

## General Studies-2; Topic: Mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections

### Creating Safe Spaces for Women

#### 1) Introduction

- Sexual harassment in public spaces is an everyday occurrence for women and girls around the world—in urban and rural areas, in developed and developing countries.
- Five years after a gang rape in the capital, stringent laws have not proved to be a deterrent, or created safe spaces for women.
- 2018 began with the mass assault of women on New Year's eve on the streets of Bengaluru.

#### 2) Present Status

- The crime statistics released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) show that there was an increase of 12.4 per cent of rape cases reported in 2016 from 2015.
- Delhi has continued to have a major share of reported cases of rape followed by Mumbai.
- Data shows that around 95 per cent of rapes are by known persons — family members, neighbours, lovers, people in authority.
- Most cases of this type are not brought to light
- We do not have mechanisms, either preventive or curative, to cope with this reality.
- #MeToo campaign was a harsh reality check, about sexual harassment that take place in our educational institutions, at workplaces, by people in authority, by respected elders.
- We see such incidents all around and yet, remain mute spectators.
- Promises of women's safety have figured prominently in election manifestos of all political parties.

#### 3) Consequences

- It reduces women's and girls' freedom of movement.
- It reduces their ability to participate in school, work and public life.
- It limits their access to essential services and their enjoyment of cultural and recreational opportunities.
- It also negatively impacts their health and well-being.
- There is a cost to our economic participation.
- The suicide case of such victimized women is also a deadly consequence and the number of such cases is increasing day by day.

#### 4) Concerns / Challenges

- Stereotypical thinking and Patriarchal mindset is the biggest challenge
- Low confidence for women when it comes to reporting a case of sexual harassment.
- Judicial remedies or police reforms, though absolutely necessary, are mostly curative, rather than being preventive.
- For thousands of female street vendors, women employed in informal setups offer no safety net, no home drops late evenings, and no committees to tackle harassment at workplace.
- NCRB data shows that the conviction rate in rape cases dropped even though the number of cases went up
- The judge to population ratio or judge to crime ratio is very low. Paucity of judges, especially those that deal with criminal cases

- Around 36 per cent of Indian companies and 25 per cent MNCs are not compliant with the Sexual Harassment Act, 2013.
- There are no legal provisions to tackle the situation when Law enforcer becomes Law violator. Eg: Sexual and physical assault by police personnel in Chhattisgarh
- There aren't enough shelter homes for women and most of the functional homes are in a deplorable condition
- Inadequate budgetary allocations, unspent budgets and unplanned expenditure.

### 5) Way Forward

- We need to move beyond the theory of stringent punishment as a deterrent.
- The nation's collective protest in one isolated case is not going to bring in necessary changes.
- We need to address the issue at the mundane level to counter the culture of violence against women in society.
- Women's safety audits to guide urban planning
- We need support for the victim, counselling, support from police, and most importantly we need to change way the people think
- A city cannot be made safer for women unless they are made equal partners in decision-making
- Dedicated surveys must be conducted to map gender violence. The data then can help drawing up actionable plans.
- For speedy trial, we need more judges, recruited and promoted based on adherence to constitutional values like women's freedom.
- As the country talks about 'smart' cities, we also need 'inclusive cities'.
- If we don't change our mindset and the approach of our system, we cannot reduce crime against women in India.
- List of NGOs and governmental organizations dealing with women's issues should be made known to the public
- Police should be trained to be respectful and courteous to women in distress
- Safety is not a privilege to be handed out. It's our right.