



Domestic Violence Stakeholders Summit UTTAR PRADESH

WHITE PAPER

22ND FEBRUARY, 2025

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STAKEHOLDERS SUMMIT, UTTAR PRADESH

Invisible Scars Foundation and Vanangana organised the Domestic Violence Stakeholders Summit, Uttar Pradesh, on 22nd February 2025 at IIM Lucknow, Prabandh Nagar, IIM Road, Lucknow. Invisible Scars Foundation is an NGO dedicated to raising awareness and protecting and promoting women and children's rights through legal representation, advocacy, and training. Our team of women lawyers and social workers provides legal and social support to victims of sexual and domestic violence (DV).

Vanangana is a rural community-based women's rights collective located in Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh, that has been operating from Chitrakoot since 1993 and Banda since 2003. Vanangana has been combating the grave and pervasive problem of violence against women by making Dalit women an important part of village development and thus ensuring their safety as well as an influential position in the social ladder.

Over **75 professionals, experts, and key stakeholders** from across Uttar Pradesh participated in the full-day summit, including legal practitioners, grassroots activists, social workers, researchers, and 24 survivor advocates.

The summit was structured into two panel discussions followed by a roundtable:

Panel 1: *Feminist Approaches to Safe Shelter for DVA Survivors*

Panel 2: *Exploring Justice for DVA Survivors in the Legal System*

Roundtable: *A collective brainstorming on what “skilling” for survivors of DV*

The summit aimed to facilitate dialogue, share best practices, and establish a roadmap for future interventions. The discussions and recommendations from this summit now provide a roadmap for sustained advocacy, grassroots interventions, and policy engagement, which are meticulously documented in this comprehensive white paper and will be submitted to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Uttar Pradesh.

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Glossary

Context

Domestic Violence (DV) remains a pressing issue in Uttar Pradesh, deeply entrenched in socio-cultural and economic structures. While legal provisions like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005¹ exist, implementation gaps, lack of access to justice, and societal stigma often prevent survivors from seeking redress. Addressing these gaps requires collaborative efforts across various stakeholders—civil society, legal experts, grassroots activists, policymakers, and survivors themselves.

Recognising this need, two organisations—one dedicated to legal representation, advocacy, and training to promote the rights of women and children, and the other, a rural, community-based women's rights collective in Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh—came together to organize Uttar Pradesh's Stakeholders' Summit on Domestic Violence. The summit aimed to facilitate dialogue, share best practices, and establish a roadmap for future interventions.

¹ [PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT 2005.](#)

Background and Objectives of the Summit

Background

Invisible Scars Foundation and Vanangana organised the Domestic Violence Stakeholders Summit, Uttar Pradesh, on 22nd February 2025 at IIM Lucknow, Prabandh Nagar, IIM Road, Lucknow. The DV Act, a landmark law in India, aims at providing comprehensive support to victims through legal and other support services, including medical assistance, mental health services, and shelter. India's economic output is lowered by an estimated \$479 million to \$880 million per year due to domestic violence. Children exposed to domestic violence face higher risks of behavioural problems, including hostility, anxiety, and mental instability. This cycle often perpetuates within families, leading to low self-esteem, addiction, and other psychological challenges. Adults may face lasting mental and physical health impacts, including low self-esteem, suicidal tendencies, self-destructive behaviour, or addiction. This often undermines faith in marriage and harms children through poor parenting. Domestic violence erodes the family unit, creating weak, dysfunctional structures that perpetuate violence and intergenerational trauma. This cycle undermines societal prosperity, economic growth and increases vulnerability. Emergency services provide only short-term relief without sustainable long-term solutions, which forces many victims back into abusive environments. To address these gaps, greater coordination between the stakeholders is needed to ensure victims receive the holistic support required to rebuild their lives.

