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ABSTRACT

The discourse on domestic violence has steadily moved from solely the realm of private family affairs into the institutional domain, through changing perceptions and the enactment and enforcement of laws. This article aims to understand how women approach institutions and how institutions perceive, translate, and respond to complaints within human rights discourses. The study analysed all cases registered in a family counselling centre in Rajasthan, India, with ten cases then randomly selected for in-depth interviews. The institutions are a catalyst of social change; however, they need to partner with specialists for medical interventions, and network with line departments more effectively to improve social resilience.

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Introduction

The right of access to justice for women is essential for good governance and gender equality. This encompasses justiciability, availability, accessibility, good-quality and accountability of justice systems. It is a tool to advance women's rights and provide remedies for victims. In India, various factors make it harder for women to access justice, including illiteracy, deprivation of liberty, geographical remoteness, stigmatisation of women fighting for their rights, inordinate delays in investigation, lengthy court proceedings, and the burden of going through the process alone (Hamby and Gray-Little 2007). In India, crime against women in 2016 was reported to have increased by 2.9% compared to 2015 (National Crime Records Bureau 2016). (National Crime Records Bureau 2016). The prevalence of domestic violence has been found to be 37.2%, with considerable variation across states in different settings (IIPS 2017). This figure is disturbing because it highlights the wide acceptance and normalcy accorded to domestic violence being an integral part of marriage; and, therefore, it is handled as a social responsibility, rather than lodged as a legal complaint (Bhatla and Rajan 2003). In addition, seeking legal justice is often very difficult because of a lack of vital support at the time of crisis. Studies report that the very act of calling the police, shelters, or social services has very serious consequences and may escalate the violence. For many years, the standard practice in most police departments has been to treat domestic violence cases as "family affairs" and not a crime (Stalans and Finn 2006). The police prefer not to be involved; rather, it is perceived that such violence is part of Indian culture. Even when women have the courage to approach external institutions, they are met with insensitive attitudes and inadequate redressal mechanisms. Despite the constitutional guarantee of justice (socio-economic and political), equality, and dignity, only a fraction of abused women seek help; a significant proportion do not receive the required care and prefer to remain voiceless (Bhatla and Rajan 2003). In such a framework, the act of reporting domestic violence and getting justice may be a struggle for women.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA 2005) was enforced across India in October 2006 (The Gazette of India 2013). The Act appears to be comprehensive, providing for the establishment of departments, family counselling centres (FCCs), helplines, training of counsellors to support the police, and facilities to enforce the law. It seems, however, that the existing programmes only reach a small percentage of the target population. While most women are not well aware of the legal system, sometimes how service providers guide them also makes a great difference. The ratio between the number of women opting for civil and criminal remedies differs from state to state. Although a number of criminal and civil justice tools exist to prevent abuse and hold perpetrators accountable for their behaviour, no single tool has been effective across all situations. Women affected by domestic violence need a range of services and support relating to their mental and physical health, and their safety, although each context presents its own specific challenges. Many studies regarding the functioning of these institutions report this as evidence of poor implementation of the law (Suneetha and Negaraj 2006). Currently, there is no comprehensive source of national data that provides quantitative and qualitative information about the types of services provided or the individuals served by the programmes.

Within the development framework of equality and gender justice, in India the FCC is a newly established institution to support abused women to move from silence to action. The FCC represents an extension of social institutions embedded within the state, converging legal and administrative functions, and therefore becoming an authority to resolve issues in society. There is a FCC situated in almost every district of India, potentially accessible by women to access possible solutions to domestic abuse. This article therefore particularly aims to understand how women approach and reach out to a FCC, the role of institutions in meeting the needs of women, and how these institutions perceive, translate, and respond to women's complaints in the realm of human rights discourses.

