

GBV Survivors — Connecting Them to the Support They Are Entitled To

Odisha has a reasonably comprehensive formal support system for GBV survivors on paper. In practice, for women in remote tribal communities, most of it is inaccessible. Understanding both what exists and where it fails is the starting point.

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practice-note

Women Empowerment

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What exists:

- One Stop Centres (Sakhi Centres) at district headquarters — integrated support including medical care, legal aid, police facilitation, shelter, and counselling
- Police stations with Women Help Desks and mandated Child Welfare Police Officers
- Short Stay Homes and shelter homes for women fleeing violence
- Free legal aid through District Legal Services Authorities (DLSA)
- The Odisha Victims Compensation Scheme (2017) providing financial compensation to survivors of violence
- National helplines: 181 (Women Helpline), 112 (Emergency), 1098 (Childline)
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 providing civil remedies including protection orders, residence orders, and monetary relief
- The POCSO Act 2012 for child sexual abuse cases
- SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act for survivors from these communities

Where it fails for tribal women in remote blocks:

- The nearest One Stop Centre is typically a full day's travel away
- Legal aid through DLSA requires the survivor to reach the district town
- Most frontline police have limited training in survivor-centred GBV response
- Victim compensation requires documentation (FIR, medical report) that many tribal survivors cannot easily obtain
- The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act requires the survivor to file an application in a Magistrate's court — a process most rural tribal women cannot navigate independently
- Language barriers at every formal system point

This gap between what exists and what is accessible is precisely where NGO facilitation adds value.

The Immediate Response: What to Do First

When a survivor comes to your organisation's attention — through a community volunteer, an ASHA, an AWW, or directly — the immediate priorities in order are:

1. Safety: Is the survivor currently safe? Is she at immediate risk of further violence? If yes, safety before anything else. The OSC emergency line (usually the district collector's emergency number in Odisha) can mobilise police for immediate protection. The Women Helpline 181 connects to emergency response. If a woman needs to leave her home immediately, the OSC can arrange shelter transport.

2. Medical care: Under Section 357C of the Code of Criminal Procedure (now BNSS Section 397), every hospital — public or private — is legally required to provide first aid and emergency medical treatment to survivors of violence free of cost, regardless of whether a police complaint has been filed. The hospital cannot make police reporting a condition of medical care. This is a right that many survivors do not know they have, and that hospital staff sometimes violate.

If a survivor needs medical care — particularly in a case of sexual violence where forensic evidence needs to be preserved — medical attention must precede any other

step. Evidence degrades rapidly. Document the time of contact and the time of medical presentation carefully.

3. Listen without directing: Before doing anything else, listen to what the survivor wants. Does she want to file a complaint? Does she want legal separation? Does she want counselling? Does she want to go home? Does she not know yet? The answer shapes everything that follows. Your job is not to steer her toward the "correct" option. It is to give her accurate information about every option and support her in whatever she chooses.

The Legal Entitlements in Detail

Free first aid and medical treatment

Entitlement: Immediate free medical care at any hospital, public or private, regardless of police reporting status. (BNSS Section 397, previously CrPC Section 357C)

In practice: In district towns, this is generally available. In CHCs and PHCs in remote blocks, implementation varies. The Medico-Legal Certificate (MLC) that documents injuries is important for any subsequent legal process — request it explicitly and get a copy.

NGO role: Accompany the survivor to the health facility. Know the section number. If the facility attempts to condition medical care on police complaint, produce the legal provision or contact the DLSA emergency line.

Police complaint and FIR registration

Entitlement: Every survivor has the right to file an FIR at any police station; the police are legally required to register it for cognisable offences (all serious violence, domestic violence, rape, POCSO offences). Zero FIR — filed at any station regardless of jurisdiction — must be accepted. Under the BNS 2023, provisions have been strengthened.

In practice: Police stations in tribal areas frequently attempt to discourage FIR registration, refer complainants to "family dispute resolution," or delay registration. This is illegal but common. A woman from a tribal community filing a complaint at a police station alone, in a language she may not be fluent in, facing officials who may have caste or community biases — is in an extremely vulnerable position.

NGO role: If a survivor wants to file an FIR, accompany her to the police station. Your presence as an NGO representative changes the dynamic. Know the CWPO (Child Welfare Police Officer) in each local station by name — they have specific training in GBV and POCSO cases and are the appropriate first contact. If the police refuse to register an FIR, the survivor can send it in writing by post (the station must acknowledge receipt) or file directly with the Magistrate.

One Stop Centre services

Entitlement: OSCs provide integrated services: medical care, legal aid, police facilitation, psychosocial counselling, and temporary shelter, all in one location. Operated by the Women and Child Development Department. Available to all women in distress regardless of caste, religion, or type of violence.

In practice: OSC at district headquarters. Available 24/7 in principle; staffing reality varies. For tribal women who cannot reach the district, the OSC is effectively inaccessible.

