

Survivors of sexual violence in South Asia struggle to access compensation, new report finds

A new report by SAMAJ reveals why many survivors of sexual violence in South Asia struggle to access financial compensation despite legal guarantees.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Beyond the devastating psychological and physical impacts, sexual violence often inflicts significant economic harm on survivors. While governments in South Asia have acknowledged this by establishing financial compensation schemes, new research finds that these systems are frequently underfunded, inconsistently implemented, and difficult to navigate, leaving many survivors unable to access the financial assistance they are legally entitled to.



Photo credit, Equality Now, Aakansha Saxena

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No survivor of sexual violence should face different odds for the same right of compensation. Across South Asia, the law is either missing or it is not enforced.”

Divya Srinivasan, Equality Now

These are just some of the findings of a new report, The Good Practices Paper on [Compensation for Survivors of Sexual Violence in South Asia](#), by the [South Asian Movement for Accessing Justice \(SAMAJ\)](#), a coalition of organisations working to end sexual violence in the region.

WHY SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE STRUGGLE TO ACCESS COMPENSATION

Sexual violence often has long-lasting financial consequences. Survivors may face immediate out-of-pocket costs for emergency medical treatment, counselling, transport, legal assistance and, in some cases, relocation to escape further harm. Many are forced to take time off work or education, lose their livelihoods, or experience reduced earning potential because of the physical and psychological impacts.

SAMAJ's regional comparison of compensation schemes across Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives finds survivors often face complex and lengthy criminal justice processes before they can access compensation.



Long delays in investigations, trials, and administrative processes can leave survivors bearing the costs of pursuing justice while receiving little or no financial support when they need it most. A lack of awareness among both survivors and justice officials about compensation schemes, [low conviction rates for sexual violence](#), and delays in the disbursement of funds are some of the other obstacles survivors face.

Where interim financial support is unavailable, survivors are often forced to choose between pursuing a lengthy and costly legal process they cannot afford or accepting an informal settlement, often under pressure. Coerced out-of-court settlements are widespread across South Asia, and the absence of emergency compensation is a significant factor driving survivors away from formal justice processes and allowing perpetrators to evade accountability.

COMPENSATION SYSTEMS ARE FAILING SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In Pakistan, many survivors receive no compensation even after an offender has been convicted, because judges retain broad discretion over whether compensation is awarded, and many choose not to.

In Bangladesh, courts awarded compensation in just 6.8% of reviewed rape cases, despite survivors' legal entitlement to seek financial redress. The country also has no national victim compensation fund.

MARGINALISED SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE FACE GREATER BARRIERS TO COMPENSATION

Dalit and Adivasi women, Indigenous women, religious minorities, and children born as a result of rape often face even greater obstacles. Discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion can make it harder to report sexual violence, be aware of legal rights, and navigate complex compensation processes.

Women with disabilities face added challenges as justice officials often lack understanding of disability-related needs. Information about compensation schemes may be unavailable in accessible formats, while police stations, courts, and government offices are not always physically accessible.

Geographical barriers are particularly acute in the Maldives, an archipelago of around 200 inhabited islands. Forensic exam capacity, trained counsellors, shelters, and legal aid are concentrated in the capital, Malé, and just a few other urban centres.

Several guidance notes for victims emphasise the need for rapid reporting to preserve forensic evidence. The island's geography imposes logistical and cost barriers to the timely medical and forensic documentation that many compensation or assistance procedures require. Meanwhile, limited public data on compensation awards makes it difficult to assess whether compensation is reaching survivors.

Sri Lanka has established a statutory Victims' Assistance and Protection Fund, which mandates the formation of a national authority to oversee implementation, including payment of compensation to victims of crime. However, access to victim support services and compensation remains uneven, with survivors in conflict-affected areas, Tamil communities and other marginalised groups facing particular difficulties obtaining assistance and reparations.

In Nepal, survivors of the civil war between 1996 and 2006 remain largely excluded from any compensation because no legal mechanism for conflict-era reparation has been enacted.

HOW INDIA AND NEPAL ARE STRENGTHENING COMPENSATION FOR RAPE SURVIVORS

India and Nepal offer the region's most developed frameworks and practical models for replication, with both systems recognising that compensation must not hinge on requiring a criminal conviction.

Nepal's Crime Victim Protection Act 2018 consolidates victims' rights into a single statute and establishes a central Victim Relief Fund through which the state pays compensation when an offender is unable to do so.

India's system combines a statutory duty on states to fund victim compensation schemes with independent Legal Services Authorities that assess and process claims, while constitutional jurisprudence recognises compensation as an enforceable right. After finding that compensation laws were not being implemented as intended, India's Supreme Court recently directed courts nationwide to consider compensation in all sexual offence cases.

Manjula Pradeep from the National Council of Women Leaders reflects, "We have seen what compensation makes possible. A Dalit survivor woman in Uttar Pradesh, India, received government grant assistance under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Act. That support allowed her to leave her home for safety, return to court, and pursue a law degree. Without it, by her own account, she could not have continued the case at all. One woman's story should not be the exception. It must become the standard."

SOUTH ASIAN GOVERNMENTS MUST ENACT NATIONAL VICTIM COMPENSATION FUNDS

SAMAJ calls on South Asian governments, donors, and civil society organisations to set up national victim compensation funds in Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Maldives that provide compensation independent of criminal conviction.

Additionally, interim disbursement mechanisms are critical so survivors can access emergency support for medical care, psychosocial support and transport immediately.

Governments should strengthen enforcement of court-ordered compensation, publish annual data on compensation awards and payments, and standardise victim fund guidelines to reduce inconsistencies.

SAMAJ urges state authorities to ensure information and processes are available in local languages and accessible formats, and to establish explicit reparations frameworks for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Divya Srinivasan from Equality Now, the secretariat and co-founder of SAMAJ, concludes, "No survivor of sexual violence should face different odds for the same right of compensation. Across South Asia, the law is either missing or it is not enforced. India and Nepal show another way is possible, even with real resource constraints. We are calling on governments in the region to close this gap. Legislate where the law is missing, and fund and enforce it where it already exists, so compensation becomes a right survivors can rely on, not a matter of geography."

About SAMAJ: The South Asian Movement for Accessing Justice (SAMAJ) is a regional coalition of 27 individuals and organisations from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, united in their mission to end sexual violence and strengthen access to justice for survivors in the region. Formed in 2024, SAMAJ works to address deep-rooted legal inequalities by advocating for comprehensive legal reform, ensuring survivor-centred approaches and promoting the inclusion of marginalised communities across South Asia.

About Equality Now: Equality Now is a worldwide human rights organisation dedicated to securing the legal and systemic change needed to end discrimination against all women and girls, everywhere in the world. It is currently acting as the convenor and secretariat for the SAMAJ coalition. Since its inception in 1992, it has played a role in reforming 130 discriminatory laws globally, positively impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of women and girls, their communities and nations, both now and for generations to come.

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