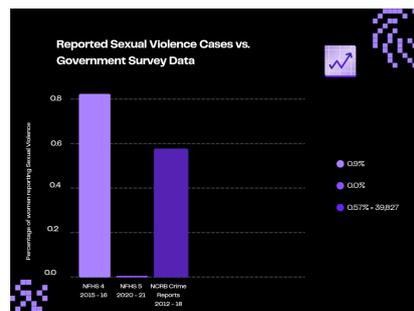


## Tamil Nadu's "Zero Percent" Sexual Violence Statistic and The Truth Behind it - A Clear Misunderstanding

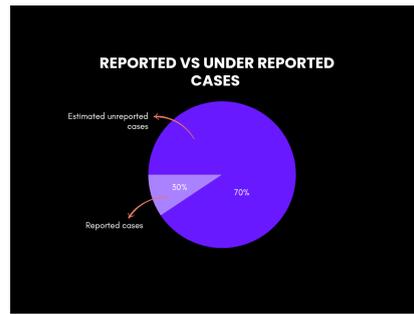
A government survey revealing no instances of sexual violence cases should be good news. Yes? During the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) done between 2020 and 2021, shocking 0.0% prevalence rate of sexual violence was reported in Tamil Nadu for women aged 18 to 29. If these figures are to be believed, Tamil Nadu would be the safest region in India for women. Newspapers would straight away stop reporting cases of abuse. Survivors and activists would be celebrating the termination of sexual violence. Unfortunately, that's not the case.

### The Contradiction Between Government Data and Crime Reports

The 0.0% figure from NFHS-5 contradicts the previous statistics and crime records far too many times. During NFHS-4 (2015-16), 0.9% of women belonging to the same category reported sexual violence towards them. If this figure is true, it means Indian state of Tamil Nadu has managed to achieve an impossible task and made the issue of sexual violence vanish. NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) maintains police recorded crime statistics and it tells a very different story. There have been thousands of cases of sexual violence registered in Tamil Nadu. So no, the problem has not disappeared.



Also, between 2012 and 2018, Tamil Nadu has logged 39,827 instances of the offenses under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act. This number alone proves the existence of the statement “zero” sexual violence as false. The issue is not the absence of sexual violence, it is the unreporting of it is.



### **What causes the underreporting of sexual violence, especially in these regions?**

It is widely known that sexual violence is one of the least reported crimes in India and Tamil Nadu is no exception. UNICEF had conducted a study and found that only 3 in 10 children who face sexual violence seek help. If there is underreporting of this nature for minors, then it is sure to continue for adults as well. The inactivity surrounding these offenses can be attributed to a number of reasons:

#### **1. Avoidance of Shaming Blame**

A number of people remain quiet about these issues because they do not want to be blamed by their families or shamed by society. Survivors of sexual violence are often questioned about their action, clothes, or even where they were at the time of the rape instead of the crime's focus. For this reason, women do not want to report cases of sexual violence committed against them.

#### **2. Family Violence**

In most families, ignoring or failing to report sexual violence becomes the norm because of the family's obsession with societal esteem, marriage, or the fear of community reaction. In a patriarchal context, a woman seeking justice is often discredited or silenced because a family's "honor" is seen more important. As a result, survivors remain mute, which in turn, translates into poor official reports of these occurrences.

#### **3. Lack of Faith in Achieving Justice**

It may be said that even for those survivors willing to report their experiences, very few are able to proceed due to lack of faith in the legal system. Many with pain expect that police will not believe their statements or, if there is no evidence, their matter will terminate at no proof.

The long and often degrading process of legal action has pulled many victims away from the needed justice.

Survivors need to have confidence that justice will be served whenever they choose to report.

This entails:

- Sexual violence cases having expedient trials.
- Police receiving more training on how to handle complex sensitive complaints.
- Witness protection schemes being made more powerful to ensure survivors remain free from intimidation silence.

#### 4. Attitudinal Changes

Stigma and victim blaming practices fuels the reason on why there is underreporting. Campaigns, the public narrative, and schooling all have a role to play as far as the attitude towards survivors is concerned.

#### **Conclusion**

Sexual violence should not be treated as just mere figures in a report, it's an unfortunate truth that impacts numerous lives. A government that surveys and reports zero cases does not take away the pain of the victims. Tamil Nadu's 0.0% is not an indication that women are safe, it is an indication of the absence of speech.

As long as survivors are silenced and shackled by fear, the stigma surrounding reporting the incident and loss of faith in the justice system prevails, the truth remains bound. We should not be aiming to achieve socially constructed ideals by distorting data, but instead, ensuring those figures are corroborated by the truth. Genuine action can only be taken when the vastness of the issue is accepted.