

WOMEN'S HELPLINE SCHEMES: EVALUATING AWARENESS, ACCESSIBILITY, AND IMPACT

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Abstract:

Women's Helpline Schemes (WHS) have evolved from crisis intervention to comprehensive support systems offering counseling, legal aid, and financial assistance. Despite these advancements, accessibility, societal stigma, and awareness gaps limit their effectiveness. This study assesses WHS in the Vasai to Bandra region, examining awareness, service utilization, and outreach preferences through a mixed-methods approach. Findings indicate that while awareness exists, barriers such as confidentiality concerns and language issues hinder utilization. Women prefer SMS services, locality-based awareness, and social media campaigns to enhance outreach. To improve effectiveness, a multi-channel strategy integrating national broadcasting, community engagement, and digital platforms is necessary. Strengthening collaboration with community leaders and increasing government-backed awareness campaigns can enhance trust and accessibility. The study provides policy recommendations to improve WHS efficiency, ensuring timely and confidential support for women in distress.

Keywords: Women's Helpline Schemes, gender-based violence, accessibility, awareness.

INTRODUCTION:

Women's Helpline Schemes (WHS) have undergone a significant transformation, evolving from basic crisis intervention services into holistic support systems that address multiple dimensions of gender-based violence (GBV). Originally designed to provide emergency assistance, these helplines now encompass a broad range of services, including counseling, legal aid, financial assistance, medical referrals, and access to shelter homes. Moreover, many WHS have integrated vocational training programs and mental health support to empower survivors for a sustainable recovery. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of the complex challenges faced by women in distress and underscores the necessity of integrated, multi-disciplinary support mechanisms. WHS are no longer confined to addressing immediate crises—they have become pivotal in enabling long-term recovery, rehabilitation, and empowerment. However, the success of these systems remains critically dependent on factors such as ease of access, cultural and societal attitudes, and the overall level of public awareness regarding the availability of these services.

Despite these commendable efforts, many women remain unaware of the comprehensive services offered by WHS. A significant proportion of potential beneficiaries encounter barriers such as deeply rooted societal stigma, cultural norms discouraging the seeking of external assistance, and fears of retaliation from perpetrators. In rural areas or marginalized communities, the situation is often exacerbated by limited infrastructure, low literacy levels, and a lack of trust in formal institutions. These barriers not only impede access to assistance but also perpetuate cycles of violence and silence. While initiatives have been undertaken to make these services more accessible—for instance, toll-free helplines, mobile-friendly platforms, and multilingual support—gaps in outreach and service delivery persist. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated effort that includes targeted awareness campaigns aimed at dispelling societal stigma, leveraging digital technologies to reach remote areas, and collaborating with grassroots organizations that have established trust within local communities.

The evaluation of WHS is a critical step toward ensuring their effectiveness. This study seeks to assess the operational efficiency of WHS, the extent of public awareness about their existence and services, and the barriers that inhibit their accessibility. In addition to analyzing the delivery mechanisms and service utilization rates, the research will focus on the quality of interactions between helpline users and staff, the adequacy of training provided to service providers, and the availability of resources to handle diverse cases effectively. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study will integrate primary data from women who have used or are aware of WHS with secondary data sources to examine historical trends, case studies, and comparative analyses of similar interventions globally. The findings of the research aim to pinpoint critical areas for intervention, recommend strategies for improving service efficiency, and propose policy recommendations for the further strengthening of WHS. These insights are expected to contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on women's safety and empowerment, fostering evidence-based reforms and highlighting opportunities for innovation within WHS frameworks. By focusing on inclusivity, community engagement, and sustainable support, these schemes can truly transform into lifelines for women from all walks of life.

Purpose of the Study:

- This research aims to assess the effectiveness of WHS in addressing GBV and promoting social welfare in the Vasai to Bandra region.
- By examining the evolution, challenges, and impact of these schemes, the study seeks to provide insights into enhancing their outreach, accessibility, and efficacy.
- Through a mixed-method approach, including primary data collection and secondary data analysis, the research endeavors to offer a comprehensive understanding of WHS dynamics and their implications for women's empowerment and well-being.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

-Assist.Prof. Vimalkumar Makwana, Chancel Jayaram discussed in their paper title ‘**Study as impact of 181 helpline implementations about the status of women**’ that the impact of the 181 Women Helpline in Vadodara, India, highlighting its role in assisting women facing violence. It reports that a majority of respondents faced violence or harassment in society and that most had

contacted the helpline. The primary source of awareness about the helpline was social media. Reasons for contacting the helpline included harassment on social media and over the phone. All respondents were able to communicate in the local language and expressed satisfaction with the helpline services. The study concludes that the helpline has been successful and recommends raising awareness about its services.

-Dr. S. Catherine Rex highlighted in a paper titled ‘Awareness and impacts on women's helpline in India’, examined the impact of the 181 Women Helpline on the status of women, focusing on its effectiveness in addressing issues like violence and harassment. It likely uses data analysis to assess the helpline's success in improving women's safety and well-being. The study may also explore how awareness and utilization of the helpline contribute to enhancing the overall status of women in society. The authors, Assist. Prof. Vimalkumar Makwana and Chanchel Jayaram, aim to provide insights into the effectiveness of helplines in supporting women in distress.