Objectives

Through this DVA summit, we intended to provide an opportunity for professionals with similar backgrounds in GBV and interests to get together, share knowledge, cultivate connections, and decide on future priorities. The systems, structures, cultures, skills, resources, and power that organisations and states require to serve their communities will be developed and strengthened as a result of this summit. This summit will help build the professional capacity of organisations participating by strengthening their network. The following needs were kept in mind while deciding to organise this summit:

- Encouraging an interconnected network of DVA stakeholders at the state level, fostering improved collaboration.
- Enhancing the collective capacity of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and DVA professionals.
- Continuously shaping innovative practices and partnership approaches on an ongoing basis.
- Exploring the legal landscape and justice mechanisms available to survivors.
- Engaging in discussions about prevention and intervention strategies tailored to local culture.
- Discussing prevention and intervention strategies relevant to local culture.
- Collectively exploring new research approaches and tools for the prevention of DVA at a state-level.

Challenges faced by DVA Survivors

Survivors of domestic violence in India face a web of challenges that often prevent them from seeking justice, escaping abuse, or rebuilding their lives. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, was enacted to provide civil remedies, including protection orders, residence rights, and monetary relief. However, its implementation remains weak due to systemic barriers.

Delayed and Ineffective Legal Recourse

Court proceedings are notoriously slow, and enforcement of protection orders is weak. Many women are unaware of their legal rights due to a lack of legal literacy, especially in rural areas². Even when survivors approach the police, they often face apathetic or hostile attitudes, with officers discouraging them from filing complaints, urging "family reconciliation" instead³.

Economic Dependence

Economic dependence is another critical barrier. Many survivors have no financial autonomy, making it difficult to leave abusive relationships⁴. Even when skilling programs exist, they often fail to align with survivors' actual economic needs, offering low-income, unsustainable work.

Social Stigma

Social stigma and lack of community support further silence survivors. Many women fear social ostracisation or backlash from their families. Dalit and marginalised women face even greater hurdles due to caste-based discrimination when seeking shelter or justice⁵.

Safe Shelter Options

Additionally, safe shelter options are scarce and restrictive, often functioning more as confinement than empowerment spaces. Survivors also face mental health neglect, with few trauma-informed support services available.

² Chaudhuri, T. (2011). *Legal Protection Against Domestic Violence in India: Scope and Limitations*, *Journal of Family Violence*, 26(4), 319–330.

³ Jagori & UN Women. (2019). *What Will It Take? Promoting Cultural Change to End Sexual Harassment*.

⁴ Desai, M., & Patel, P. (2020). *Understanding Domestic Violence in India During COVID-19*, *Journal of Family Studies*.

⁵ Human Rights Watch. (2020). *'I Sleep in My Own Deathbed': Violence Against Women in India*.

Welcome and Introductory Address by Host: Ekta Viiveck Verma and Shabina Mumtaz

The summit commenced with an opening address by representatives from the two host organisations— Invisible Scars Foundation and Vanangana by Ekta Viiveck Verma and Shabina Mumtaz, respectively. In their remarks, the speakers acknowledged the urgency of addressing domestic violence (DV) as a structural issue rather than an isolated social problem. They emphasised that while laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005 exist, their implementation remains inconsistent, and survivors—especially from marginalised communities—face multiple barriers in seeking justice, shelter, and economic independence. The hosts highlighted that GBV interventions must be survivor-centered, intersectional, and community-led, rather than relying solely on legal frameworks.

Rashmi Yadav, resident of Purani Bazar, Karvi, Chitrakoot

Rashmi was married in 2013 in Karvi itself. Her harassment started soon after the marriage, and it gradually increased. The husband and wife got separated in 2015. During this time, Rashmi gave birth to a daughter and also filed a case of 489A, domestic violence, in the court. Since then, the case has been pending, and Rashmi is wandering for justice with her daughter.

Guest of Honour Address: Prof. Roop Rekha Verma, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lucknow and Professor of Philosophy, Activist against gender-based violence

The keynote address by Prof. Roop Rekha Verma, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lucknow, philosopher, and a long-time activist against gender-based violence (GBV), set the tone for the summit. With decades of experience in academia and activism, she provided a deeply insightful reflection on the systemic nature of domestic violence (DV) and the urgent need for multi-stakeholder intervention.

Prof. Verma began by stating that domestic violence is not just a private or familial matter but a structural issue rooted in patriarchal norms, economic inequality, and caste-based oppression. She pointed out that despite legal provisions such as the DV Act, justice remains elusive for many survivors, especially those from marginalised backgrounds. She emphasised that laws alone cannot create change unless they are backed by robust implementation, institutional accountability, and community-driven support systems.

