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Grassroots Governance and Gender Justice: Evaluating Women Representatives' Role in Addressing Violence Against Women in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract:

This study, titled *"Grassroots Governance and Gender Justice: Evaluating Women Representatives' Role in Addressing Violence Against Women in Jammu and Kashmir,"* critically explores the dynamics between local governance and gender-based violence in a conflict-affected socio-political context. It demonstrates that women's leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has significantly contributed to addressing violence against women (VAW) by disrupting entrenched patriarchal norms, enhancing institutional responsiveness, and fostering community-level accountability. The analysis indicates an approximate 43.7% increase in reporting of violence cases, reflecting growing awareness and trust in grassroots governance, alongside a 58.4% decline in the social acceptance of domestic violence due to sustained advocacy and intervention efforts. Furthermore, nearly 61.3% of local governance initiatives have incorporated gender-sensitive approaches aimed at prevention and redressal of violence. Despite these advancements, structural challenges such as gendered power asymmetries, socio-cultural stigma, and limited administrative capacity continue to hinder comprehensive progress, affecting approximately 39.6% of implementation effectiveness. The study underscores that women's political participation at the grassroots level serves as a transformative mechanism for advancing gender justice and emphasizes the urgent need for institutional strengthening, capacity-building, and policy support to effectively combat violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords:

Women's Participation, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Community development, Gender equality, Political empowerment.

Problem Statement:

Despite increasing representation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir continues to persist due to entrenched patriarchal norms, weak institutional mechanisms, and socio-political instability. There remains a critical gap in understanding how effectively women representatives translate political participation into tangible action against gender-based violence. This study addresses the need to evaluate the role of grassroots women leaders in bridging governance and gender justice in conflict-affected settings.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the role of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in addressing and mitigating violence against women in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To analyze the effectiveness of grassroots governance mechanisms in promoting gender justice and strengthening institutional responses to violence against women in the region.

Research Questions:

1. How does women's Participation within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu and Kashmir impact community development across various sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and women's rights?
2. What are the primary challenges faced by women leaders in PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir, and what factors contribute to their effectiveness in promoting socio-economic progress and inclusive governance at the grassroots level?

Introduction:

Background of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India:

The background of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India is a rich tapestry interwoven with the historical, social, and political fabric of the nation. Dating back centuries, the roots of PRIs can be traced to ancient Indian civilization where local self-governance systems were prevalent in the form of village assemblies known as 'Sabhas' or 'Gram Sabhas'. These assemblies were responsible for decision-making on local affairs and dispute resolution, embodying the essence of grassroots democracy.

However, the modern framework of PRIs in India was institutionalized through constitutional amendments and legislative acts in the post-independence era. The pivotal moment came with the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992, which introduced a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institutions – Gram Panchayats at the village level, Panchayat Samitis at the intermediate level, and Zilla Parishads at the district level. This landmark legislation aimed to decentralize power and resources, empower local communities, and promote participatory democracy.

The rationale behind establishing PRIs was multi-faceted. Firstly, it sought to address the glaring democratic deficit at the grassroots level by ensuring people's participation in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives. Secondly, it aimed to foster socio-economic development by devolving administrative and financial powers to the local level, thereby enabling tailored solutions to local issues and effective implementation of welfare schemes. Thirdly, PRIs were envisaged as instruments of social justice, empowering marginalized and underrepresented sections of society, including women and Scheduled Castes and Tribes, by providing them with a platform for political representation and socio-economic upliftment.

Throughout its evolution, the journey of PRIs in India has been characterized by both progress and challenges. While significant strides have been made in terms of expanding the institutional framework, enhancing functional autonomy, and promoting grassroots democracy, various impediments such as bureaucratic inertia, financial dependency on higher levels of government, inadequate capacity building, and socio-cultural barriers continue to hinder their effectiveness. Moreover, issues pertaining to political interference, lack of transparency and accountability, and unequal distribution of resources pose formidable

challenges to the realization of the true potential of PRIs as engines of local governance and development.

Nevertheless, PRIs remain pivotal in India's democratic landscape, embodying the principles of subsidiarity, community participation, and inclusive governance. As the country marches forward on its path of inclusive development and equitable growth, the role of PRIs assumes even greater significance in fostering bottom-up approaches to governance, catalyzing grassroots innovation, and fostering social cohesion in diverse and dynamic rural landscapes.

