

## Note on Special Cells approach: Comparative models across State-based contexts

### The Special Cells Approach

Violence against Women (VAW) has been a recurring theme and focus of attention of the women's movement in India for close to three decades now. The issue of custodial rape was one of the first public protests against VAW. This initiated the engagement of the women's movement with the Criminal Justice System (CJS) to sensitise it to the stark reality of VAW, in particular domestic & family violence. The last twenty years have witnessed many changes in the CJS, and new sections of law have been introduced in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in response to newly recognised dimensions of violence (specifically 498A & 304B, to address dowry-related death). Women's groups & governments have since then raised concerns, leading to the formulation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) 2005. It has led to the recognition of the need for support for women survivors of DV by bringing together volunteers, voluntary organisations and community-based organisations (CBOs) on the issue of VAW. Within the police also there have been sporadic, reactive and experimental efforts such as the setting up of vigilance committees, all-women police stations, Crime against Women Cells and counselling centres within police stations.

The Special Cell for Women and Children (hereafter, Special Cell) is one such effort aimed at eliminating VAW. It is a service provided to women survivors by trained social workers, located in the police system with a clear understanding that VAW is a crime and that it is the responsibility of the State to prevent and counter it. The strategic location within the police station aims to lead to a more co-ordinated, coherent and in-depth response to the issue by integrating social services within the police system.<sup>1</sup> **The first Special Cell for Women and Children was established in 1984** as a strategic collaboration between Bombay Police and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, to provide professional support services to women and children facing violence. A description of the Special Cell as a model for intervention may be drawn, as follows, from the existing internally generated documents brought out by TISS that now form the cornerstones to the sharing & dissemination of the model itself:

– **Mission:** The Special Cell for Women and Children is located within the Police System, to work on the issue of violence against women and children. It recognizes the woman as an individual in her own right with entitlements (incl. social & Constitutional rights), as guaranteed by the Constitution of India, and as upheld by international instruments, like CEDAW (ratified by India). Thus, the Special Cells' mission is to work towards ensuring that women are recognized as individuals, with equal rights and opportunities in society, including the opportunity to live a peaceful, violence-free life. It works with a clear understanding that violence against women is a crime, against both her *and* society, and that it is the responsibility of the state to prevent & counter it. Hence, the strategic location of the Special Cell within the police system facilitates the State to counter VAW.<sup>2</sup>

– **Location within the CJS:** The Special Cell is strategically located within the police system, based on the belief that the legitimate power & authority inherent in the latter can be constructively used to curb VAW in society. This enables the programme to say “no to violence” at the individual & societal levels. The Police location is used to begin problem-solving work by focusing on the violated woman's citizenship & legal rights. Further, it serves as a model of social service within the police system, with a pro-woman understanding. The collaboration of the Special Cell (as an FAP of the TISS) and the Police, resulting in synergy from their differential strengths & contributions, enriches systemic response into a coordinated, multi-agency response to the issue of VAW. This enables the needs of the violated woman to be addressed holistically. The Special Cell also links the police system with women's organizations & other social service groups, thereby enhancing coordinated response to the violated woman's needs.<sup>3</sup> Special Cell conducts training sessions that serve to build the capacity & sensitivity of police personnel to understand & respond to women's realities in the context of the family & domestic violence. Working alongside Cell workers the police are exposed to a woman-sensitive approach and techniques in dealing with VAW.<sup>4</sup>

---

1 Adapted from 'Mission Statement and the Monitoring Indicators for Special Cell for Women and Children – Within the Maharashtra State Police System', p.1-2

2 Ibid. 1

3 Adapted from Ganesh, Indira Maya: 'Next Steps.. Special Cell Strategy and Vision' (2008), pg.4

4 Ibid. 1, at p.17

– **Approach and practice:** The Special Cell’s interventions related to the issue of VAW draws from the framework of Social Work practice & the pro-woman perspective. The role of the social worker is central to the intervention/s process. The Special Cell has developed its pro-woman perspective on the basis of feminist analysis, & its work is built on an understanding that society is patriarchal. The pro-woman perspective recognises that the violated woman is not responsible for the violence inflicted on her, and that within a patriarchal society, the misuse of power by men makes her vulnerable to, and a victim of violence. The Special Cell perceives her as a survivor of violence, as she has the potential to engage in empowering processes. Moreover, the Special Cell acts on the premise that VAW is not a personal matter to be resolved by the family alone, and that instead, it is a social issue that needs to be addressed within the public domain. During the problem-solving process, the social worker intervenes in the interest of the violated woman. The Special Cell’s social worker is trained & qualified in the required skills to undertake simultaneous actions at multiple levels of intervention, both individual and systemic.<sup>5</sup>

