India's Commitment to Women's Safety

Mains Syllabus: GS II - Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

Why in news?

In recent times, women are excelling across all sectors, through the legislative reforms, initiatives, and financial support by the Indian Government to empower them to the full potential.

What are the legal measures to safeguard women security?

- Government has implemented a number of crucial laws to safeguard women's physical and mental security.
- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023 -** It introduced stringent penalties for sexual offenses, including the death penalty for the rape of girls below 18 years of age.
- It *increased minimum sentences* for rape and *expanded the definition of sexual offenses*.
- Harassment related to dowry is also punishable under laws like the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).
- **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012** – The act safeguards children from sexual abuse and offences.
- The Act was further reviewed and amended in 2019 to introduce more stringent punishment including the death penalty for Committing sexual crimes on children.
- **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 -** In India, domestic violence is governed by the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005.
- The Act applies to women in shared households related by blood, marriage, adoption, or marriage-like relationships.

The NFHS-5 (2019-2021) report shows spousal violence among married women (18-49 years) declined from 31.2% (2015-16) to 29.3%.

- **Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 –** It penalizes giving, taking, or demanding dowry.
- Authorities such as Dowry Prohibition Officers, police, and NGOs handle complaints, and awareness programs aim to discourage dowry practices.

If a woman dies under unnatural circumstances within seven years of marriage due to dowry harassment, it is considered dowry death, with severe legal consequences.

- **Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956** – Th is Act focuses on preventing human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of individuals for commercial purposes.
- It provides support by rescue and rehabilitation of victims and prescribes penalties for those involved in trafficking offenses, aiming to combat organized exploitation.
- **Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 -** The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 (PCMA) was enacted to prevent child marriages and punish those involved.
- Section 16 of the act empowers State Governments to appoint Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) to enforce the Act.
- CMPOs work to prevent child marriages, collect evidence for prosecution, counsel communities, raise awareness, and sensitize the public on its harmful effects.
- **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act, 2013 –** It mandates employers to create an Internal Committee (IC) in workplaces with over 10 employees.
- For smaller organizations or cases against employers' government sets up Local Committees (LCs).

What are the Government Initiatives for Women Safety?

- **Nirbhaya Fund** – Government has set up a dedicated fund which can be utilized for projects specifically designed to improve the safety and security of women.
- **Launched on** - December 2012
- It is a *non-lapsable corpus fund.*
- **Administered by** – Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance.
- **Review and monitored by** – Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).
- Under the fund, a total amount of Rs 7712.85 crore has been allocated up to the financial year 2024-25, with Rs 5846.08 crore utilised which is nearly *76% of the total allocation*

Schemes funded under Nirbhaya fund	
Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD).	**One Stop Centres (OSCs)**
	• Launched on 2018 • It provides *integrated support to women* affected by violence. • These centres offer medical assistance, legal aid, psychological counselling, and temporary shelter.
	Women Helpline (WHL-181)
	• Launched on 2018. • It provides 24/7 emergency and support services for women facing violence in both public and private spaces. • It offers referrals to police, hospitals, legal aid, and One Stop Centres (OSC). • Sakhi Dashboard updates and regular feedback collection help track cases effectively.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).	**Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112)**
	• It is an integrated emergency service helpline (112), to handle all types of emergencies • This system unifies all existing emergency numbers, including 100 (Police), 101 (Fire), 108 (Ambulance), and 181 (Women & Child Care). • Citizens can seek help through calls, SMS, email, SOS signals, or the ERSS web portal.
	Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs)
	• To prevent and combat **human trafficking**, especially of women and children. • AHTUs work in coordination with *Interpol and border security forces for cross-border cases.*
	Women Help Desks (WHDs)
	• To create a ***women-friendly support system*** at police stations for lodging complaints. • More than 10,000 WHDs have been established nationwide.
	Cyber Forensic cum Training Labs
	• To strengthen ***cybercrime investigation capabilities*** for offenses against women. • These labs train law enforcement personnel in digital forensic techniques.
	Safe City Projects
	• Aims to create a safe, secure and empowering environment for women in public places. • To enable them to pursue all opportunities without the threat of gender-based violence and/or harassment. • Implemented in 8 major cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and Lucknow.
	Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF)
	• To provide ***financial assistance*** to survivors of rape, acid attacks, human trafficking, and other crimes. • Compensation ranges from Rs1 lakh to Rs10 lakh, depending on the severity of the case.
Ministry of Law and Justice	**Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs)**
	• ***To speed up the trial process in cases of rape and sexual offenses*** against women and children. • They were set from 2019 under Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. • 1,023 FTSCs have been set up across India under the Nirbhaya Fund.
Ministry of Road Transport and Highways & Ministry of Railways.	**Rail and Road Transport Safety Initiatives**
	• To improve ***women's safety in public transport*** through surveillance and emergency response systems. • ***CCTV cameras, panic buttons, and GPS tracking*** are being installed in buses and trains.



- **SHe-Box Portal –** Launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development.
- To provide a single–window platform for women to register workplace sexual harassment complaints.
- It is accessible to all women, regardless of their work sector (organized/unorganized, public/private).
- **Mission Shakti** – It is an integrated women empowerment programme for the safety, security and empowerment of women for implementation.
- It is launched during the 15th Finance Commission period 202l-22 to 2025-26.
- It has two sub-schemes - 'Sambal' and 'Samarthya'.
    - **Sambal** - Safety and security of women
    - **Samarthya** - Empowerment of women
- **Investigation Tracking System for Sexual Offences** - An online analytical tool launched to monitor and track timely completion of police investigations in sexual assault cases.
- **National Database of Sexual Offenders** - Launched to identify repeat offenders and receive alerts on sex offenders.
- **Cyber Crime Reporting Portal** - This portal facilitates victims' complainants to report cybercrime complaints online.
- **Meri Saheli Initiative** - Indian Railways has launched "Meri Saheli initiative to provide safety and security to lady passengers travelling by trains.
- **Mahila Police Volunteers** – They serve as a bridge between the police and the community, assisting women in distress.

What lies ahead?

- Ensuring better utilization of the Nirbhaya Fund, and expanding One Stop Centres (OSCs) to all districts.
- Government may introduce stricter laws against online abuse and cyber harassment to ensure time-bound investigations and trials.
- Awareness campaigns to encourage reporting of crimes and reduce social stigma

Reference

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