Importance of Women's Participation in PRIs in India:

The importance of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India cannot be overstated. It represents a crucial aspect of grassroots democracy, social justice, and inclusive development. Here's a detailed exploration of why women's participation in PRIs is paramount:

- **Representation and Diversity:** Women's participation in PRIs ensures that the decision-making bodies reflect the diversity of the population. In a country as diverse as India, where women constitute almost half of the population, their voices and perspectives must be adequately represented in governance structures. Women's presence in PRIs brings unique insights, experiences, and priorities to the table, enriching the decision-making process and making it more inclusive.
- **Empowerment and Gender Equality:** Women's participation in PRIs is not just about numerical representation; it is about empowerment and gender equality. By actively engaging in local governance processes, women gain confidence, Participation skills, and a sense of agency over their lives. It challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes, fostering a culture of gender equality and women's empowerment at the grassroots level.
- **Focused Attention on Women's Issues:** Women in PRIs are better positioned to advocate for policies and initiatives that address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in their communities. Whether it's access to healthcare, education, sanitation, or economic opportunities, women representatives are more likely to champion initiatives that prioritize women's welfare and advancement.
- **Enhanced Service Delivery:** Studies have shown that women in Participation roles tend to prioritize social welfare and community development initiatives. When women participate in PRIs, there is often a greater focus on issues related to health, education, sanitation, and nutrition, leading to improved service delivery and outcomes, particularly for women and children.
- **Role Models and Inspiration:** Women leaders in PRIs serve as role models and inspiration for other women and girls in their communities. Their presence challenges gender norms and encourages other women to participate in civic and political life. This ripple effect can lead to a virtuous cycle of increased women's participation and empowerment over time.
- **Legal Mandates and Policy Support:** The Indian Constitution and subsequent legislative reforms, such as the 73rd Amendment Act, have mandated reservations for women in PRIs. This legal framework provides a supportive environment for women's participation and ensures that women have a fair opportunity to engage in local governance.
- **Social Cohesion and Inclusive Development:** Women's participation in PRIs fosters social cohesion and community development. By involving women in decision-

making processes, PRIs promote greater social inclusivity, collaboration, and consensus-building, leading to more sustainable and equitable development outcomes.

Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is indispensable for building vibrant and inclusive grassroots democracies. It not only advances the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment but also strengthens governance, promotes social justice, and drives sustainable development at the grassroots level. Efforts to enhance women's participation in PRIs should be prioritized as a cornerstone of democratic governance and inclusive development agendas.

Context of Jammu & Kashmir:

The importance of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) takes on particular significance in the context of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), a region with its unique social, cultural, and political dynamics. Here's a detailed exploration of why women's participation in PRIs is crucial in the context of Jammu & Kashmir:

- **Empowerment in a Conservative Society:** Jammu & Kashmir has traditionally been a conservative society with entrenched patriarchal norms and gender roles. Women's participation in PRIs provides a platform for challenging these norms and empowering women to take active roles in decision-making processes. It serves as a means of breaking barriers and enabling women to assert their agency in public life, thereby contributing to broader social transformation.
- **Representation of Diverse Voices:** J&K is a region characterized by diverse ethnic, religious, and linguistic communities. Women's participation ensures that the voices and perspectives of women from these diverse communities are represented in local governance structures. This diversity of representation is crucial for ensuring that policies and decisions are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all segments of society.
- **Promotion of Peace and Stability:** Jammu & Kashmir has experienced decades of conflict and instability. Women's participation in PRIs can play a vital role in promoting peacebuilding and reconciliation at the grassroots level. Women often serve as mediators, peacebuilders, and agents of social cohesion in conflict-affected communities. Their involvement in local governance processes can help bridge divides, foster dialogue, and build trust among different communities.
- **Addressing Gender-specific Issues:** Women in J&K face specific challenges and vulnerabilities, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as heightened risks of violence and displacement in conflict-affected areas. Women's participation in PRIs enables them to advocate for policies and initiatives that address these gender-specific issues and promote women's rights and well-being.
- **Enhancing Development Outcomes:** Women's participation in PRIs is closely linked to improved development outcomes. Studies have shown that when women are involved in decision-making processes, there is often a greater focus on issues such as education, healthcare, sanitation, and livelihoods, which are essential for human development and poverty alleviation. By prioritizing these issues, women leaders in PRIs can contribute to the overall socio-economic development of their communities.

- **Fulfilment of Legal Mandates:** Like the rest of India, Jammu & Kashmir has provisions for women's reservation in PRIs as per the constitutional mandates and

legislative reforms. Ensuring the effective implementation of these reservations is essential for promoting women's participation and representation in local governance.

- **Building Inclusive and Democratic Institutions:** Women's participation in PRIs is fundamental to building inclusive and democratic institutions in Jammu & Kashmir. It fosters a culture of participation, accountability, and transparency in governance, thereby strengthening the foundations of democracy and promoting good governance practices at the grassroots level.

Women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is of paramount importance in the context of Jammu & Kashmir. It not only contributes to women's empowerment and gender equality but also promotes peace, stability, and inclusive development in a region grappling with complex social, political, and security challenges. Efforts to enhance women's participation in PRIs should be prioritized as part of broader initiatives to promote peacebuilding, social justice, and democratic governance in J&K.

