

Zero FIR as a Tool for Strengthening Women's Safety in India: Judicial Approach, and Practical Challenges

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Abstract:

As we can observe in current scenario India women are mistreated, abused, harassed, raped and treated like an object. Lack of awareness about laws and guidelines is big reason behind it. It is necessary for women across the nation to have knowledge regarding law enforcement for the purpose of women safety. Zero FIR is one of the essential tool in women safety. This paper examines the effectiveness of zero FIR in reality, using various case studies. Paper mainly focuses on women related cases and how zero FIR improves procedure of heinous crime cases against women, with the intention of identifying the flaws of zero FIR and appreciating the improvement its presence has created. The study concludes that there is improvement in resolving women related crimes, yet there are so many limitations in zero FIR procedure.

Key words: Woman safety, FIR, Zero FIR, Woman harassment, Society, Judicial Approach

Introduction:

We all are aware about the crucial conditions that women have suffered. For centuries women have been treated poorly. If we go decades back, we see it in form of child marriage, female infanticide, domestic violence and repression, lack of freedom for working, dressing and in some intense cases even speaking. While in present time it is noticeable that drastic change of order has been applied but the modern women is still suffering and getting hurt by the people of society in such ways as sexual harassment, work place harassment, woman trafficking, cyber-crimes while domestic violence still lingering commendable personalities, who used think ahead of their time have taken marvellous steps even when it wasn't considered a problem in the society such as immaculate steps taken by visionary Raja Rammohan Rai, government banned Sati Pratha. Many unspoken activists and groups have helped to shape the way society perceives the role and importance of women in functional society. Government and social worker also improve the social status of woman by creating awareness for beti bachao beti padhao (save girl and educate girl). In modern times Vishakha vs state of Rajasthan is a good example of active role of judiciary in women safety which provides guidelines for sexual harassment at work place. The government has also taken many steps towards women safety for example Domestic Violence act 2005, The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961, The Equal Remuneration Act 1976, and The Immoral Traffic Act 1956, introduction of zero FIR. Where FIR means the first information report is the first written complaint given to the police about crime. Many times due to safety or other circumstances person is not able to register the complaints the police station in which jurisdiction crime was happen. In such cases Zero FIR becomes helpful, Zero FIR implies that you can lodge an FIR at any police station irrespective of jurisdiction and later shift it to relevant police station until then the number zero is given to that FIR.

Zero FIR

Zero FIR means First Information Report that can be registered at any police station, regardless of where the crime actually occurred. Normally FIR are registered at the police station which has the jurisdiction over the area where the crime is happened. But Zero FIR removes that restriction, the police station must register the complaint even if the incident happened somewhere else. After which they will transfer the case to the police station that has the correct jurisdiction. In 2013, the case of "**Lalita Kumari vs Government of Uttar Pradesh**" court rule in the favour of Lalita Kamari stating that "the police are required to register and FIR as soon as the received information about a cognizable offence. Flier to do so is considered a violation of legal and constitutional obligation and shall invite contempt". Because instead of assigning a regular FIR number, the police register with the number zero (0) and later give it a proper number when it reaches the correct police station. Zero FIR is help to file immigrate complaints it useful in cases like accident, rape, murder, kidnapping, theft, road rage etc. it protects victim rights.

The Court provided the following guidelines to be complied with strictly as under

1. When Zero FIR was first introduced it was a part of Criminal Prosier Code, 1973 (CrPC) section 154 of the Code, letter on it was change from CrPC to Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS).

2. If the information received does not disclose a cognizable offence but indicates the necessity for an inquiry, a preliminary inquiry may be conducted only to ascertain whether cognizable offence is disclosed or not.
3. If the inquiry discloses the commission of a cognizable offence, the FIR must be registered. In cases where preliminary inquiry ends in closing the complaint, a copy of the entry of such closure must be supplied to the first informant forthwith and not later than one week. It must disclose reasons in brief for closing the complaint and not proceeding further.
4. The police officer cannot avoid his duty of registering offence if cognizable offence is disclosed. Action must be taken against erring officers who do not register the FIR if information received by him discloses a cognizable offence.
5. The scope of preliminary inquiry is not to verify the veracity or otherwise of the information received but only to ascertain whether the information reveals any cognizable offence.
6. As to what type and in which cases preliminary inquiry is to be conducted will depend on the facts and circumstances of each case. The category of cases in which preliminary inquiry may be made are as under:
 - a) Matrimonial disputes/ family disputes
 - b) Commercial offences
 - c) Medical negligence cases
 - d) Corruption cases
 - e) Cases where there is abnormal delay/laches in initiating criminal prosecution, for example, over 3 months delay in reporting the matter without satisfactorily explaining the reasons for delay. The aforesaid are only illustrations and not exhaustive of all conditions which may warrant preliminary inquiry.
7. While ensuring and protecting the rights of the accused and the complainant, a preliminary inquiry should be made time bound and in any case it should not exceed 7 days. The fact of such delay and the causes of it must be reflected in the General Diary entry.
8. Since the General Diary/Station Diary/Daily Diary is the record of all information received in a police station, we direct that all information relating to cognizable offences, whether resulting in registration of FIR or leading to an inquiry, must be mandatorily and meticulously reflected in the said Diary and the decision to conduct a preliminary inquiry must also be reflected, as mentioned above.