FCCs under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act

In recent years in India, laws have been amended and medical evidence used to provide more information on sexual abuse, but efforts towards assisting victims of domestic violence at the community level are still in their infancy. The Domestic Violence Act is an improvement over the earlier prevailing legal mechanisms as far as the roles of law-enforcement agencies are concerned. The Act creates two new offices for implementing the law – “protection officers” and “service providers”. The Act utilises a multipronged approach and works across the health, justice, and social service sectors. It not only relies on law-enforcement agencies to protect women against domestic violence, but also refers to protection officers and allows for the registration of NGOs as “*service providers for legal aid, medical examination, or shelters for women in distress*” (Raman 2009). New efforts have been made to establish FCCs at the community level to provide shelter, emotional support, crisis and healthcare interventions, and many other forms of assistance to battered women. Central to these interventions, states adopted a number of legal as well as community-based conflict resolution measures. NGO-based domestic violence services exist in a few states under the FCC scheme. Thus, domestic violence has moved from being viewed as only a social problem to having a criminal justice mandate (Fleury-Steiner et al. 2006), which addresses the issue through the passage and enforcement of criminal and civil laws (Buchbinder and Eisikovits 2004).

The rationale for establishing FCCs was to create an enabling space for abused women to approach and access the right to police protection. A FCC provides an atmosphere of sensitivity and safety for women complainants and promotes non-adversarial litigation and conciliatory solutions. FCCs are endowed with powers to deal with counselling, referral, and rehabilitative services to women suffering from domestic violence, including those affected by disputes, marital discord, or maladjustment. Unlike crime as an event for legal and police action, the FCC thinks of an abusive event in a woman's life as a social anomaly by protecting the woman's interest, preserving her social position, and preventing reoccurrence of such a crime through empowerment. Services are provided for free. The FCCs work in close collaboration with nodal departments and local authorities,

such as the police, and institutions such as short-stay homes and health centres, panchayati raj institutions, NGOs, and the Department of Social Justice. This collaborative effort aims to systematically investigate cases of domestic violence, provide guidance, help women in distress, and resolve marital conflicts through counselling and conciliation in cases of divorce and separation. When public institutions were set up as the primary site of action for women, two processes became apparent; one, a woman's efforts to continue her marriage and family with dignity; two, her actions outside the home in reaching the law and relevant institutions. The FCC helps women articulate their claims using the language of rights. Generally, every police station has set up an FCC exclusively staffed by trained women. Fleury-Steiner et al. (2006) reported that abused women who were employed were more likely to use this system, while women financially tied to their perpetrators were less likely to do so. This shifting dynamic structure generates both opportunities and constraints, but it is imperative to understand how it mediates and controls.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed method approach, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The Mahila Salah and Suraksha Kendra (MSSK), a FCC serving abused women under the NGO SAPNA, located in Alwar, Rajasthan, was selected for this study. The selection of the Rajasthan-based organisation was made based on three women's development outcome parameters: low sex ratio (Rajasthan having a sex ratio of 928 compared to the national average of 940 (Census of India 2011)); Rajasthan having a high maternal mortality ratio of 244, compared to 167 overall in India (SRS 2014), and a high prevalence of domestic violence against women (domestic violence in Rajasthan is 46.3% compare to 37.2% overall in India (IIPS 2017)) in the area. Women registered with FCC and the service providers working in the FCC were the target participants. Women participants were selected with the help of the register and records maintained by the counsellors at MSSK.

We examined the records at MSSK, which raised several questions on the role of MSSK in responding to the needs of women. After obtaining verbal consent, interviews with women focused on: (i) how can she break her silence about personal conflict?; (ii) what is the process by which she could overcome social pressure to visit MSSK?; (iii) the women's perception about the FCC; and (iv) changes brought after the intervention. Interviews with counsellors probed their understanding on MSSK's procedure for interpreting and registering conflict, the variation in demand for public action/justice among the women, and the challenges and strategies adopted by MSSK to overcome social and institutional pressure. To understand the implications of these questions, we reviewed all registered cases during 2010–15, which numbered 1,652. To obtain qualitative data, we selected ten cases randomly from the register for 2015 for in-depth interviews.