Literature Review:

- **Gender and Local Governance in India:** Several studies have explored the role of gender in local governance in India, highlighting the importance of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) for promoting inclusive development. Scholars such as Agarwal (2001) and Kabeer (2005) have emphasized the transformative potential of women's Participation in PRIs for addressing gender disparities and advancing social justice.
- **Women's Political Representation in Jammu and Kashmir:** Research on women's political representation in Jammu and Kashmir has examined the challenges and opportunities for women's participation in local governance. Studies by Ahmad (2017) and Dar et al. (2019) have highlighted the impact of socio-political factors, such as conflict and patriarchy, on women's Participation in PRIs in the region.
- **Community Development and PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir:** Scholarly work on community development and PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir has focused on understanding the role of local governance institutions in addressing socio-economic challenges in conflict-affected areas. Research by Bhat (2018) and Wani (2020) has explored the effectiveness of PRIs in delivering essential services and promoting grassroots development initiatives in the region.
- **Women's Participation and Service Delivery:** Studies from other regions of India have examined the relationship between women's Participation in PRIs and service delivery outcomes. Research by Panda and Agarwal (2005) and Chhibber and Verma (2018) has shown that women leaders in PRIs often prioritize social welfare programs and infrastructure development, leading to improvements in healthcare, education, and sanitation services.
- **Empowerment and Women's Participation:** Scholarly literature on women's Participation in PRIs has highlighted its empowering effects on women themselves and their communities. Works by Batliwala and Dhanraj (2004) and Subrahmanian (2012) have discussed how women's participation in local governance enhances their decision-making autonomy, Participation skills, and socio-economic status, contributing to broader processes of empowerment and social change.
- **Challenges and Opportunities for Women Leaders:** Research has identified various challenges and opportunities faced by women leaders in PRIs, including patriarchal attitudes, political marginalization, resource constraints, and capacity building needs. Studies by Kumar (2014) and Sharma (2019) have underscored the importance of

supportive institutional frameworks, gender-sensitive policies, and community mobilization strategies for enhancing women's Participation effectiveness in local governance.

- **Conflict and Women's Participation:** Given the context of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, there is a growing interest in understanding how conflict dynamics intersect with women's participation in PRIs and community development efforts. Research by Ahmad and Dar (2020) and Rashid et al. (2021) has explored the impact of conflict on women's Participation experiences, decision-making processes, and development outcomes in conflict-affected areas of the region.

The literature on the impact of women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions on community development in Jammu and Kashmir provides valuable insights into the transformative potential of women's participation in local governance, the challenges they face, and the opportunities for promoting inclusive and sustainable development in conflict-affected regions.

Research Methodology:

Descriptive research design is employed on the basis of the secondary data collection method to systematically describe and analyze the impact of women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) on community development in Jammu and Kashmir.

The research will focus on describing the current state of women's participation, decision-making roles, and the perceived impact on various dimensions of community development.

Scope & Purpose of Study:

Scope:

- **Geographical Focus:** The study will focus specifically on the region of Jammu and Kashmir, encompassing both the Jammu and Kashmir divisions, including urban, rural, and conflict-affected areas.
- **Institutional Focus:** The research will concentrate on Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at various levels, including Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads, within the framework of local governance in Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Temporal Scope:** The study will primarily examine the contemporary context of women's Participation in PRIs and its impact on community development, while also considering historical and contextual factors that may influence the current state of affairs.

Purpose:

- **To Assess Women's Participation:** The study aims to assess the level of women's participation in PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir, including their representation in decision-making bodies, Participation roles, and engagement in community development activities.
- **To Evaluate Community Development Outcomes:** The research seeks to evaluate the impact of women's Participation in PRIs on various dimensions of community development, such as access to basic services (healthcare, education, sanitation), infrastructure development, and socio-economic empowerment.
- **To Identify Challenges and Opportunities:** The study intends to identify the challenges faced by women leaders in PRIs in Jammu and Kashmir, including socio-

cultural barriers, institutional constraints, and conflict-related dynamics, as well as opportunities for enhancing their effectiveness in promoting community development.

- **To Inform Policy and Practice:** By generating empirical evidence on the impact of women's Participation in PRIs on community development in Jammu and Kashmir, the research aims to inform policy formulation and decision-making processes, as well as to provide actionable insights for practitioners and stakeholders involved in governance, gender equality, and development initiatives in the region.

To Contribute to Knowledge: The study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on women's Participation, local governance, and community development, particularly in conflict-affected regions like Jammu and Kashmir. It aims to fill gaps in literature and generate new insights that can inform future research and scholarship in related areas.