Cases Related to Zero FIR:

1. Asaram Bapu sexual assault case

A well-known case of Asaram Bapu sexual assault case, the crime happened in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, where a minor girl was allegedly assaulted by the spiritual leader. However, the victim's family filed a Zero FIR in Delhi in August, 2013 in Delhi because they were initially unsure or unable to approach the correct police station in Rajasthan. That Zero FIR was then transferred to the appropriate police station in Jodhpur, which allowed investigation and arrest proceedings to begin without unnecessary delay.

2. Manipur Violence & Atrocities Cases

In Manipur, multiple Zero FIR were registered in cases where women from ethnic communities were abducted, assaulted, paraded naked, raped, and murdered during violence. Because victims or their families couldn't immediately report to the local jurisdictional police, Zero FIRs were filed at other nearby police stations and later transferred to the correct investigation units, enabling action despite initial case filing in different police stations.

3. Rape & Pregnancy Case - Odisha/Mumbai Connection

A 15 year old girl from Odisha who was working in Mumbai was raped and became pregnant, Initial report Zero FIR was filed in Berhampur police station then it was transfer to the Mumbai police station. The accused allegedly established a relationship with the victim. With the coordination of both police station then accused was arrested in Mumbai.

4. Delhi Case — Urgent Action & Arrest

In November, 2025 Delhi Red Fort blast was reported by a woman at a police station far from the actual location of the incident. Because of the urgency, the police registered a Zero FIR and then transfer to the correct police jurisdiction station. This led to a quick arrest of the accused.

5. Dombivli-Akola Train Rape Case

A 16 year old girl was allegedly kidnapped from Dombivli and raped on a train to Akola. Zero FIR was registered by the Government Railway Police (GRP) in Akola after finding her at the railway station. The case was then transferred from Akola to the Kalyan GRP, which had jurisdiction over the starting point of the crime.

6. Thivim, Goa Case

A woman from Sawantwadi, Maharashtra, alleged a man had sex with her under the false promise of marriage in Goa. A Zero FIR was filed at Bicholim Police Station in Goa and subsequently transferred to Colvale Police which was the jurisdictional station, leading to the accused's arrest.

7. Latur HIV+ Minor Girl Case

A 16 year old girl, who is HIV positive, alleged that a staff member at a private hospital in Latur had repeatedly raped her for two years. She lodged a Zero FIR in Dharashiv, which was then transferred to the concerned

police station in Latur for investigation and immediate action.

8. Gurugram Gang Rape Case

A woman was allegedly gang raped in Neemrana, Rajasthan, after being taken there on the pretext of a job interview. She returned to Gurugram, Haryana, and the Gurugram police registered a Zero FIR under relevant sections of the Indian Penal Code, ensuring her immediate medical examination and the start of the process, before transferring the case to the police in Alwar, Rajasthan.

Practical Challenges in Zero FIR:

The FIR is registered by police officer-in-charge under section 154 CrPC in the matter related with cognizable offence and thus the registration of FIR is the first stage in bringing into motion the criminal justice system but lodging of FIR is thought to be extremely difficult exercise. Though the Indian Judiciary, from time to time, by various judgements has clearly mandated that registration of FIR is mandatory but the mind set-up and mechanism of police, till date, is like Britishers.

Police Reluctance and attitudinal barriers: A significant challenge is the on-going hesitation of some police officers to register Zero FIRs. Due to existing bureaucratic culture, a lack of sufficient training on the procedure and desire to avoid an increased workload or the complications of inter jurisdictional cases.

Lack of Public Awareness: Many citizens, especially in rural or marginalized regions, are still unaware of their right to file a Zero FIR at any police station. Due to this lack of awareness victims may still face delays trying to find the "correct" jurisdictional police station.

Procedural and Transfer Delays: Once a Zero FIR is registered, it must be promptly transferred to the police station with the appropriate jurisdiction for investigation. Sometime delays in this transfer process, or improper handling of the paperwork, can hinder the timely investigation, potentially leading to the loss or destruction of crucial evidence.

Inconsistent Implementation: The application and procedures for Zero FIRs can vary across different states and police jurisdictions due to the absence of uniformly applied Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or comprehensive procedural guidelines. This inconsistency can lead to confusion and legal ambiguities.

Infrastructure and Data Management Gaps: Many police stations, particularly outside of major cities, lack adequate digital infrastructure, internet access, and trained personnel to manage electronic records efficiently. This infrastructural deficit creates challenges in the seamless tracking, management, and transfer of Zero FIR data, especially with the move towards digital systems like e-Zero FIRs.

Potential for Misuse: There are concerns about the potential for misuse, such as filing false reports or "forum shopping". This necessitates careful verification processes, which can sometimes slow down the initial registration.

Conclusion

Zero FIR is a progressive step for women safety and access to justice. Though it is not perfect, it bridges the gap between victim and justice. Here's some suggestions for strengthens Zero FIR more awareness campaign should done specially for women in rural areas and in backward area of urban city. Police officer should be trained for such kind of situation. Women safety related cases should be prioritized and resolve as soon as possible and accountability should be maintained for such cases. Strict action should be taken against unlawful refusal of fir. To purpose of the transparency audio video records of zero fir should be maintained. As already victim suffer a lot already procedure should be handle carefully and in supportive manner.

Reference

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