A pretested semi-structured questionnaire was used for the in-depth interviews, which were recorded in Hindi and translated into English. Where women found it difficult to interact at home, the interview was held at the FCC. With interviews conducted in the women's home, we phoned beforehand to agree on a suitable time. If on reaching a respondent's home, we found that the woman was ill or there were guests present, we excluded that case and considered another woman to complete the ten interviews. Conducting interviews at the women's homes meant that we had to manage and respond to queries from family members and neighbours. We parked our vehicle away from the home to avoid social stigma. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour.

We also conducted five interviews with counsellors and police personnel working with the MSSK over the last few years. Interviews aimed to understand the roles and responsibilities of the personnel, the gap between the process of public action, mediation of women's access, and personal interpretation of justice and institutional responses. We contextualised the case studies within their social frames of reference and in the ways in which they are interpreted into the human rights discourse.

Data analysis was conducted on 1,652 cases to observe the trend of cases registered, withdrawn, and with the police or the courts between 2010 and 2015. The data from recorded interviews were transcribed with the help of field notes. Transcripts of the interviews with women and service providers were reviewed. Latent thematic content analysis was done in the following ways. First, the data were reviewed and transcripts re-read to identify important themes. Then, the patterns, possible relationships between themes, and contradictory responses were identified. Statements in the interviews were categorised and analysed accordingly to general frequency, controversial discussion of the statement, and emotional involvement of the interview participants. Typical statements were marked and used for later citation. Analysis, interpretation, and conclusions were carefully drawn, describing the research context and the characteristics of the study participants. The study protocol was approved by the Ethical Committee, Sapna, New Delhi.

Findings

Role and response of FCC

Despite the findings of earlier studies suggesting that institutional responses to women are poor, or the refusal by the police to register cases and investigate seriously, institutional functioning has improved due to the increased role of the FCC in recent times. MSSK is located on the premises of a police station in Alwar district. MSSK provides preventive and referral services to women, helping them to negotiate, settling disputes through alternative conflict-resolution mechanisms, providing rehabilitation, medical and legal aid, psychosocial support, shelter, economic rehabilitation, and any other relief required to women who have been abused. The centre is managed by trained social workers supported by the police. A visit by the police strengthens the woman's position in her family but ruptures the family's position in society and requires an explanation from the family to community members. The police personnel working with the FCC dress in civilian clothes to help them be better accepted in society. Neighbours and relatives do not find out that the police have visited a certain house. At the same time, the family members of the abuser get sound results due to their presence. This establishes credibility within the community by helping develop a strong relationship between the survivor and the FCC. In contrast, the counsellor and social worker of MSSK are not "taboo" and have more acceptability in society, and therefore also within individual families. Women are more comfortable with the social extension of the police in the form of the MSSK centre as it gives them better social accessibility and acceptability. Many victims' stories touch social workers, both professionally and personally, which encourages them to stand firm in aiming to curb violent acts against women. The personnel advocate autonomy of power and empowerment of women; therefore, the relationship between the agency and the social structure is an important factor. MSSK, with the collaborative effort of NGOs and the police, redefines the social action expected from the police.

The best alternative options an FCC can offer are registration of a woman's complaint as a crime, and legal help in obtaining divorce, restitution of conjugal rights, judicial separation, maintenance, custody of children, and so on. A popular misconception by society and state is that the complaint is for coercive action. Women seldom complain with the intention that punishment is an expected outcome; their intention is to protect their rights and dignity with minimal social disruption. It was found that women do not want to jeopardise either their family honour (in India, family disputes are considered socially deviant behaviour and often looked down by society) or the safety of their men. At the outset, acting as a pressure group, the FCC initiates action against reported cases of abuse against women. The process aims at enabling women to seek social and economic development by ensuring both the spouses, including their families, come together for counselling. All complaints registered at the FCC go through the process of "counselling for reconciliation", conducted by FCC staff along with the police. In the first step of the procedure, the FCC registers a written complaint. The counsellor listens to the woman and calls the husband and/or the family to the FCC,

according to the complaint. The FCC investigates the case thoroughly to enable women to arrive at a solution of their choice. If the woman wishes to maintain her marriage, in cases of impending divorce, marital discord, and separation, the FCC counsellor's goal is to reconcile couples.