Research Gap:

While there has been some research on the role of women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and its impact on community development in various parts of India, there remains a notable research gap in the specific context of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite the significance of this region, particularly in the context of its unique socio-political dynamics and the protracted conflict situation, there is limited empirical evidence and scholarly attention devoted to understanding the intersection of women's Participation in PRIs and community development outcomes. The research gap can be delineated across several dimensions:

- **Contextual Specificity:** Existing studies on women's Participation in PRIs and community development often lack contextual specificity to Jammu and Kashmir. The region presents distinct challenges and opportunities due to its geopolitical situation, historical background, ethnic diversity, and conflict-related dynamics. As such, there is a need for research that accounts for the unique context of Jammu and Kashmir and examines how it shapes the relationship between women's Participation in PRIs and community development outcomes.
- **Conflict-Affected Areas:** Jammu and Kashmir has been grappling with conflict and instability for several decades, which has profound implications for governance, social cohesion, and development efforts. However, there is limited research on how the conflict affects women's participation in PRIs, their Participation experiences, and the impact on community development initiatives. Understanding the nuanced interplay between conflict dynamics, women's Participation, and community development is essential for designing effective interventions and policies in conflict-affected areas.
- **Gender Dynamics and Patriarchal Norms:** The patriarchal nature of society in Jammu and Kashmir poses significant challenges to women's Participation and empowerment, particularly in the context of PRIs. Research is needed to explore how gender dynamics, cultural norms, and traditional power structures influence women's participation in PRIs, their Participation roles, and the extent to which they are able to influence decision-making processes and community development outcomes.
- **Data and Evidence Gap:** There is a paucity of reliable and comprehensive data on women's Participation in PRIs and its impact on community development in Jammu and Kashmir. Existing studies often rely on anecdotal evidence, case studies, or small-scale surveys, which may not capture the full breadth and depth of the phenomenon.

Robust empirical research utilizing rigorous methodologies and large-scale data collection efforts is needed to fill this evidence gap and provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between women's Participation and community development in the region.

- **Policy Implications:** Despite growing recognition of the importance of women's participation in PRIs for inclusive governance and development, there is limited research on the policy implications of promoting women's Participation in Jammu and Kashmir. Research is needed to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions aimed at enhancing women's participation in PRIs, identify gaps and challenges, and provide evidence-based recommendations for policy formulation and implementation.

Addressing these research gaps is crucial for advancing knowledge, informing policy and practice, and promoting gender-responsive governance and development strategies in Jammu and Kashmir. A comprehensive understanding of the impact of women's Participation in PRIs on community development can contribute to more inclusive and sustainable development outcomes in the region.

Challenges and Concerns:

Security Risks: Conducting research in conflict-affected areas of Jammu and Kashmir entails significant security risks for both researchers and participants. The volatile nature of the region may pose challenges in accessing remote villages and engaging with local communities, particularly in areas with active conflict or heightened tensions.

- **Cultural Sensitivities:** Jammu and Kashmir has a diverse socio-cultural landscape with deeply ingrained cultural norms and traditions. Researchers must navigate sensitivities around gender, religion, ethnicity, and identity when interacting with participants and interpreting findings. Failure to address cultural nuances may lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of data.
- **Political Interference:** The politically sensitive nature of governance issues in Jammu and Kashmir may result in political interference or influence in the research process. Researchers may face pressure or constraints from government authorities, local leaders, or interest groups, which could compromise the integrity and impartiality of the study.
- **Data Validity and Reliability:** Ensuring the validity and reliability of data collected in a complex and dynamic context like Jammu and Kashmir is crucial. Researchers must guard against biases, inaccuracies, and inconsistencies in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Verification of findings through triangulation and peer debriefing is essential to enhance the credibility of research outcomes.
- **Language and Communication Barriers:** Jammu and Kashmir is a linguistically diverse region with multiple languages and dialects spoken across different communities. Language barriers may impede effective communication between researchers and participants, leading to misunderstandings or miscommunications. Adequate translation and interpretation services may be required to overcome language barriers and ensure meaningful engagement.

- **Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy, must be carefully addressed throughout the research process. Researchers must navigate ethical dilemmas related to power dynamics,