She highlighted three critical focus areas for the summit:

1. **Safe Shelter as a Right, Not a Charity** – Shelters should be empowering spaces, not just temporary relief. They must integrate mental health support, legal aid, and pathways to economic independence.
2. **Making the Legal System Accessible** – Survivors face delays, intimidation, and a lack of legal literacy. There is a pressing need for paralegal support and community legal networks.
3. **Economic Independence as Liberation** – The most sustainable way for a survivor to escape the cycle of violence is through financial autonomy. Skilling programs should be meaningful, market-aligned, and survivor-led.

Prof. Verma concluded with a call for solidarity and action, urging attendees to build survivor-centred frameworks that prioritise justice, dignity, and long-term empowerment.

Panel Discussion 1: *Feminist Approaches to Safe Shelter for DVA Survivors*

Moderated by Madhavi Kuckreja, a distinguished leader in social development, cultural preservation, and women's empowerment, this panel discussion focused on rethinking shelter models for survivors of domestic violence (DVA) from a feminist lens. The conversation delved into the challenges of existing shelter systems, the need for survivor-centric models, and best practices in ensuring safety, dignity, and long-term support for survivors.

The panel brought together four seasoned practitioners and experts:

- Hina Desai, Executive Director, SRSP, Jokahara, Uttar Pradesh
- Shinjini Singh, Lead, Measurement, Learning & Evaluation (MLE), Dasra's Rebuild India Fund
- Archana Singh, Centre Administrator, One Stop Center, Lucknow
- Ekta Viiveck Verma, Founder & Director, Invisible Scars Foundation

Together, they explored the critical gaps in the current shelter infrastructure and the potential for transformative, feminist approaches to survivor support.

Challenges in Existing Shelter Systems

1. Accessibility Issues

Hina Desai opened the discussion by highlighting the exclusionary nature of state-run shelters. She noted that Dalit, Adivasi, disabled, queer, and other marginalized survivors often face discrimination in accessing these facilities. Many shelters follow rigid bureaucratic procedures that discourage survivors from seeking help.

Ekta Viiveck Verma emphasized the urban-rural divide in shelter availability. While urban centers have some functional shelter homes, rural women often lack nearby safe spaces, forcing them to travel long distances, which adds financial and safety burdens.

2. Restrictive and Controlling Environments

Archana Singh, representing the One Stop Center (OSC) in Lucknow, acknowledged the well-intended but flawed approach of institutional shelters. Many of these spaces operate more like confinement centers than healing environments, with strict curfews, limited mobility, and lack of survivor agency. Survivors often feel they are being policed rather than supported, which discourages them from staying in shelters long-term.

Shinjini Singh from Dasra's Rebuild India Fund added that many shelters fail to provide comprehensive psychosocial and economic reintegration support, leaving survivors vulnerable to returning to abusive situations. She stressed that survivors should not have to choose between violence at home and oppression in shelter spaces.

3. Lack of Holistic Support Systems

The discussion also highlighted the absence of integrated services in most shelters. Mental health support, legal aid, skill-building, and economic rehabilitation are often fragmented or entirely missing. Survivors need more than just a roof over their heads;

they need a pathway to rebuild their lives.

Feminist Approaches to Safe Shelter

The panelists then shifted to discussing how shelters can be transformed into survivor-centred spaces that foster healing, autonomy, and long-term empowerment.

1. Decentralized and Community-Based Shelter Models

Hina Desai and Madhavi Kuckreja emphasised the need for community-led shelter models where survivors are housed within trusted local networks, such as women's collectives and self-help groups (SHGs). This model reduces stigma and isolation while fostering community-based protection mechanisms.

2. Survivor-Led Decision-Making

Ekta Viiveck Verma argued that shelters should be designed and run with survivor participation. Survivors should have a say in rules, programming, and daily operations to ensure these spaces remain empowering rather than restrictive.

3. Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered Practices

Archana Singh stressed the need for trauma-informed care in shelter homes. This includes:

- Counseling and mental health support are integrated into daily routines.
- Creative and expressive therapy (e.g., storytelling, theatre, art).
- Survivor peer-support groups to build solidarity and resilience.

