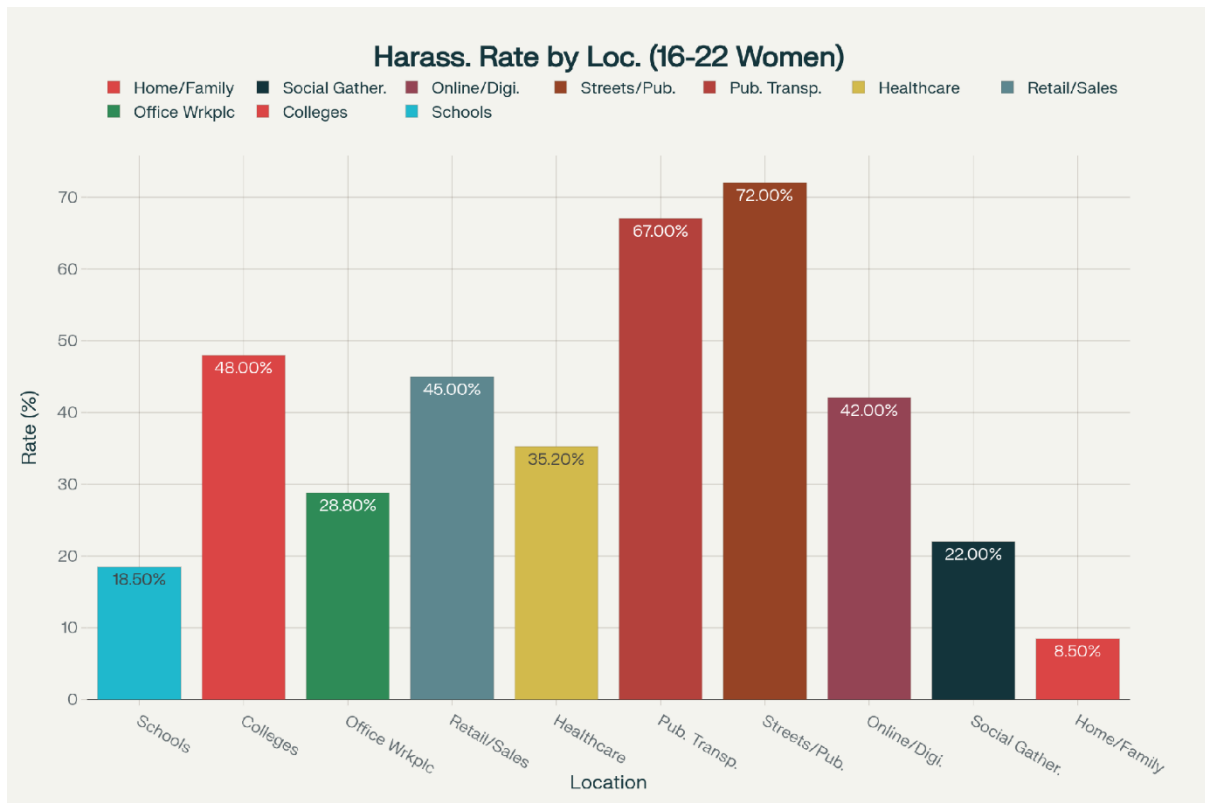
Graph 3: Age-wise Harassment Trends by Location for Women Aged 16-22

Location-Based Harassment Patterns

Public Spaces: Streets and public spaces present the highest harassment risk at 72% for young women aged 16-22, including catcalling, following, inappropriate comments, and physical touching, predominantly by male strangers [36]. Public transportation shows 67% harassment rates, primarily involving physical contact, with reporting rates at only 5% [37]. Research from Telangana demonstrates that street harassment significantly impacts educational outcomes, with specialized women's safety units increasing girls' grade 12 completion by 37.34% [38].

Workplace Environments: Among working women, 28.8% experience harassment [39]. Healthcare sectors show 35.2% harassment rates, while retail/sales reach 45% [40]. Sales positions (80%) and nursing (45.7%) demonstrate the highest harassment rates compared to teaching (13.3%) and banking (6.1%) [41]. NSE-listed companies reported 1,160 sexual harassment complaints in FY2023, with 52.2% filing formal complaints [42].