The FCC counsellor stated that: *"I tried to convince the husband and in-laws using soft, kind words, or making them fear the police lock up and even sometimes being harsh for reiterating to adhere to the norms."* Although the Domestic Violence Act is pro-women, it is still believed that women's integrity is judged according to the conventional notion of the "good wife". During the process of investigation for reconciliation, husbands usually agree to act upon their wife's complaints. The women go through the procedure to further reinforce and follow-up their complaint. It is only when reconciliation fails that regular proceedings such as a criminal complaint begin, which may be in cases such as extramarital affairs, alcoholism, or dowry harassment by the husband or in-laws.

Table 1 presents analysis of women's actions in the face of domestic violence before and after the FCC intervention. The results suggest that women are gaining autonomy, freedom, and rights after the FCC's intervention. Going to the FCC and lodging a complaint is most often not the woman's decision alone. It is neither purely spontaneous, nor freely made; rather, it is enforced and established in situations that have caused violent episodes for a long time. A common narrative from the counsellor was:

"When women fear to come to give written complaint, I try to motivate and counsel the women to file a written complaint, take her into confidence that the FCC will maintain confidently of the complaint. I will visit to your home as your friend so that the neighbours and relatives will not get to know about it."

The data shed light on the details of reported incidents of violence – such as nature of abuse, type of weapon used, frequency of abuse, reasons, other factors, and the perpetrator – before and after intervention by the FCC. Analysis of data from 2010 to 2015 available from MSSK reveals that 95% women reached the FCC in a psychologically traumatised condition, intending to end the conjugal relationship. But most women still chose to continue to live in the violent family and tended not to break away. The FCC counsellor reported that when victims arrive at the centre, they are in a severe physical and physiological torturous disposition. The counsellor listens attentively, giving catharsis to the women, before registering the complaint. She explains the detailed procedure of the FCC

Table 1. Women's cases received and action taken by FCC, by year.

Year	Total no. of cases received at FCC	Situation of the women before intervention, as reported by women	Situation of the women after intervention				Women's world view
			Reconciliation	Withdrawal of cases by the victim – women	Cases are with police or court	Cases carry forward to the subsequent year	
2015	314	Physical, psychological, and sexual violence; constant threats of exclusion from the family; depression; less food intake; less sleep; no attention to the children; no interest in doing household chores, etc.	126 (40.1%)	43 (13.7%)	78 (24.8%)	67 (21.3%)	At the time of reconciliation, no physical and sexual violence; using birth control pills without the consent of husband; taking decision regarding children's education; better food intake and sleep; generated interest in engaging self for economic activity to be self-reliant.
2014	390		187 (47.9%)	47 (12%)	85 (21.8%)	71 (18.2%)	
2013	280		137 (48.9%)	33 (11.8%)	46 (16.4%)	64 (22.8%)	
2012	225		108 (48%)	21 (9.3%)	43 (19.1%)	53 (23.5%)	
2011	214		109 (50.9%)	23 (10.7%)	42 (19.6%)	40 (18.7%)	
2010	229		79 (34.5%)	25 (31.6%)	72 (31.4%)	53 (23.1%)	

intervention, time taken and number of visits to the household, and measures to be adhered to by both the parties. With the consent of the women, the case is registered in the format available with the FCC. The FCC calls the couple and provides a valuable medium to engage in examining various beliefs held by them, which caused or justified their spousal interactions. The success of couple and family-oriented interventions has already been evidenced in India; such approaches are welcomed by the counsellors, particularly when violence or the threat of violence is not severe in terms of physical danger. There is an increasing trend in the number of cases received by the FCC from 2010 to 2015. Data reveal that much of the violence ceased after the first six to eight months of intervention, with a follow-up after another six months, often due to reconciliation.