– **Process of intervention:** The process of interventions emphasizes joint problem-solving between the social worker and the violated woman, in the latter's interest. Thus, the woman determines the time, space, and pace at which she wants to undertake the change/problem-solving process, which she initiates the problem-solving process by approaching the Special Cell for help. The Cell works through the case with a focus on immediate crisis intervention, as the violated woman seeks help at the time of a crisis. Usually a violated woman approaches the Special Cell for help as a result of a precipitating event/factor linked to the crisis in her life, which she experiences at the mental/physical/sexual/emotional levels. Subsequent to immediate crisis intervention, if the woman desires, the Special Cell’s interventions focus on her longer-term development.<sup>6</sup>

– **Socio-legal services and empowerment:** Special Cell enables women to access benefits of the law available to them. By demystifying the process & letter of the law and placing options before women clients, Special Cell gives them a sense of their rights & entitlements. Support mechanisms such as rehabilitation, retrieval of personal belongings, making requests for monetary & other forms of support within an emotionally protective environment allow women to navigate their way through the legal system in a more empowered way.<sup>7</sup>

– **Larger linkages:** The Special Cell’s interventions at the macro-level in the interests of the violated woman include building awareness among police personnel, members of women’s vigilance groups, professional groups, women’s groups & caste panchayats, as well as among youth, children & various community groups; advocacy for law & policy reform pertaining to the issue of VAW; contribution to social work education by integrating practice experiences into the teaching-learning process, with regard to the issue of VAW & gender analysis; and documentation, research, & dissemination related to the issue of violence against women.<sup>8</sup> Special Cell engages with non-formal justice systems such as caste panchayats which many citizens may/do access before they approach more formal justice systems.<sup>9</sup> Through training & capacity building on socio-legal services for violated women, Special Cell empowers NGO and academic partners to improve their outreach to communities on issues of violence against women.<sup>10</sup>

**Hence, to summarise, the Special Cell’s interventions at the level of the individual woman and at the level of systems enable a multi-faceted response to the complex issue of VAW in the interests of the violated woman.<sup>11</sup> Interventions are made, within the social work practice framework, for providing emotional support & strengthening the psychological self of the violated woman, negotiating for non-violence with various stakeholders, building support systems for violated women, engaging police help in the interest of violated women, arranging shelter for violated women, working with men in the interest of violated women, the re-establishment of women's relationships with their economic assets, advocacy for group entitlement in the interest of violated women, development counselling with violated women, and Legal Aid to facilitate the violated woman’s journey through the criminal justice system.<sup>12</sup>**

---

5 Ibid. 2, at p.6-8

6 Ibid. 2, at p.9

7 Ibid. 1, at p.18

8 Ibid. 2, at p.10

9 Ibid. 1, at p.17

10 Ibid. 1, at p.18

11 Ibid. 2, at p.13

12 Ibid. 2, at p.14-29

## Journey and adaptations of the Special Cells Approach

The first Special Cell workers were given space in the office of the Commissioner of Police. Over the years this space expanded to more police stations of the city. UNIFEM funding of Special Cell was initiated for the short-term when UNIFEM, TISS, and the Government of Maharashtra (Departments of Women & Child Development, and Home, especially Police) signed a memorandum in 2001 that made Special Cell a joint programme of all three partners and with an agenda to expand the work of the Cells across the state. Thereafter, the Cells were established in Thane district and then other districts of the State as well. Finally, in 2005, the DoWCD (Government of Maharashtra) took up the funding of the entire Special Cells, to be run henceforth with the official collaboration of the State Department of Home. The role of the TISS has transformed into that of a coordinating, monitoring, part-implementation and technical support agency. At present, Special Cells is in the process of further district and even taluka-level expansion in Maharashtra, and is being operated as a scheme of the State Government. Under the scheme, TISS & local NGOs are implementing the Cells in districts. Currently, 144 Special Cells are sanctioned for various locations across Maharashtra (60 are operational, 30 are in process of initialisation in current f.y.).

Through the interest of other organisations working for women's rights, as well as multilateral/international funding agencies, the TISS has also helped demonstrate the Special Cells in other States viz. Madhya Pradesh (2010), Delhi (2009), Odisha (2011), Andhra Pradesh (2011), Rajasthan (2011), Haryana (2007) & Gujarat (2011). Institutionalisation of these with the support of the State Government has been possible in some States like Rajasthan (2011), Haryana (2008), Delhi (2010) & Gujarat (2013). During this phase, the Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence Against Women (RCI-VAW) has emerged organically to support the continuing capacity building & advocacy needs of Special Cells Maharashtra, as well as to build other stakeholders' capacities to work on VAW with the State system, and to initiate & advocate for institutionalisation & strengthening of Special Cells in other States. Special Cells Maharashtra and RCI-VAW therefore remain organically linked FAPs of the TISS as well.

