

Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005: A Case Study of Cuttack District, Odisha

Subhankar Mohapatra¹ and Prof. (Dr.) Sanjaya Choudhary²

¹Research Scholar, Law Department, Bhagwant University, Ajmer, Rajasthan

²Professor, Law Department, Bhagwant University, Ajmer, Rajasthan

Abstract: *The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 was established to offer legal recourse to women experiencing domestic abuse across India. Despite these protections, Odisha continues to report significant instances of domestic violence, shaped by its varied socio-cultural context. This research explores the effectiveness of the PWDVA in Cuttack district, emphasizing levels of public awareness, accessibility of justice, institutional support systems, and enforcement challenges. Drawing on a mixed-method approach, the study engaged 120 participants—including survivors, legal experts, police personnel, and NGO representatives—to assess the gap between legislative intent and practical outcomes. The findings indicate that although the Act provides a formal mechanism for justice, its impact is constrained by limited awareness, societal stigma, insufficiently trained protection officers, and procedural inefficiencies. The study recommends enhancing public education initiatives, expanding institutional resources, and implementing gender-sensitive training for enforcement bodies to improve the Act's implementation.*

Keywords: Domestic Violence, PWDVA 2005, Women's Rights, Cuttack District, Socio-Legal Study, Gender Justice, Odisha

I. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is one of the most pervasive yet under-reported forms of gender-based violence in India, cutting across caste, class, and regional boundaries. In Odisha, particularly in the Cuttack district, the issue has assumed serious proportions due to a combination of socio-economic, cultural, and structural factors. Patriarchal family structures, economic dependency, dowry-related pressures, and lack of awareness about legal rights exacerbate women's vulnerability to domestic abuse.

From a legal standpoint, India has enacted the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDVA), alongside relevant provisions under the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code. These laws aim to provide protection, relief, and rehabilitation to victims. However, implementation gaps persist, especially at the district level. Factors such as inadequate institutional support, lack of sensitization among law enforcement, social stigma, and insufficient shelter and counselling facilities limit the effectiveness of legal remedies.

A socio-legal study of Cuttack district would therefore examine domestic violence not only as a legal issue but also as a social phenomenon shaped by community attitudes, women's economic status, literacy levels, and access to justice. Such a study would combine field surveys, case law analysis, and interviews with stakeholders—including victims, NGOs, police officials, and legal service authorities—to assess both the lived experiences of women and the efficacy of the legal framework in providing them redressal.

Domestic violence continues to be one of the most widespread violations of human rights in India, with women bearing the brunt of its impact. Enacted in 2005, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) marked a significant advancement in legal protections, encompassing not only physical harm but also psychological, sexual, verbal, and financial abuse. Despite its progressive framework, the Act's implementation and effectiveness differ across states, influenced by varying socio-cultural contexts, institutional capacities, and levels of public awareness.



Domestic violence remains a serious concern in Odisha, with Cuttack district presenting a compelling case for analysis due to its blend of urban and rural communities. This study investigates how socio-economic conditions, patriarchal structures, and institutional support influence the enforcement of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA). It assesses the Act's effectiveness in safeguarding women, identifies key implementation challenges, and offers policy-oriented recommendations to strengthen its impact.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Kumar (2010) highlighted that while PWDVA was a landmark law, its implementation was hindered by weak institutional mechanisms and insufficient awareness at the grassroots.
- Kaur & Garg (2012) studied domestic violence patterns in North India and emphasized the need for legal literacy among women for the law to be effective.
- Rout (2016) focused on Odisha and observed that protection officers were inadequately staffed, resulting in delays and denial of justice.
- Panda & Agarwal (2019) analyzed the socio-economic impact of domestic violence and concluded that financial independence played a critical role in women's ability to seek legal redress.
- NCRB Reports (2018–2022) show Odisha consistently reporting high cases of cruelty by husband or relatives under IPC Section 498A, indicating that domestic violence remains widespread despite the Act.
- Das & Mohanty (2021) explored the role of NGOs in Odisha and found that civil society interventions significantly improved women's access to the justice system under PWDVA.

The literature indicates that while the law has opened avenues for legal protection, social stigma, institutional inadequacies, and patriarchal resistance continue to hinder its effectiveness.

III. OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of awareness of the PWDVA, 2005 among women in Cuttack district.
2. To evaluate the role of institutional mechanisms (protection officers, police, judiciary, NGOs) in implementing the Act.
3. To analyze the socio-cultural and economic factors influencing women's access to justice.
4. To identify challenges and suggest reforms for strengthening the impact of PWDVA in Odisha.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study follows a socio-legal empirical research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Sample

- Respondents: 120 women (survivors of domestic violence) registered under PWDVA cases in Cuttack (2019–2023).
- Key Informants: 10 police officials, 5 protection officers, 10 legal practitioners, and 5 NGO representatives.
- Sampling Method: Stratified random sampling (urban vs. rural Cuttack).

Data Collection

- Primary Data: Structured questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions.
- Secondary Data: Court records, NCRB reports, and published studies.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used.