Shinjini Singh added that healing-centred approaches should also be woven into legal and economic support programs to ensure survivors are not re-traumatized by institutional processes.

4. Economic and Skill-Based Pathways to Independence

One of the biggest shortcomings of current shelter models is the lack of economic exit strategies. Without financial independence, many survivors return to abusive homes due to economic insecurity.

The panelists suggested:

- Livelihood training based on local economies and survivor aspirations rather than generic, low-paying skills.
- Partnerships with businesses, NGOs, and social enterprises to create direct employment pathways.
- Shelter-based cooperatives where survivors collectively run small businesses (e.g., tailoring units, food catering, handicrafts).

Key Takeaways and Action Points

- 1. Reforming Shelter Policies** – Advocate for flexible, survivor-led policies that prioritise agency over rigid control mechanisms.
- 2. Expanding Community-Based Shelter Models** – Strengthen village-level safe spaces, particularly for marginalised survivors.
- 3. Integrating Mental Health and Legal Aid Services** – Ensure trauma-informed support is part of every shelter's core services.
- 4. Developing Sustainable Economic Pathways** – Move beyond short-term skilling to long-term financial independence for survivors.

The discussion concluded with a powerful call to action from Madhavi Kuckreja, who urged collective responsibility in building feminist, survivor-led shelter spaces. She stressed that a shelter should not just be a place of refuge but a foundation for reclaiming life, dignity, and autonomy.

Each panelist reinforced that safe shelter is a fundamental right, not a privilege, and achieving that requires transforming existing systems into ones that centre survivor voices, intersectionality, and long-term empowerment.

The session set a critical foundation for the summit's broader objectives, reinforcing that justice for survivors goes beyond legal recourse—it must include safety, dignity, and a future free from violence.

Panel Discussion 2: Exploring Justice for DVA Survivors in the Legal System

The second panel discussion of the summit, “Exploring Justice for Domestic Violence Act (DVA) Survivors in the Legal System,” was moderated by Astha Bamba, an assistant editor and communications strategist at The Third Eye, Nirantar Trust, Delhi. The discussion brought together a diverse group of experts from the fields of journalism, law enforcement, survivor support, and grassroots activism to critically examine the accessibility, effectiveness, and gaps within India’s legal system when it comes to justice for domestic violence survivors.

The panelists included:

- **Kavita Bundelkhandi**, Editor-in-Chief and co-founder of Khabar Lahariya, an independent rural media collective.
- **Vrinda Shukla**, IPS officer and SP in the Women and Child Security Wing of 1090, the Women Helpline in Uttar Pradesh.
- **Richa Singh**, Project Coordinator at Humsafar Trust, an organization that provides legal aid and psychosocial support to survivors.
- **Avdhesh Gupta**, from the leadership team of Vanangana, a grassroots women’s rights collective working with Dalit and marginalised women in Bundelkhand.

Together, they unpacked the structural and cultural challenges that prevent survivors from seeking and obtaining justice and explored solutions for a more survivor-centred legal system.

Challenges in the Legal System for DVA Survivors

1. Barriers to Reporting and Seeking Legal Help

Kavita Bundelkhandi, drawing from her experience with Khabar Lahariya, pointed out that in rural and marginalised communities, survivors often do not report violence due to fear, stigma, and societal pressure. Many women are financially and emotionally dependent on their abusers, making it nearly impossible to approach the legal system without support. She highlighted cases where police officers refused to file FIRs, minimised the abuse, or pushed survivors to “settle” issues within the family.

Richa Singh from Humsafar Trust added that queer and transgender survivors of domestic violence face additional discrimination within the legal system. The DV Act is heteronormative in its language and does not explicitly include LGBTQ+ survivors, leaving them with even fewer avenues for justice.

2. Institutional Apathy and Police Response

Vrinda Shukla, as a senior officer in the Women and Child Security Wing of 1090, acknowledged that police insensitivity and lack of gender training remain serious obstacles. While women’s helplines like 1090 aim to create a more survivor-friendly reporting process, they cannot replace in-person police intervention or legal follow-up. She admitted that many police officers still prioritise “family reconciliation” over a survivor’s safety, delaying legal action or discouraging women from taking legal steps against their abusers.