So 5 models of the Special Cells approach have merged, as it were, along the journey. Comparative areas can be understood better through the matrix below:

PHASE	ASPECTS	STATES				
		Maharashtra	Rajasthan	Haryana	Delhi	Guj, A.P. , U.P. , Odisha
Initial phase (Pilot Cells demonstration)	FAP	TISS' SSW's focused FAP with Mumbai Police	Women's groups connected with TISS to learn and initiate Cells in Rajasthan together	RCI-VAW project on invitation of UNDP under SAJI Phase-I	RCI-VAW project with NCW and Delhi Police	RCI-VAW project with Oxfam India & local partner organisations in 4 States
	Partners in pilot phase	Mumbai Police 1984-2000, then also UNIFEM & DoWCD till 2005;	Police & women's groups & civil liberties groups (NGOs & CBOs)	UNDP funding support for 2 pilot Cells for a year; infrastructure support from Haryana Police	NCW funding support, and Delhi Police providing space	NGO implemented (women's groups) with TISS' technical support & Oxfam India funding
	Year of starting, duration of initial phase	1984; 16 years (funding support from Ford Foundation & others)	2002-2004 (4 years)	2006-2007; 1 year	2009; 1 year	2009; 4 years in Gujarat; continues in A.P., U.P. & Odisha
Second phase (Demonstration & advocacy)	Key Stakeholders	TISS implementation, Police infrastructure, UNIFEM funding, DoWCD MoU to take over in future	Only NGOs directly implementing & funding, Police infrastructure, TISS training	TISS' training, system-setting, advocacy, DWCD funded & administered, Police's infrastructural & intervention support	TISS & Police implemented, NCW other stakeholder (only government bodies, no NGO/donor agency)	Partner NGOs implemented, TISS & Oxfam monitored, Oxfam funded, TISS trained, Police's infrastructure

<b>Second phase (contd.)</b>	<b>Duration</b>	3 years (2002-2005)	2004-2010 (6 years)	2007-08: 1 year	Ongoing	2 years in Gujarat; continues in A.P., Odisha
	<b>Personnel</b>	Social Workers at Cells, Project Coordinators at range-levels	Trained social workers at Special Cell units	Trained social workers & professional lawyers; empowered under PWDVA 2005 & PCMA 2006 as Protection-cum-Prohibition Officers (PPOs)	Trained counsellors and trained social workers; designated counsellors	Trained social workers and experienced activists & para-professionals incl. Community organisers;
	<b>Expansion</b>	Regular expansion in number and location of Cells across Police ranges (within Mumbai and across districts)	01.01.2002 – First MSSK in Gandhi Nagar WPS in Jaipur; 2004 – second MSSK in Jaipur; 2010-11 onwards – 23 MSSKs operating with State funding	2006-07 - 2 pilot Cells; November 2008 onwards – 20 Cells across districts; 2011-12 onwards 1 new district & Cell started	2009-12 – 3 Cells; 2012 onwards – only 2 (Malviya Nagar P.S. Cell vacant)	2009-14: 6 Support Centres in 5 districts in Gujarat, 5 in 5 districts of Odisha, & 5 in 4 districts in A.P.; 2014 onwards: 26 Support Centres across all districts of Gujarat
<b>Third phase (programme institutionalised and time of system-setting)</b>	<b>When</b>	Institutionalisation as DoWCD scheme in collaboration with Home/Police Department in 2005	Institutionalisation as DoWCD Scheme in 2010-11	Institutionalised as a DoWCD programme in November 2008, and schematisation process is underway	Not yet institutionalised across districts of Delhi	Institutionalised in 2013-14 as DWCD's programme with Police across all 26 districts of Gujarat; Not institutionalised in A.P. & Odisha
	<b>Location</b>	Special Cells in 3 locations in Mumbai, and 7 at district Police headquarters; Now (in 2013-14) expanded to 144 Cell units across the State (3 taluka-level & 1 district H.Q. Level Cell units in each of 36 districts)	1 Special Cell in each of 26 districts, in Police Stations	1 Special Cell in each of 21 districts of the State, located in office premises of Superintendent of Police	1 in SPUWAC headquarters, Nanakpura, and 1 each in CAW Cells of Pitampura & Malviya Nagar P.S., respectively	Support Centres in Odisha (5), A.P. (5) & Gujarat (6) are based in Police Stations (incl. WPS); U.P. - 2 Support Centres running part-time/non-regular basis in Police space; Now, 1 per 26 districts of Gujarat as institutionalised prog.