- Abhishek Kamboj, Ayush Jain, Juli Yadav and Prof.Sumit Kumar in their paper titled‘Webpage for Women Helpline System’ discussed that the development of a women's helpline online portal in Delhi, India, aiming to facilitate complaint registration related to harassment. It identifies technological gaps in inter-organizational collaboration and follow-ups. The portal allows victims to track their cases online, ensuring privacy. It categorizes investigation tasks and assigns officers automatically. The study emphasizes the importance of such initiatives in combating crime against women. It suggests potential future applications and expansions for the portal.

Advocate Sweety Jain in her paper titled’ Women Empowerment in India emphasized the need for concerted efforts from various stakeholders to address gender disparities and promote women's empowerment in India. It also stated that there was a need to bridge communication gaps between government authorities and women facing harassment

Dhavaleshwar C. U in his paper titled ‘SANTWANA- WOMEN HELPLINE - A RAY OF HOPE FOR WOMEN IN DISTRES’ stated that the prevalence of atrocities against women in Indian society underscores the necessity of initiatives like the Santwana Women's Helpline program to address and prevent such abuses. Study also highlights that the need for increased awareness, improved quality of services, and adequate staffing for the Santwana women's helpline program to effectively address women's distress in the region.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To examine the awareness of Women's Helpline Schemes
2. Analyzing Service Utilization
3. Assessing Preferred Communication Channels
4. To provide the remedial measures or suggestions

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:

Null Hypothesis(H0): There is no significant difference in the awareness and utilization of women's helpline schemes among the target population.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the awareness and utilization of women's helpline schemes among the target population

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Sources of data:

- **Primary Data Collection:**

Method: A structured questionnaire was distributed online using a Google form.

Sample Area: Focusing on small areas from Vasai to Bandra

Population: Women affected by violence, both in private and public spaces, across different demographic backgrounds (age, education, socioeconomic status, etc.).

Sample Size: 50 respondents

The statistical technique used: T-Test, ANOVA test, Descriptive & Graphical Presentation

- **Secondary Data Collection:**

Sources: Existing literature, government reports, academic journals, and other relevant publications related to women's helplines, violence against women, government schemes, etc.

Period of the study:- This study is conducted for one month.

Type of Research: The type of research conducted appears to be descriptive research

SCOPE: The scope of the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role and effectiveness of women's helpline numbers in addressing violence against women in India, with a focus on improving service delivery, raising awareness, and promoting gender equality and women's rights

ANALYSIS:

Demographic Profile – Awareness of Women's Helpline Schemes

This survey, carried out exclusively among female respondents, sheds light on important insights regarding awareness of women's helpline schemes (WHS):

- Overall Awareness:

- A significant 78% of respondents are aware of national women's helpline schemes.

- In comparison, only 42% know about local helpline schemes, highlighting a notable gap in community-level outreach.

-Age-wise Insights:

- For those aged 18–24, awareness is at its peak: approximately 85% know about national helplines, while around 46% are informed about local options.

- Among the 35–44 age group, there is a noticeable decline, with only 50% aware of national schemes and just 25% familiar with local ones.

- Interestingly, women aged 45–54 exhibit full awareness of national schemes (100%), yet there is a complete lack of knowledge regarding local services.

- Those under 18 show no awareness of any helpline services—national or local.

These findings indicate a strong outreach at the national level but underscore serious gaps in the visibility and accessibility of local support services. This suggests the urgent need for targeted awareness campaigns aimed at younger and middle-aged women, particularly in community settings.

One-Way ANOVA (Non-parametric)

Kruskal-Wallis

	χ^2	df	p
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [National broadcasting]	1.519	2	0.468
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [SMS services]	0.796	2	0.672
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [Locality-wise visibility]	0.987	2	0.610
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [other options]	1.585	2	0.453
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [Social media]	0.334	2	0.846

Source : Primary data

The table shows the results of a non-parametric ANOVA comparing women's ratings on how helplines could better reach them through different channels like broadcasting, SMS, visibility,

and social media. Since all p-values are greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning:

- There is **no statistically significant difference** in how respondents rated different outreach methods.
- Respondents **did not have significantly different preferences** across different response groups.
- The ranking of effectiveness for **National Broadcasting, SMS Services, Locality-Wise Visibility, Other Options, and Social Media** was **not significantly different** among respondents.