FCC facilitates or promotes women's empowerment

As most women would find it difficult, time-consuming, and expensive to go through the control model of legal institutions, the FCC combines the social and legal processes to entail entitlement with empowerment. This is because the FCC is able to bridge the gap between the state and society. This acceptable model promotes empowerment principles by positioning the event with entitlements within the larger rights discourse (Figure 1). Events are considered at individual and institutional levels in the form of crimes and complaints. However, entitlements provided to the women are in terms of counselling, divorce, separation, medical aid, legal aid, and psychosocial support. The data suggest that there are two categories of women who come to the police station. The first, which comprise about 95%, approach the FCC with expectations that range from giving a sound beating to their husband or a day or two in police custody, a warning to the in-laws, or making the husband give up alcohol and promise good behaviour. They prefer judicious police threats to force men to abstain from violence. The other category of women comes to the police with a determined mindset to end the relationship.

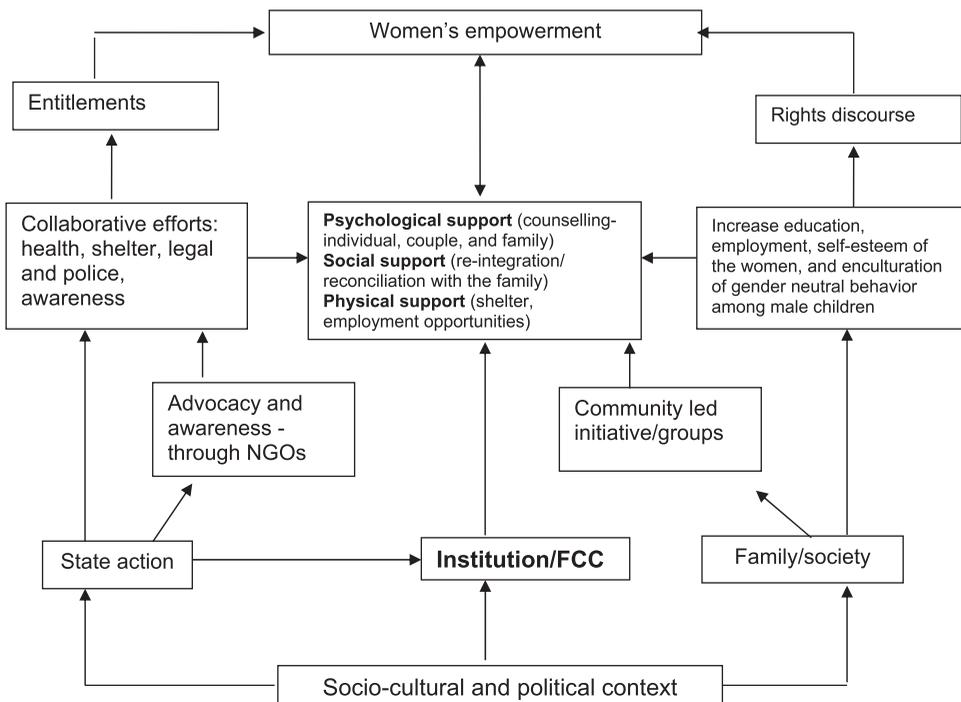


Figure 1. Perceived model of women's empowerment through self-efficiency of FCC in the management of domestic violence.

The difficulties start with the very process of writing and interpreting women's complaints into that particular institution's framework of available categories, as to whether it is a complaint or a petition. This results in "*a completely new understanding of events ... often very different from the original language and intention*" (Karlekar 1995). The content of one's claim requires narration of only the part of the story that determines the strongest aspect of the evidence. Although it has a direct entry into the institution, as required by the legal procedures, the woman's complaint has to be written as an account of the violation of rights. Other issues around the complaint, such as the difficulty in staying with the family during the procedure, or understanding the lone battle of the woman at the institution, are covered by the institutional procedure, and often go unreported, creating a gap between the institution and the woman. Although some women approach the FCC with a complaint, they wish to "reform the husband" by keeping the marriage intact, which is not in the ambit of law. However, reconciliation is the legal process to achieve the women's desired objective. The burgeoning activity at the institution indicates that women clearly wish to continue to use this institution, demonstrating the success of women's interactions.