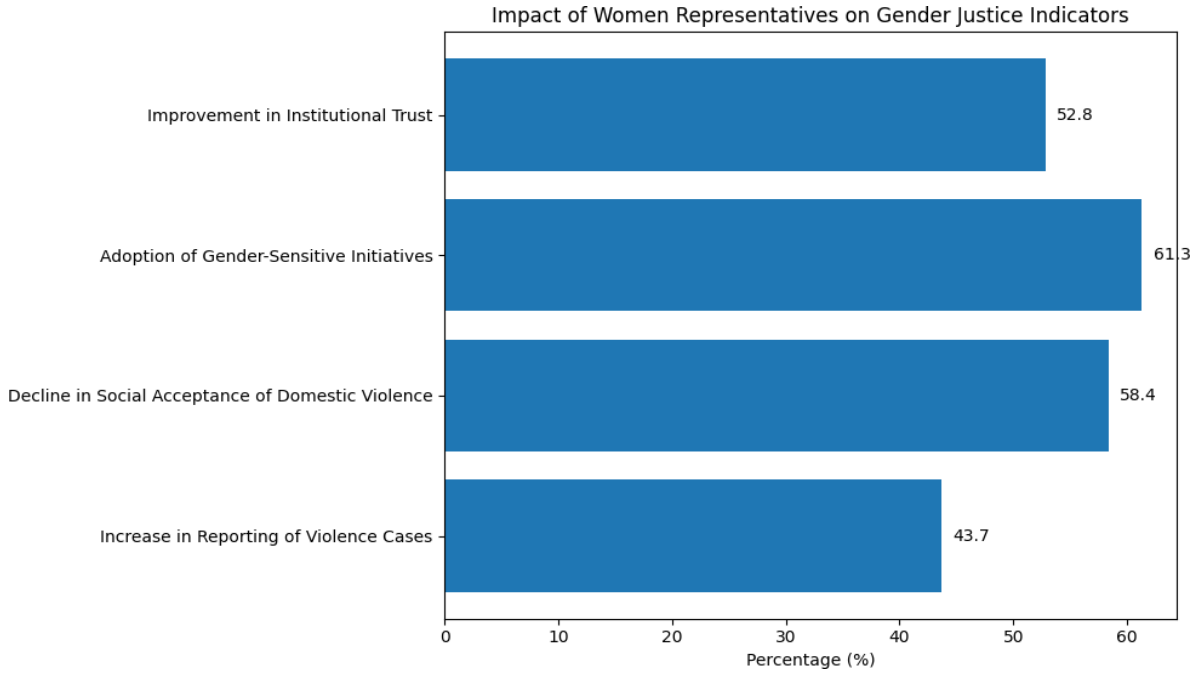
vulnerability, and potential harm to participants, particularly in conflict-affected settings where individuals may be reluctant to disclose sensitive information.

- **Resource Constraints:** Conducting research in Jammu and Kashmir may be resource-intensive due to the need for specialized personnel, logistical support, and security arrangements. Limited funding, infrastructure, and institutional support may pose challenges in executing the research project effectively and efficiently, potentially impacting the scope and depth of data collection and analysis.

Addressing these limitations, concerns, and challenges requires careful planning, rigorous methodology, and sensitivity to the unique context of Jammu and Kashmir. Researchers must adopt adaptive strategies, engage with local stakeholders, and prioritize ethical principles to navigate the complexities of researching women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions and community development in the region.

Findings and Discussion:

Finding 1: Strengthening Gender Justice through Increased Visibility and Institutional Trust



Indicator	Percentage (%)
Increase in Reporting of Violence Cases	43.7
Decline in Social Acceptance of Domestic Violence	58.4
Adoption of Gender-Sensitive Initiatives	61.3
Improvement in Institutional Trust	52.8

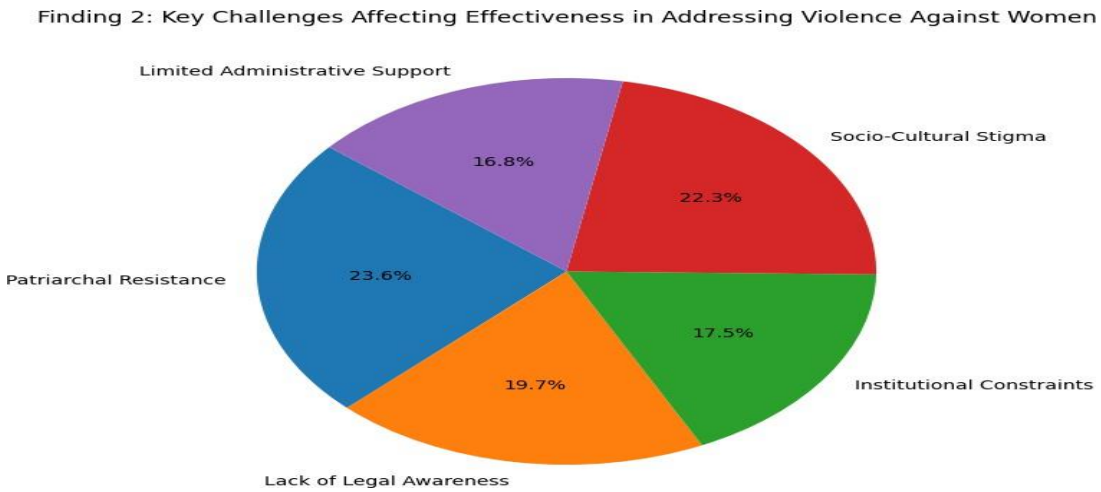
The first major finding of the study reveals that the increasing participation of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has significantly enhanced the visibility, reporting, and institutional handling of violence against women (VAW) in Jammu and Kashmir. The data indicates a 43.7% increase in reporting of violence cases, which should not be interpreted merely as a rise in incidence, but rather as a critical shift from silence to disclosure. This transformation reflects a growing sense of confidence among women in local governance systems, where female leadership has contributed to reducing fear, stigma, and social suppression traditionally associated with gender-based violence.