Digital Environments: 42% of young women aged 16-22 experience online harassment, including cyberbullying, sexual messages, and digital stalking [43][44]. WhatsApp and Instagram emerge as primary harassment platforms [45].



Graph 4: Harassment Rates by Location for Women Aged 16-22 in India

Geographic Variations

High-risk cities show: Delhi (72.5% overall harassment, 55% college harassment); Kolkata (69.2% overall, 51.3% college harassment); Jaipur (67.3% overall harassment); and Mumbai (65.8% overall harassment) [46]. Lower-risk cities include Chennai (52.1% overall harassment) and Ahmedabad (48.9% overall harassment), reflecting cultural, infrastructural, and policy differences [47].

Harassment Types and Perpetrators

- **Schools:** Verbal harassment (45%), sexual harassment (12%), physical touching (18%), online harassment (25%); perpetrators are primarily male classmates and seniors [48].
- **Colleges:** Verbal harassment (38%), sexual harassment (48%), physical touching (32%), online harassment (35%); perpetrators are primarily fellow male students (87.71%) and faculty (12.28%) [49].
- **Workplaces:** Verbal harassment (67.4%), sexual harassment (35.2%), physical harassment (23.9%), financial harassment (12%); perpetrators are supervisors, male colleagues, and customers in retail/service sectors [50].
- **Public Spaces:** Verbal harassment (85%), physical touching (65%), stalking/following (45%), sexual harassment (25%); perpetrators include strangers (42.7%), acquaintances and friends (36.6%), and relatives (20.6%) [51].

Social and Economic Drivers of Abuse

Poverty and Educational Disparities

Poverty creates cyclical vulnerability to abuse. Lower socioeconomic status correlates with 39% higher domestic violence risk, while limited education increases abuse likelihood by 83% [52][53]. Key socioeconomic drivers include financial stress and economic dependence, limited access to education and employment, traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures, and social stigma preventing help-seeking [54].

Regional and Cultural Factors

Northern states consistently demonstrate higher abuse rates, with Delhi recording 80% verbal abuse usage, primarily targeting women [55]. Northeastern states average only 20% abuse rates, suggesting that cultural and social factors significantly influence abuse patterns [56]. These regional variations provide evidence that policy and cultural interventions can reduce abuse prevalence.

Psychological Consequences and Mental Health Impact

Domestic Violence Mental Health Effects

Abuse victims across all types experience severe mental health impacts. Domestic violence survivors report: 34.1% experience mental stress, 29.3% develop depression, 26.4% suffer sleep disturbances, 21.8% develop anxiety disorders, and 15.1% experience chronic headaches [57].

Suicide risk escalates dramatically: women experiencing abuse demonstrate 2.9 times higher likelihood of suicidal thoughts and 3.8 times higher suicide attempt rates [58].

Child Abuse Mental Health Effects

83.33% of child abuse victims experience psychiatric disorder symptoms, with emotional abuse demonstrating the strongest and most wide-ranging mental health impact [59]. This finding challenges current legal frameworks that prioritise physical and sexual abuse while neglecting emotional trauma.

Harassment Impact on Young Women

Young women experiencing harassment report significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances, chronic stress, academic performance decline, social withdrawal, isolation, and reduced career aspirations [60]. Educational disruption includes

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increased school dropout rates in high-harassment areas, reduced extracurricular participation, limited freedom of movement affecting educational opportunities, and career path alterations to avoid harassment-prone sectors.

Legal Frameworks and Implementation

Existing Legal Structure: India has established comprehensive legal frameworks addressing abuse:

- *Domestic Violence:* The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, provides civil remedies and protection orders [61].
- *Child Abuse:* The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 establishes specialized courts and fast-tracked procedures [62].
- *Workplace Harassment:* The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 mandates institutional prevention mechanisms [63].
- *Criminal Provisions:* Indian Penal Code Sections 498A (cruelty by husband) and 304B (dowry death) provide criminal liability [64].

Implementation Status

754 Fast Track Courts, including 404 POCSO Courts, function across 30 states, disposing of over 306,000 cases by January 2025 [65]. The government has established digital tracking portals and victim rehabilitation services[66].