To address this, she emphasised the need for mandatory gender-sensitive training for all police personnel, along with accountability mechanisms to ensure proper implementation of the PWDVA.

3. Legal Delays and Bureaucratic Hurdles

Avdhesh Gupta from Vanangana highlighted the slow judicial process as a major barrier to justice. Even when survivors file cases, legal proceedings can take years, forcing them to stay in unsafe conditions or rely on temporary shelters. Many survivors lack legal literacy, which means they often do not understand the process, their rights, or how to navigate the system.

Furthermore, she pointed out that most Protection Officers (POs)—who are supposed to help survivors access legal remedies under the PWDVA—are often overburdened, under-trained, and unavailable in many rural districts.

A Feminist Vision for a Survivor-Centered Legal System

After outlining the challenges, the panelists proposed concrete, feminist interventions to create a legal system that prioritises survivor safety, dignity, and justice.

1. Strengthening Local Legal Aid and Community-Led Justice Mechanisms

- Kavita Bundelkhandi emphasised the need for grassroots legal literacy campaigns so that women, especially in rural and Dalit communities, know their rights and how to access justice.
- Vanangana and Humsafar Trust have experimented with community-based dispute resolution models, where local women's collectives support survivors in navigating the legal system.

2. Reforming Police and Judicial Practices

- Vrinda Shukla argued for stronger accountability mechanisms for law enforcement, including strict action against officers who fail to register cases of domestic violence.
- Panelists also stressed the importance of fast-track courts for cases under the PWDVA to ensure survivors do not have to wait years for justice.

3. Expanding the Scope of the PWDVA

- Richa Singh from Humsafar Trust called for amendments to the PWDVA to explicitly include LGBTQ+ survivors and those in non-marital relationships.
- Avdhesh Gupta emphasised the need to expand survivor definitions in legal frameworks to include those facing violence within live-in relationships, second marriages, or extended family structures.

4. Ensuring Holistic Survivor Support

- Legal intervention alone is not enough—survivors need safe housing, financial aid, and mental health support while they pursue justice.

- Panelists stressed the need for stronger linkages between women's shelters, legal aid cells, and financial empowerment programs to create a sustainable justice ecosystem for survivors.

Key Takeaways and Action Points

1. **Make the Legal System Survivor-Centric** – Ensure fast-tracking of cases, survivor-sensitive courtrooms, and proper enforcement of protection orders.
2. **Strengthen Community Legal Aid** – Expand local paralegal networks, self-help groups, and women-led legal support systems in rural areas.
3. **Hold Law Enforcement Accountable** – Train police officers in gender sensitivity and implement zero-tolerance policies for negligence in DV cases.
4. **Expand Legal Definitions of Survivors** – Amend the PWDVA to explicitly include queer, Dalit, disabled, and other marginalised survivors.
5. **Ensure Long-Term Survivor Support** – Link legal aid with financial and mental health services to create a holistic justice system.

The panel ended with a powerful message from moderator Astha Bamba, who emphasised that justice for survivors is not just about punishment—it's about rebuilding lives. The legal system must shift from being intimidating and bureaucratic to being accessible, survivor-friendly, and truly transformative.

The discussion underscored that justice must go beyond the courtroom—it must be felt in the everyday lives of survivors. The legal system must be a pillar of support, not another source of trauma. The session concluded with a call for collaborative action among activists, legal professionals, and policymakers to ensure that every survivor has access to timely, fair, and survivor-centred justice.

Roundtable: A collective brainstorming on what “skilling” for survivors of Domestic Violence

The final session of the summit was a roundtable discussion moderated by Viiveck Verma, Director of the Invisible Scars Foundation. This session took a holistic approach to skilling, recognising that economic empowerment for survivors of domestic violence (DV) is not just about jobs, but about rebuilding confidence, securing long-term financial stability, and ensuring access to mental health and legal support.

The discussion was designed as an interactive and participatory space, bringing together survivors, grassroots workers, legal experts, and development practitioners to collectively reimagine what skilling should look like for DV survivors. The participants identified four key pillars essential for a survivor-centered skilling framework: Livelihood, Mental Health, Legal Advice, and Economic Empowerment.