FCCs work against a social barrier that obstructs women in approaching public institutions – especially the police and the courts. Without FCCs, independent action either by the police or courts symbolises disruption and deviation from the social norms of marriage and family in society. For a woman, suppression of pain is often easier than seeking intervention by going against social norms. Despite the awareness and urge to seek interventions, women remain silent. The primary reasons reported by women for their reluctance to visit the centre are: (i) they believe that the centre's order may not guarantee their safety and may only be a tool that makes the abuser accountable if or when he violates the order; and (ii) public humiliation and attached social stigma if the order does not work. Other reasons include cumbersome legal procedures and weak follow-up intervention once the case ends. Many women are harassed again or pursued by their abusers. The women pointed out that family rejection is especially harmful to self-esteem, because it implies a sense of personal wrongdoing on which individuals ruminate when they are pushed into silence. Because a woman bears the whole brunt of social stigma, she feels a burden of guilt, especially if the family or the community rejects her. It is important to note that social rejection can happen for two reasons: either the individual victim distances herself from society out of shame or guilt, or the community rejects the abused woman based on presumed or assigned guilt. Often children are bystanders of abusive behaviour, which excludes women and children from most reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing dialogues intended to help. They are ostracised or rejected by the family and community. Being shunned in this way often leads to strong emotional reactions such as sadness, anger, loss of personal control, and lowered self-esteem and feelings of belonging.

The case studies offer some ways to examine the effectiveness of these responses. Women only reach the FCC when the suffering becomes unbearable. They come after several years of abuse and suffering from their husbands and husbands' families. A common narrative heard from women was:

"I was 17 when I was married. My husband used to watch pornographic films and forced me to do sexual activities in similar ways. I was young and did not know about the whole procedure of sexual acts. Though it was painful to engage in unnatural sex, I was somehow dealing with it. In the meantime, I bore two daughters and the elder daughter is now 10 years old. Since we are poor, we do not have separate rooms, and we all sleep in one room. My husband still forces me to do the same things in front of my daughters, which I cannot tolerate any more. I went to my family and told my mother about it, something which I had never shared before with anyone. With the support of my [maternal] family, I dared to register a complaint against my husband so that I could get divorce." (Woman victim, interview December 2015)

The interactional framework of the superordinate and subordinate relationships of women reflects the economic, cultural, social, legal, and ideological contradictions and tensions of the broader society, united around a taken-for-granted structure of norms, rules, objects, rituals, and cultural practices including meal preparation, preferences, and child care. After the FCC's intervention, when this culturally defined interactional order is broken, the dynamics of living together produce a

simultaneous confusion in the life of a woman. The women's narratives emphasise accounts of several experiences, which they suffered throughout their lives, compelling them to exercise their rights. Abuse is more pronounced after they register the case and the FCC intervention, seen as an outcome of anger and resentment. It is important to understand how women adjust within the family.

Women were asked about their situation in the family during or after reconciliation. They reported that relations remained on even terms with the husband but were slightly strained and fractured with other family members. It appears that these women were facing so much hostility from their husbands and in-laws that their outlook towards it as "normal" was an inevitable feature of their lives. Their efforts were always to manage and minimise or to forgive such behaviour and continue to stay in the abusive relationship, as they are socialised in their belief that "marriage is eternal" and being separated from one's marital partner is stigmatised with a high sense of social and financial insecurity, especially divorce. In this situation, women prefer to live in a bad marriage than no marriage at all. This is not only due to the need for economic and social survival, but also because of the children. It is also the result of institutional responses and mediations, as discussed earlier. The women reported that during the inquiry, their integrity was judged in terms of their competency in running the household, their loyalty to the marital family, their sexual behaviour, and so on. This led to great stress, as they not only had to deal with the investigative procedures to convince the FCC about the genuineness of their complaints, but also faced embarrassment and awkwardness in every activity. In the course of reconciliation, the women had to stay with the husband's family and bear humiliation from the husband's family and immediate neighbours. But they were able to stay in the husband's family because of FCC support and maternal familial support to the women, trying to put into effect their rights. Often, the maternal family and community play a significant role in helping women seek external help. The data reveal that almost all the women had already moved to their maternal homes at the time of reporting to the FCC, which was crucial in enabling them to reach out.