NGO role: Know the OSC's location, phone number, and opening hours for your district before you need it. Build a relationship with the OSC coordinator — so that when a referral arrives, it is received rather than processed bureaucratically. If a survivor cannot reach the OSC, the OSC should in principle be able to send a counsellor or facilitate police response remotely — this varies by OSC capacity.

Victim Compensation under the Odisha Victims Compensation Scheme

Entitlement: The Odisha Victims Compensation Scheme (2017) provides financial compensation to victims of specified crimes including rape, acid attack, domestic violence resulting in grievous injury, trafficking, and others. Compensation amounts range from ₹10,000 for less severe cases to ₹3 lakh for rape and ₹3 lakh for death. The scheme is administered by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA).

Key provisions specific to Odisha:

- Compensation can be applied for even before conviction — the DLSA can award interim compensation based on police report and medical evidence
- The DLSA must arrange psychological counselling through empanelled therapists and coordinate free legal aid
- If the survivor does not have a bank account, the DLSA is responsible for helping open one to facilitate payment

Application process:

1. File an application (Form I) to the DLSA — available at the district court or DLSA office
2. Attach: FIR copy, medical report, Aadhaar card, bank passbook copy (or request DLSA to facilitate bank account opening)
3. The DLSA verifies and disburses

NGO role: Most survivors do not know this scheme exists. Most cannot navigate the application process independently. The NGO facilitates: awareness, documentation support, application submission, and follow-up if disbursement is delayed. Note that since July 2024, BNSS Section 396 requires digital integration — cases can in principle be tracked through e-Courts.

Protection orders under the PWDVA

Entitlement: The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 provides civil remedies that do not require criminal prosecution: Protection Orders (prohibiting the perpetrator from committing violence or contacting the survivor), Residence Orders (ensuring the survivor can remain in the shared household or be provided alternative residence), and Monetary Relief (maintenance, compensation for injuries, medical expenses).

Access mechanism: Application to the Magistrate's court in the jurisdiction where the survivor resides or where the violence occurred. The Protection Officer at the district level (under the Collectorate) is the first contact — they assist with filing applications and provide support through the process.

In practice: The PWDVA is underutilised in tribal Odisha because most survivors and most frontline workers don't know about it, because reaching the Magistrate's court requires travel, and because the process feels intimidating. But Protection Orders — which can be issued quickly in urgent cases — are among the fastest legal remedies available to survivors of ongoing domestic violence who cannot or choose not to pursue criminal prosecution.

NGO role: Train community volunteers and frontline NGO staff in the basic PWDVA provisions. Know the Protection Officer in each district. When a survivor is facing ongoing domestic violence and wants legal protection, the PWDVA may be more accessible and faster than criminal proceedings.

Free legal aid

Entitlement: Every person with an annual income below ₹3 lakh is entitled to free legal aid from the DLSA. For SC and ST members, the income ceiling does not apply — free legal aid is available regardless of income. Legal aid includes representation in court proceedings.

Access: The DLSA Lok Adalat, available at the district court. The DLSA also has panel lawyers who handle GBV cases. In some districts, legal aid clinics are held at block level — check with the DLSA.

NGO role: For survivors who want to pursue legal action, connect them with the DLSA rather than NGO lawyers who may not be available for the full duration of a case. The DLSA system, while imperfect, is the sustainable legal support structure.

The Referral Card: Essential Information for Every Field Staff Member

Every NGO field staff member working in communities where GBV occurs should carry — or have saved on their phone — a simple reference card with:

- District OSC phone number and address
- Local police station CWPO name and number
- DLSA office phone number and address
- National helplines: 181 (Women), 112 (Emergency), 1098 (Childline)
- Short Stay Home or shelter contact if available in district
- Your organisation's internal escalation contact

This card should be updated annually. Numbers change. Contacts change. An out-of-date referral number that connects to no one is worse than no referral at all.

What NGOs Cannot Provide — and Why That Matters

NGOs cannot: provide safe housing indefinitely; provide the financial independence that allows a survivor to leave a violent relationship without economic devastation; provide legal representation through an entire criminal prosecution; or fix the justice system's failures on caseloads, timelines, or conviction rates.

Being honest about this with survivors is not defeatism. It is respect. A survivor who is told she can access legal remedy in six weeks and then discovers the case takes four years is harmed by the misinformation. A survivor who knows the options, knows the likely timelines, and makes an informed choice — however difficult that choice is — has agency. Give her agency.

Related Knowledge Commons content: Women Empowerment Sector Primer (Sector 02) · Practice Note: Community-Based GBV Response in Remote Tribal Contexts · Practice Note: Entitlements Mapping — Helping Tribal Communities Access What They Are Owed

Evidence Grade: B — Multi-study. This Practice Note draws on the Odisha Victims Compensation Scheme 2017, the BNSS 2024 provisions, the PWDVA 2005, the Meer Foundation Odisha legal entitlements documentation, and field practice from Odisha GBV support organisations. Last reviewed: April 2026.

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