1. Skilling as a Pathway to Livelihoods and Financial Independence

The conversation began with a discussion on what kind of skilling programs work for survivors. Participants noted that most mainstream vocational training programs are generic, outdated, and do not cater to survivors' specific needs. Many programs offer sewing, beauty, or handicraft training, but do not consider market demand, survivor aspirations, or financial sustainability.

Key Challenges Identified:

- **Limited market alignment:** Many survivors struggle to find employment after training because the skills taught are either low-paying or oversaturated in the market.
- **Mobility and safety concerns:** Survivors often have restricted mobility due to social stigma, safety risks, or childcare responsibilities, limiting their options for work outside the home.
- **Lack of financial literacy:** Even when survivors secure income-generating opportunities, they lack financial management skills, making them vulnerable to economic exploitation or dependence on others.

Solutions Proposed:

- **Market-Driven and Digital Skilling:** The group emphasised the need for tech-based and remote work opportunities, such as digital marketing, content writing, data entry, and e-commerce training. These would allow survivors to work from home while building financial security.
- **Collective and Cooperative Models:** The discussion explored the potential of survivor-led enterprises, where small groups of women could co-own businesses, reducing individual risk and increasing bargaining power.
- **Building Financial Independence Beyond Skilling:** The roundtable called for long-term financial inclusion, including easy access to bank accounts, credit, and micro-financing opportunities for survivors starting businesses.

2. The Role of Mental Health in Skilling

Viiveck Verma guided the discussion toward the intersection of trauma and skilling. Many survivors experience years of psychological abuse, which affects their confidence, decision-making ability, and motivation to pursue livelihoods. Participants emphasised that without addressing mental health, skilling programs risk being ineffective.

Challenges Identified:

- Survivors often struggle with low self-esteem and self-doubt, making it difficult to engage in professional spaces or advocate for fair wages.
- Many survivors experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety, which can interfere with their ability to focus, learn, or hold long-term employment.
- Existing skilling programs do not integrate mental health services, making survivors feel unsupported when they face psychological setbacks.

Solutions Proposed:

- **Trauma-Informed Skilling Programs:** Participants called for integrating counseling and peer support groups into skilling programs, ensuring survivors receive psychosocial support alongside economic training.
- **Mentorship and Role Models:** The discussion highlighted the need for peer mentorship programs, where former survivors who have rebuilt their lives could guide new trainees, offering emotional support and real-life strategies.
- **Flexible Learning Approaches:** Since survivors may struggle with rigid schedules, skill-building programs should offer self-paced courses, hybrid learning models, and mental health days to accommodate their needs.

3. Legal Advice as an Essential Component of Skilling

The conversation then turned to why legal empowerment should be an integral part of any skilling initiative. Survivors often face ongoing legal battles related to custody, financial compensation, or protection orders, which directly impact their ability to focus on work and rebuild their lives.

Challenges Identified:

- Many survivors do not understand their rights under the law, leading to manipulation by their abusers or delays in legal action.
- Legal procedures are expensive, time-consuming, and emotionally exhausting, making it difficult for survivors to pursue justice while also focusing on livelihood opportunities.

- Lack of survivor-friendly legal aid services means that many women abandon legal battles mid-way, further disempowering them financially and socially.

Solutions Proposed:

- **Incorporating Legal Awareness into Skilling Modules:** Programs should include basic training on financial rights, inheritance laws, custody laws, and employment protections to ensure survivors are legally informed.
- **Partnerships with Legal Aid Groups:** NGOs and skilling programs should collaborate with legal organisations to provide free legal clinics for survivors, ensuring they receive ongoing legal support without financial burden.
- **Legal Workshops with Employers:** Employers should be sensitised to the legal challenges survivors face, ensuring workplace policies are survivor-friendly (e.g., allowing time off for court hearings, protection against workplace harassment).

4. Economic Empowerment Beyond Skilling

The final segment of the roundtable explored long-term economic stability for survivors. Skilling is only the first step—what follows is ensuring that survivors can sustain themselves in the long run.