We assume that women reporting and registering cases increases their bargaining power at home, as at least 10% of cases are withdrawn by women. Women reported that before the FCC intervention, their life was poor as society upheld the woman's failure to sustain the marriage, but the intervention of the FCC, as a social extension of society and state, resulted in positive effects and knowledge of women's rights being instilled in traditional society. The common narrative that women reported were the steps they had to take to come to an independent decision regarding issues such as use of contraceptives without their husband's knowledge, continuation of education of their daughters, involvement in income-generation activities, which they were previously denied. This provides some evidence of women's empowerment.

Discussion

Although social structures influence and shape family violence, FCC seeks authority in society as an extension of government with a women-centric approach to address individual male behaviour and ideological gender bias. FCC intervention reduces male dominance in the subordinate female social structure. Thus, the FCC as an agency enables the possibility of a shared location where women from varied backgrounds can speak about their experiences and create common decisions around social justice. In addition, FCCs are capable of protecting a woman's interest, preserving her social position, and preventing the reoccurrence of abuse, through empowerment. With the advent of a dedicated FCC, the public institutions of justice, the police and judiciary, may though be extending their function with a new institutional design. Women require help from the police, but any police intervention is regarded as a social anomaly and does not conform to societal expectations. Thus, the function of the police in socially represented institutions such as the FCC is critical. However, the system is yet to internalise this transformation, suggesting a gap in the public institutional ability to adopt the pace and pattern of social change. The effectiveness of this system depends upon the appropriate balancing of rights, roles, and responsibilities in accordance to societal norms (Poonacha and Pandey 2000).

These findings suggest that state responses, unlike criminal cases, require action beyond the paradigm of punishing the perpetrator or having bail applications rejected by the court, which are confrontational; rather, the desired action is that of conciliation. The women wish to see confrontation only when a conformist strategy fails to reduce violence. Conformity is to reinstate the family, while confrontation is an assumed state of separation from family. The police or judiciary can protect women from perpetrators, but traditional society permanently punctures the image of the “outspoken woman”. The institutions of justice therefore need to extend their boundaries to countering rights violations and violence.

What makes FCCs unique is the combination of police role and civilian status. FCCs fill a void in the current justice mechanism that seeks evidence and stops with the verdict; FCCs’ acceptability lies in the process, wherein the goal is socially embedded and means are legally enabled. Women complain to seek justice directed towards a verdict that restates her dignity to recover normality in her life – thus rather than divorce, reconciliation may be a desired solution. Seeking justice at the cost of turbulence in the family and society is not an ideal solution in India. The FCC counselling mechanism acts as a catharsis and a non-formal support system that is otherwise ignored in the legal system. Repeated episodes of interaction and timely access to institutional support to women expand their autonomy and rights, changing the power structure by strengthening women’s position in the family and society. The FCC is a catalyst of social change and has the additional advantage of making local communities self-reliant and capable of taking collective action to transform a position that enables domestic violence in society due to structural inequality.

Incorporation of appropriate psychotherapeutic interventions is required for spouses and the family to strengthen resilience. Improved awareness helps women in critical self-analysis and understanding the effect of domestic violence on their health. This can be used to the advantage of the victim and perpetrator within the remit of couple-based interventions. Thus, in the future, the FCC needs to partner with specialists for psychological and medical interventions for the spouse and network with line departments more effectively to improve social resilience. Additionally, at the individual level, increases in women’s education, employment, and networking of support groups available to women can be very helpful in terms of improving their well-being. Re-socialising men who have a history of abuse can also be an important policy measure to reduce domestic violence. Although research in the past decade has increased our understanding about the availability of women’s rights, further knowledge about effective interventions is needed in order to advance the field. Legal rights and policies to improve women’s empowerment need to be implemented with greater vigilance, using an appropriate design and effective management of institutions.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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