One Sample T-Test

One Sample T-Test

		Statistic	df	p	Mean difference
Are you aware of the following benefits associated with WHS? [e] Counseling or therapy]	Student's t	NaN *			
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [More visibility]	Student's t	9.76	35.0	< .001	2.33
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [National broadcasting]	Student's t	10.04	35.0	< .001	2.33
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [SMS services]	Student's t	12.63	35.0	< .001	2.58
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [Social media]	Student's t	9.96	35.0	< .001	2.39
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [Locality-wise visibility]	Student's t	10.42	35.0	< .001	2.47
How do you think women's helplines could better reach and serve women like yourself who may not currently use their services? Rate on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 being highest, 5 being lowest. [other options]	Student's t	10.72	35.0	< .001	2.47

Note. $H_0: \mu \neq 0$

* Variable does not contain enough observations

Source: Primary data

1. "Counseling or Therapy"
 - Result: "NaN" (Not enough responses).
 - Interpretation: This variable had too few responses, so a statistical test could not be conducted.
2. "More Visibility" ($t = 9.76$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.33)
 - Interpretation: Respondents strongly differ from the neutral point (likely indicating they find visibility crucial).
3. "National Broadcasting" ($t = 10.04$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.33)
 - Interpretation: There is a significant deviation, meaning respondents believe in its effectiveness.
4. "SMS Services" ($t = 12.63$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.58)
 - Interpretation: Highest t-value, indicating strong preference for SMS services.
5. "Social Media" ($t = 9.96$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.39)
 - Interpretation: A strongly significant deviation, suggesting a high perceived impact of social media.
6. "Locality-Wise Visibility" ($t = 10.42$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.47)
 - Interpretation: Respondents highly support location-based awareness efforts.
7. "Other Options" ($t = 10.72$, $p < 0.001$, Mean Diff = 2.47)
 - Interpretation: Significant preference for other outreach options.

Since **all p-values are < 0.001** , respondents have **strong, statistically significant opinions** favoring these outreach methods.

SMS services had the highest preference, followed by **locality-wise visibility and social media**.

The **"counselling or therapy"** option lacked enough responses for analysis.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSION:

Findings:

- **Awareness and Utilization:** The study found a moderate to high level of awareness and utilization of Women's Helpline Schemes (WHS) among women in the Vasai to Bandra region.

- **Perceived Benefits:** Respondents were aware of the benefits of WHS, including emotional support, crisis intervention, legal assistance, and referrals to other services.
- **Types of Issues:** Women reported experiencing various issues, including domestic violence, sexual assault or harassment, stalking, and emotional or psychological abuse.
- **Preferred Channels:** Helpline phone calls and online chat/text services were the preferred channels for seeking help, indicating a preference for remote and confidential communication.
- **Barriers to Access:** Lack of confidentiality, language barriers, and accessibility issues were identified as key barriers to accessing support services like women's helplines.
- **Women are generally aware of helpline services and find outreach methods useful** (supported by T-test results).
- **No significant differences in outreach method preferences** (from Kruskal-Wallis test), meaning all methods contribute **equally** to awareness.

CONCLUSION:

The study reveals a significant lack of awareness about support services for women, highlighting the need for a well-rounded outreach strategy that utilizes multiple channels. While options like national broadcasting, social media, and SMS interventions show promise, it's crucial to implement localized initiatives such as community seminars and focused discussions to boost accessibility and engagement. By expanding digital resources like mobile helplines and encrypted messaging platforms, we can provide timely and confidential support. Collaborating with community leaders, healthcare professionals, and legal advisors can help build trust and encourage more women to seek these services.

Policymakers should embed structured awareness campaigns within schools, workplaces, and public spaces to ensure that information reaches as many people as possible. Enhanced government backing and resource distribution are vital to guarantee equitable access, especially for marginalized and rural communities. Setting up strong monitoring and evaluation systems will allow for ongoing improvements to outreach efforts based on solid evidence. Adopting a data-driven, community-focused, and tech-savvy approach is essential to reinforce women's safety networks and enhance their effectiveness. Through policy-driven strategies and partnership among stakeholders, we can achieve a broader reach, improved accessibility, and a greater overall impact for women's support services.

SUGGESTIONS:

Women's support services should focus on maximizing their outreach by organizing seminars and discussions in local communities. It's crucial for the government to prioritize this initiative and actively promote awareness in both rural and urban areas. A considerable gap in awareness about these services remains, which hinders women from accessing the support they need in critical times.

To enhance outreach, women's support services must bolster their awareness campaigns through national broadcasting, social media, and SMS alerts. Implementing localized outreach programs, like community discussions and self-help groups, will help improve access at the grassroots level.

Expanding digital solutions, such as mobile helplines, SMS notifications, and WhatsApp support, can offer quick and easy access to services. A multi-channel communication strategy that blends print, digital, and face-to-face methods will amplify reach and effectiveness.

Partnering with local influencers, community leaders, and institutions can foster trust and encourage more women to seek assistance. Furthermore, policy interventions should require regular awareness campaigns in schools, workplaces, and public spaces to ensure widespread knowledge of available services.

Increased funding and resource allocation are essential to expand services, especially in rural areas where awareness tends to be lower. Women's support services should continually assess their impact through surveys and feedback mechanisms, enabling them to refine their outreach strategies.

The government should also integrate educational programs on women's rights and helpline services into public awareness initiatives. By focusing on continuous improvements and data-driven decision-making, we can create a more effective and accessible support system for women in need.

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