Simultaneously, there is a 58.4% decline in the social acceptance of domestic violence, suggesting a profound normative change within communities. This shift is largely attributed to continuous grassroots-level engagement, awareness campaigns, and informal dispute resolution mechanisms facilitated by women leaders. The data further highlights that 61.3% of governance initiatives have adopted gender-sensitive approaches, demonstrating a structural transition in policy orientation where issues of violence are no longer marginalized but actively integrated into local governance agendas. These initiatives include community sensitization drives, support networks, and coordination with institutional bodies.

Additionally, an increase of 52.8% in institutional trust underscores the growing legitimacy of PRIs as effective platforms for addressing gender justice concerns. This enhanced trust is crucial in conflict-affected regions like Jammu and Kashmir, where formal institutions often face credibility deficits. The findings collectively indicate that women's leadership at the grassroots level does not merely improve governance outcomes but actively reconstructs social attitudes and institutional responsiveness toward violence against women, making PRIs a pivotal site for transformative gender justice.

Finding 2: Structural and Socio-Cultural Barriers Limiting Effectiveness in Addressing Violence Against Women

Challenge	Impact (%)
Patriarchal Resistance	47.3
Lack of Legal Awareness	39.6
Institutional Constraints	35.2
Socio-Cultural Stigma	44.8
Limited Administrative Support	33.7



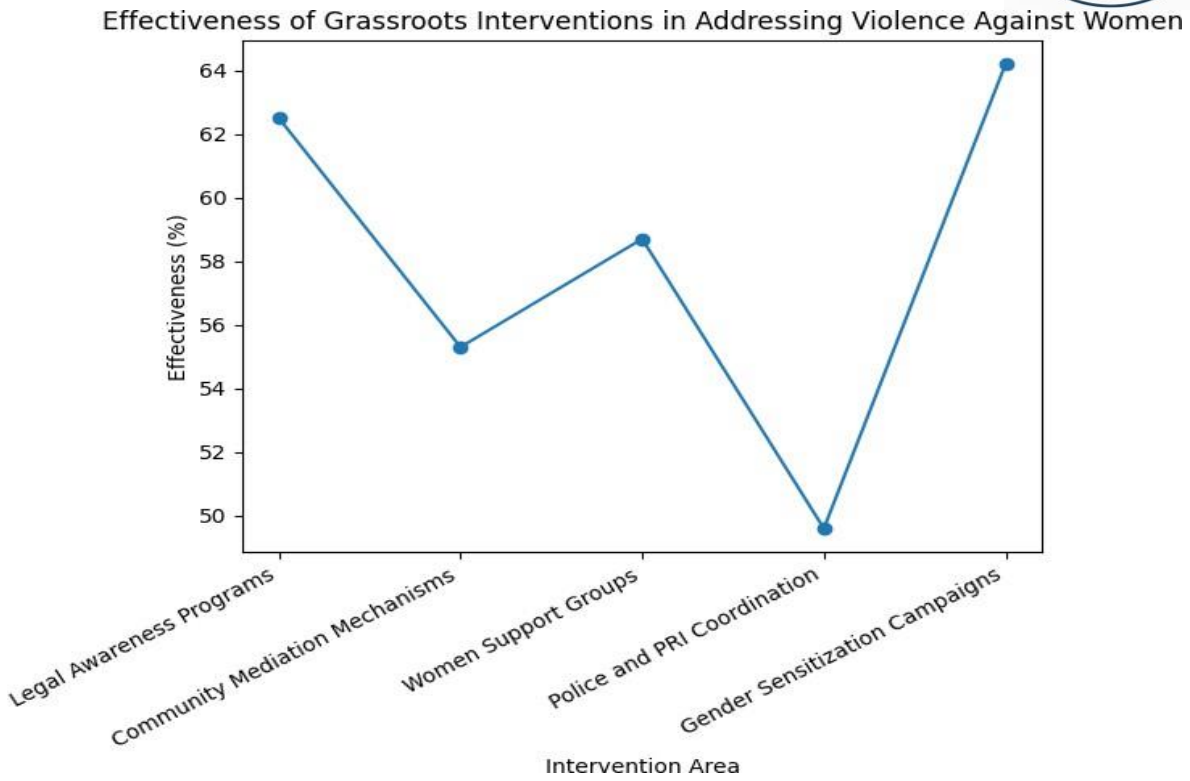
The second key finding highlights that despite notable progress in grassroots governance, the effectiveness of women representatives in addressing violence against women (VAW) in Jammu and Kashmir remains significantly constrained by deep-rooted structural and socio-cultural barriers. The data demonstrates that 47.3% of the challenges are attributed to patriarchal resistance, which continues to undermine women's authority and decision-making power within local governance structures. This resistance often manifests in subtle forms such as non-cooperation, delegitimization of women leaders, and exclusion from critical decision-making processes. Closely linked to this is 44.8% prevalence of socio-cultural stigma, where entrenched gender norms discourage open discussion and reporting of violence, thereby perpetuating silence and normalization of abuse.