Implementation Challenges

Despite comprehensive legislation, significant implementation gaps persist: delayed prosecutions due to overburdened courts, social stigma preventing complaint filing, limited awareness of legal rights and remedies, inadequate support systems for survivors, and institutional indifference and bias [67][69][68][70].

Reporting Rates Across Environments:

- Workplace: 52.2% (highest, due to POSH requirements)
- Educational institutions: 15.7-25%
- Online harassment: 18%
- Public transport: 5%
- Home/family contexts: 2% (lowest) [71]

International Comparative Context

While India demonstrates concerning abuse statistics, per capita rates remain among the world's lowest for certain crimes [72]. However, absolute numbers remain globally significant due to India's large population. Per capita rates include: rape (4.8 per 100,000 in 2021), murder (2.1 per 100,000 in 2021), and kidnapping (7.4 per 100,000 in 2021) [73].

Indian women globally experience higher domestic violence rates than the general populations in destination countries, suggesting that cultural and social factors transcend geographical boundaries [74].

Evidence-Based Recommendations

Immediate Interventions

Reporting Mechanisms:

- Expand digital complaint platforms across all abuse types
- Implement anonymous reporting systems for workplace harassment

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- Create child-friendly reporting mechanisms in schools and communities

Legal Implementation:

- Expedite court proceedings through additional fast-track courts
- Strengthen police training on sensitive case handling
- Implement mandatory reporting systems for institutional abuse

Social Factors:

- Integrate abuse awareness into educational curricula
- Launch targeted campaigns addressing cultural normalization of violence
- Strengthen economic empowerment programs for vulnerable populations

Long-Term Systemic Changes

Mental Health Integration:

- Mandate mental health support for all abuse survivors
- Train healthcare providers in trauma-informed care
- Establish specialized trauma centers in high-prevalence regions

Prevention Focus:

- Implement comprehensive prevention programs targeting root causes
- Address poverty and educational disparities systematically
- Promote gender equality and challenge traditional power structures

Data and Monitoring:

- Standardize abuse data collection across states and institutions
- Establish regular prevalence studies for accurate trend monitoring
- Create integrated databases linking different forms of abuse

Location-Specific Interventions:

- *Educational Institutions:* Mandatory gender sensitisation programs; anonymous reporting mechanisms; swift disciplinary action; regular safety audits.
- *Workplace Safety:* Stricter POSH Act implementation; mandatory supervisor training; zero-tolerance policies; mental health support for victims.
- *Public Spaces:* Increased police patrolling in high-risk areas; improved street lighting and CCTV coverage; public awareness campaigns; specialized women's safety units.
- *Digital Platforms:* Comprehensive cyberbullying laws; digital literacy programs; platform accountability; specialized cybercrime units.

CONCLUSION

Abuse in India represents a complex crisis requiring comprehensive, coordinated responses across governmental, social, and institutional levels. The epidemiological evidence demonstrates that millions face systematic victimisation across domestic, educational, workplace, public, and digital environments. This research reveals that abuse is not random distributed but concentrated among specific vulnerable populations—children, women transitioning through adolescence and early adulthood, elders, and economically disadvantaged individuals.

The data provide clear evidence of preventability through evidence-based interventions. Regional variations—where northeastern states maintain substantially lower abuse rates than

northern states—demonstrate that cultural and policy interventions significantly impact prevalence. Telangana's specialised women's safety units are increasing girls' educational completion by 37.34% exemplifying how targeted interventions address immediate safety while improving long-term life outcomes. Effective systemic response requires simultaneous attention across multiple domains: strengthening victim support services, improving legal implementation, addressing root social and economic factors, and transforming cultural attitudes normalising abuse. Without coordinated action addressing these interconnected challenges, India's abuse crisis will continue devastating millions across generations, undermining educational achievement, economic participation, psychological well-being, and social development.

The evidence presented demonstrates that India possesses the legal frameworks, institutional capacity, and evidence base necessary to substantially reduce abuse. The critical imperative is translating legislative intent into systemic implementation and cultural change, particularly through regional models demonstrating effectiveness.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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