The Resource Centre for Interventions on Violence Against Women has emerged organically out of this journey, expansion and institutionalisation of the Special Cells approach in various States' contexts, and now functions as a linked FAP of the TISS, and works with the abovementioned State Governments/Departments, Police, Judiciary, NGOs, donor agencies etc. on innovating, demonstrating, handholding & evaluating State-based VAW intervention models. Hence, it in itself represents the consolidation of the Special Cells' learnings and expertise in VAW intervention, training, gender education, woman-centred social work praxis with the State, VAW research, VAW intervention research in particular and VAW issue-based advocacy at all levels. Based on this consolidated experience, an understanding of the way forward with each of the 5 State-based Special Cell models and the highlights of the same are summarised in the table on the following page.

ASPECTS		Maharashtra	Rajasthan	Haryana	Delhi	Guj, A.P. , U.P. , Odisha
<b>Highlight of State-specific adaptation of Special Cells approach</b>	<b>Achievements and strengths</b>	Birthing ground for Special Cells approach – innovation, skills & advocacy all rigorously developed over 30 years of work with Police; Police support in constant advocacy with State & Judiciary for strengthening, sustainability, expansion & streamlining of programme	CSOs incl. Civil rights activist groups & autonomous women's groups took up the Special Cell approach and advocated with State Government for institutionalisation; Have also continued to implement & capacity-build the programme with support from TISS	Police support to TISS in advocating successfully for institutionalisation of the Special Cells approach as DWCD scheme; PPOs empowered under laws to intervene in child-marriage & DV	Special Cells approach & process integrated into & adapted to the CAW Cells (now SPUWAC) of Delhi Police; Cell workers/counsellors given good infrastructural support and involved in Delhi Police's training, public awareness & community mobilisation activities	Capacity-building & handholding relationship on VAW intervention & advocacy with State-based NGOs working on women's issues; Advocacy & networking with Oxfam India on national-level PWDVA & Sp.Cells Schemes & (successfully) for Gujarat Sp.Cells' institutionalisation
	<b>Structure</b>	DWCD grants-in-aid to TISS for programme coordination & part-implementation (i.e. employment & monitoring of 28 social workers of 14 Cells across districts & 4 regional coordinators), and to NGOs for implementation of Cells; TISS Faculty in-charge manages the project and is member of the State-level Monitoring/Steering Committee (comprising of all stakeholders mentioned, Chaired by ACS, Home)	DWCD sponsored Scheme implemented by NGOs/CSOs through grants-in-aid fund flow, with MSSKs located & functioning in Police Stations incl. WPS	State coordination office along with TISS presence as official technical support for implementation & capacity-building of programme (1 project officer in the State); PO (ICDS) at district-level play administrative monitoring role; PPOs at Cells have support staff and all receive salaries directly as contractual employees of State Government	Social workers/counsellors' salaries are paid through NCW funds which flow directly to Delhi Police's Spl. Police Unit for Women & Children; Workers report to ADCP (CAW), ACP & PI at the SPUWAC Headquarters	Gujarat Support Centres institutionalised and launched in each district as DWCD programme with a State & Regional-level programme coordination structure monitored by the State's Gender Resource Centre, with separate budgetary allocation
<b>Way forward</b>		Advocacy & collaboration by TISS with DWCD for streamlining of expanded programme through alternative structure (either State-sponsored Society or in-State Coordination & prog. Implementation mechanism)	Refresher & induction trainings by TISS on invitation from DWCD planned for 2014; Advocacy to be initiated with Deptt. for programme evaluation study & long-term training component	Refresher training; Scheme document formulation; SoP/protocols being concretised with DWCD; A-V awareness material being developed; 6 year comprehensive report-cum-case-study being finalised (focus on programme's achievements in intervening in VAW & children); Advocacy for Asst. PPO's post to be created & filled	Refresher training & documentation support; On-going advocacy for expansion & institutionalisation across 9 districts of Delhi as DWCD & /or Police-sponsored programme, as well as for State-based programme coordination unit	Advocacy for establishment of Special Cells in U.P. Police locations; Advocacy for expansion & institutionalisation as State-sponsored programme in A.P. & Odisha with help of CSO partners; Advocacy for systems-setting & basic training for institutionalised Cells across Gujarat towards programmatic quality sustainability