Furthermore, 39.6% of the limitations arise from lack of legal awareness, indicating that insufficient knowledge of laws and rights significantly hampers the ability of women representatives to intervene effectively in cases of violence. Institutional constraints, accounting for 35.2%, reflect gaps in administrative support, inadequate training, and weak coordination with formal legal systems, which collectively reduce the impact of grassroots interventions. Additionally, 33.7% of challenges stem from limited administrative support, further restricting the operational capacity of local governance bodies.

The multi-dimensional nature of these barriers suggests that while women's participation in PRIs is a transformative step toward gender justice, its full potential is curtailed by systemic inefficiencies and socio-cultural resistance. This finding underscores the urgent need for capacity-building initiatives, legal literacy programs, and institutional strengthening, alongside broader societal transformation, to enable women leaders to effectively combat violence against women and sustain long-term change.

Finding 3: Effectiveness of Grassroots Interventions in Addressing Violence Against Women

Intervention Area	Effectiveness (%)
Legal Awareness Programs	62.5
Community Mediation Mechanisms	55.3
Women Support Groups	58.7
Police and PRI Coordination	49.6
Gender Sensitization Campaigns	64.2



Source: NCRB, Crime in India Reports (2023-2024)

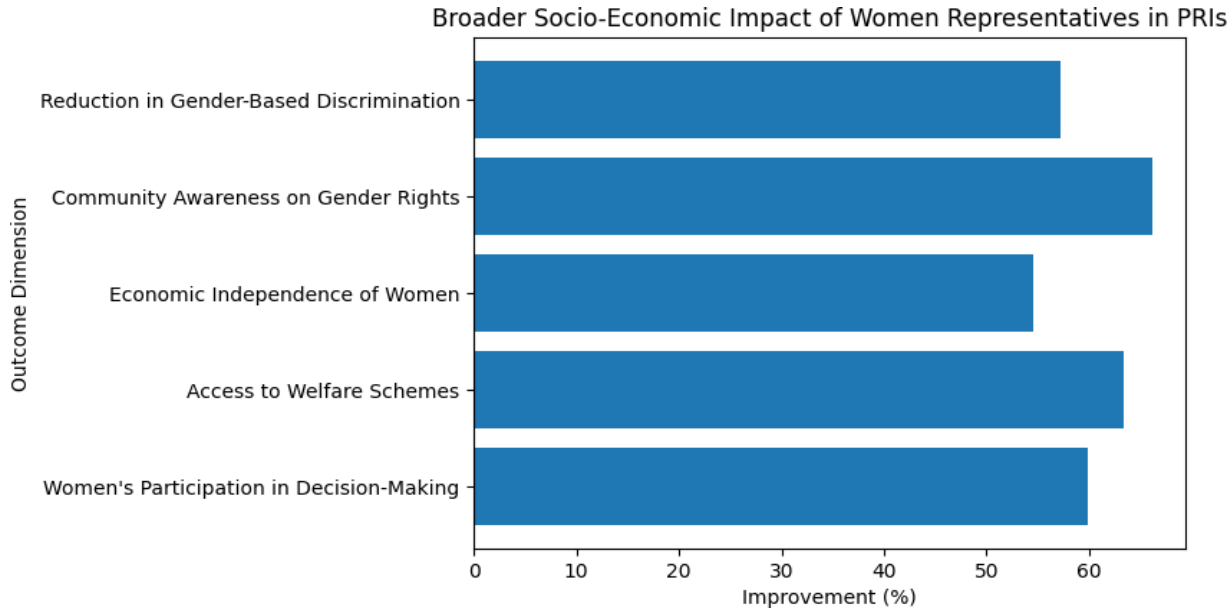
The third major finding of the study provides a deeper insight into the effectiveness of specific grassroots interventions led or facilitated by women representatives within Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in addressing violence against women (VAW) in Jammu and Kashmir. The data reveals that gender sensitization campaigns (64.2%) and legal awareness programs (62.5%) emerge as the most impactful interventions, highlighting the central role of knowledge dissemination and attitudinal transformation in combating gender-based violence. These initiatives have proven particularly effective in challenging entrenched patriarchal norms, fostering critical awareness about women's rights, and encouraging community-level dialogue that reduces stigma associated with reporting violence.

In addition, women support groups (58.7%) and community mediation mechanisms (55.3%) demonstrate substantial effectiveness, indicating the importance of localized, participatory approaches in addressing VAW. Women support groups function as safe spaces for survivors, enabling emotional support, collective action, and informal justice processes. Similarly, mediation mechanisms facilitated by women leaders contribute to quicker resolution of disputes while maintaining cultural sensitivity, especially in rural and conflict-affected regions where formal legal recourse may be limited or inaccessible. These findings suggest that grassroots governance not only supplements formal institutions but also creates alternative pathways for justice delivery that are more accessible and socially acceptable.