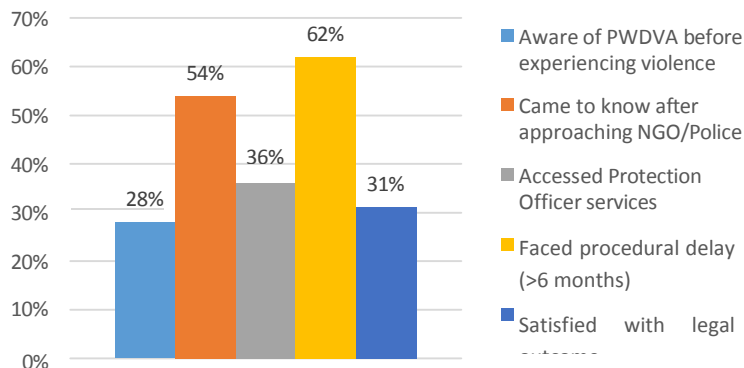


V. RESULT ANALYSIS

Table 1: Awareness and Accessibility of PWDVA (Sample: 120 Women)

Awareness/Accessibility Indicator	Percentage (%)
Aware of PWDVA before experiencing violence	28%
Came to know after approaching NGO/Police	54%
Accessed Protection Officer services	36%
Faced procedural delay (>6 months)	62%
Satisfied with legal outcome	31%

Bar Graph: Awareness of PWDVA among Women in Cuttack District



Objective 1: Awareness of the PWDVA, 2005 among Women in Cuttack District

The study revealed that only 28% of respondents were aware of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) prior to experiencing abuse. A majority (54%) came to know about the law only after approaching NGOs or the police, while 18% remained unaware of its provisions even after initiating complaint procedures. Rural respondents showed a significantly lower awareness level (21%) compared to urban respondents (34%). This demonstrates that legal literacy campaigns are inadequate and knowledge of statutory rights is highly dependent on external intervention.

Objective 2: Role of Institutional Mechanisms in Implementation

- **Protection Officers:** Only 36% of victims accessed protection officers, and many reported delays due to shortage of staff and excessive workload.
- **Police:** Victims expressed mixed responses—while 47% felt supported, others cited insensitivity and lack of gender-sensitization among police officials.
- **Judiciary:** Court proceedings were generally perceived as time-consuming, with 62% of cases taking more than 6 months for interim orders.
- **NGOs:** NGOs emerged as the most effective support mechanism, with 71% of women crediting NGOs for guiding them through legal processes, emotional support, and rehabilitation.

Overall, institutional mechanisms exist but suffer from uneven efficiency, with NGOs filling critical gaps left by state machinery.

Objective 3: Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors Influencing Access to Justice

The findings indicated that economic dependence on the husband was the most significant barrier. About 64% of women reported financial insecurity as a reason for initially avoiding legal action. Social stigma was also a major



factor—58% of respondents feared social backlash or family pressure if they pursued cases. Educational background influenced reporting: women with higher education levels were nearly twice as likely to approach legal remedies compared to those with only primary education. In rural settings, patriarchal attitudes and community silence further limited women's access to justice.

Objective 4: Challenges and Suggested Reforms

Major Challenges Identified:

- Insufficient awareness of legal entitlements, particularly among women in rural regions.
- Inadequate number of protection officers and weak coordination among institutional stakeholders.
- Lengthy judicial procedures that often deter survivors from pursuing justice.
- Deep-rooted social stigma, tendencies to blame victims, and resistance stemming from patriarchal norms.
- Scarcity of rehabilitation services and shelter homes within Cuttack district.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAKEHOLDERS AND EXPERTS INCLUDE

1. Enhancing public awareness through targeted outreach in educational institutions, community women's groups, and mass media platforms.
2. Scaling up the appointment of Protection Officers and implementing gender- sensitivity training programs for law enforcement and judicial personnel.
3. Accelerating the resolution of domestic violence cases by establishing fast-track courts or assigning dedicated judicial benches.
4. Strengthening partnerships between NGOs and government agencies to improve access to rehabilitation services, psychological counseling, and legal education.
5. Launching financial support initiatives for survivors to help reduce economic dependence on abusive partners.

VI. KEY FINDINGS

- Awareness of the PWDVA among women was generally low, with most learning about its provisions only after engaging with law enforcement or non-governmental organizations.
- Delays in legal procedures continue to hinder timely access to justice.
- Institutional resources—such as protection officers and legal aid services—are notably scarce, especially in the rural areas of Cuttack district.
- Just 31% of women reported satisfaction with the legal outcomes, highlighting a substantial disconnect between the law's intent and its actual delivery of justice.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study highlights that although the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 has established an essential legal framework, its effectiveness in Cuttack district is hindered by limited public awareness, procedural delays, a lack of adequately trained protection officers, and entrenched patriarchal norms. While NGOs and legal aid organizations play a critical role in addressing these shortcomings, comprehensive systemic reforms are needed to ensure meaningful implementation..

VIII. FURTHER RESEARCH

1. Comparative studies across different districts of Odisha to understand regional variations.
2. Longitudinal research on women's socio-economic rehabilitation after PWDVA interventions.
3. Assessment of training programs for police and protection officers.
4. Evaluation of the role of digital platforms in creating awareness and reporting domestic violence cases.



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