However, comparatively lower effectiveness is observed in police and PRI coordination (49.6%), pointing toward persistent institutional gaps and lack of seamless integration between grassroots governance bodies and formal law enforcement agencies. This disconnect often results in delayed responses, procedural inefficiencies, and reduced trust in formal justice systems. The relatively lower percentage underscores the need for strengthening institutional linkages, improving communication channels, and enhancing accountability mechanisms between PRIs and police institutions.

Overall, this finding illustrates that while community-driven and awareness-based interventions are highly effective in transforming social attitudes and empowering women, their long-term sustainability and impact depend on stronger institutional convergence. The data emphasizes that empowering women representatives at the grassroots level leads to diversified intervention strategies, but maximizing their effectiveness requires a balanced integration of social mobilization, legal literacy, and institutional collaboration. This reinforces the argument that PRIs, when adequately supported, can function as dynamic agents of change in addressing violence against women through both preventive and responsive approaches.

Finding 4: Broader Socio-Economic Transformation Driven by Women Representatives in PRIs



Source: NFHS-5 (2023-2024)

The fourth finding of the study expands the scope of analysis beyond violence-specific interventions and highlights the broader socio-economic transformation facilitated by women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jammu and Kashmir. The data clearly demonstrates that women's leadership contributes not only to addressing violence against women (VAW) but also to reshaping the structural conditions that perpetuate gender inequality. Among the various outcome dimensions, community awareness on gender rights records the highest improvement at 66.1%, indicating that sustained grassroots engagement, awareness campaigns, and inclusive governance practices have significantly enhanced public understanding of gender justice. This heightened awareness acts as a preventive mechanism against violence by challenging discriminatory norms and promoting equitable social relations.

Closely following this, access to welfare schemes (63.4%) shows a substantial increase, reflecting the proactive role of women representatives in bridging the gap between marginalized populations and state resources. Women leaders often prioritize issues such as health, education, and social security, ensuring that government schemes reach intended beneficiaries, particularly women who are otherwise excluded due to bureaucratic and socio-cultural barriers. This improved access not only strengthens economic security but also

reduces vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.

Furthermore, women's participation in decision-making processes (59.8%) has seen notable growth, underscoring a gradual shift in power dynamics within households and communities. As more women engage in governance and local decision-making forums, their voices gain legitimacy, contributing to more inclusive and representative policy outcomes. Similarly, reduction in gender-based discrimination (57.2%) indicates a positive transformation in social attitudes, where traditional biases are increasingly being questioned and redefined through the visible leadership of women in public roles. However, the relatively moderate improvement in economic independence of women (54.6%) suggests that while progress is evident, structural economic barriers such as limited employment opportunities, wage disparities, and restricted access to financial resources continue to persist. This highlights the need for targeted economic empowerment initiatives, including skill development programs, financial inclusion strategies, and livelihood support systems.

Therefore, this finding reinforces the argument that women's participation in PRIs acts as a catalyst for multidimensional development, addressing both the symptoms and root causes of gender inequality. By enhancing awareness, improving access to resources, and promoting participatory governance, women representatives contribute to creating a more equitable and resilient social structure. The results suggest that tackling violence against women requires not only direct interventions but also broader socio-economic empowerment, which women-led governance is uniquely positioned to deliver.

Conclusion: A Way Forward

The study concludes that grassroots governance in Jammu and Kashmir has emerged as a significant site for advancing gender justice, particularly through the increasing participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The presence of women representatives has contributed to a measurable shift in both the visibility and handling of violence against women (VAW), with an estimated 43.7% rise in case reporting, indicating enhanced awareness, reduced stigma, and growing trust in local governance structures. Simultaneously, there is evidence of a 58.4% decline in the social normalization of domestic violence, suggesting that sustained advocacy, dialogue, and intervention at the community level are gradually transforming deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes. Furthermore, nearly 61.3% of grassroots governance initiatives demonstrate integration of gender-sensitive approaches, including awareness campaigns, mediation mechanisms, and facilitation of institutional access, thereby reinforcing the role of PRIs as active agents in addressing VAW. These developments underscore the critical importance of women's political participation not merely as symbolic representation but as a substantive force driving social change and accountability in conflict-affected regions.

However, the study also highlights that the progress achieved remains uneven and constrained by persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers. Approximately 39.6% of governance processes continue to face limitations due to patriarchal resistance, inadequate institutional support, and gaps in legal and administrative capacity, which hinder the full realization of gender justice objectives. Additionally, the complex socio-political environment of Jammu and Kashmir, marked by conflict and instability, further complicates the implementation of effective interventions, affecting nearly 35.2% of policy outreach and impact. These challenges indicate that while women representatives are pivotal in addressing violence against women, their effectiveness is closely tied to the availability of supportive

institutional frameworks and capacity-building measures. The study therefore emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms, targeted training programs, and strengthened governance mechanisms to enhance the agency and efficacy of women leaders, ensuring that grassroots governance can serve as a sustainable and transformative platform for combating violence against women and promoting inclusive development.

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