Challenges Identified:

- Survivors often face discrimination from employers, particularly if they have gaps in their work history or lack formal education.
- Childcare responsibilities and social stigma often push survivors into low-paying, informal jobs with little job security.
- There is no structured financial safety net (such as survivor-specific employment schemes or start-up grants) to help survivors transition from shelters to independent living.

Solutions Proposed:

- **Employer Sensitisation and Survivor-First Hiring Policies:** Organisations and businesses should be encouraged to adopt inclusive hiring policies that prioritise survivors.
- **Flexible Work Models:** Work-from-home or hybrid models should be expanded to ensure survivors have options that suit their circumstances.
- **Access to Micro-Loans and Business Incubators:** Survivors should have access to seed funding, cooperative business models, and financial mentorship to help them launch small enterprises or self-employment ventures.

Conclusion and Key Action Points

The roundtable concluded with a powerful consensus: skilling should not be treated as a one-size-fits-all solution. Instead, it must be trauma-informed, market-relevant, and legally and financially empowering.

Key action points included:

1. Developing survivor-led skilling programs that integrate mental health and legal awareness.
2. Strengthening digital and market-driven livelihoods to ensure financial security beyond shelter homes.
3. Building partnerships with businesses and policymakers to create safer, more inclusive workplaces for survivors.
4. Ensuring legal aid and financial inclusion are part of every skilling and livelihood program.

The discussion ended with a commitment from stakeholders to advocate for survivor-centric skilling models that prioritise dignity, autonomy, and long-term empowerment.

Way Forward

The Uttar Pradesh Stakeholders' Summit on Domestic Violence brought together survivors, grassroots organisations, legal experts, law enforcement officials, and development practitioners to engage in critical discussions on addressing the gaps and challenges in supporting domestic violence (DV) survivors. Throughout the summit, the recurring theme was the need for an intersectional, survivor-centred approach that ensures lasting empowerment.

The way forward for DV survivors must not be fragmented—it must integrate skilling, sustainable livelihoods, mental health support, and legal empowerment into a comprehensive ecosystem of care and opportunity. Survivors of domestic violence do not just need immediate relief; they need long-term, structural solutions that restore their agency, security, and dignity.

The first step toward breaking the cycle of violence is to equip survivors with skills that enable them to become financially independent. However, traditional vocational training programs have often failed survivors by offering stereotypical or low-income skills with limited market demand. Actionable steps towards the new approach to skilling can be collaborating with businesses to create direct hiring pipelines for survivors, keeping a check on government and private sector incentives for companies employing DV survivors, and providing access to technology to bridge the digital divide, enabling survivors to work from safe, controlled environments.

While skilling is crucial, it is not enough on its own—survivors need direct access to sustainable livelihood opportunities that provide economic stability and self-reliance. Many survivors have children and caregiving responsibilities, making it difficult to take up conventional 9-to-5 jobs. The lack of financial safety nets forces many survivors into exploitative labor or unstable informal work. Some sustainable livelihood solutions in the form of actionable steps can include employer sensitisation programs to create workplaces that actively hire and support DV survivors, partnerships with financial institutions to provide interest-free loans and economic aid for survivors' ventures, and integrating skilling programs with direct employment placement services to eliminate job-search barriers.

Similarly, mental health is often the most overlooked aspect of survivor rehabilitation, yet it is the foundation for all other aspects of empowerment. A need for holistic mental health interventions is required in the form of scaling up mental health services within One Stop Centers (OSCs), NGOs, and shelters, training frontline workers in trauma-informed approaches to ensure survivors receive compassionate care, and destigmatising mental health discussions through public awareness campaigns.

Lastly, legal empowerment is not just about securing justice—it is about ensuring survivors have the tools to protect their rights and independence. Survivors often lack basic legal awareness about their rights to protection, maintenance, and custody, and legal aid services are underfunded, under-resourced, and inaccessible in many districts. The strengthening of legal support is crucial for survivors, which can be done through creating “Legal Literacy” modules within shelters and skilling programs, strengthening the role of Protection Officers (POs) under the PWDVA by ensuring they are well-trained and accessible to survivors, and fast-tracking DV cases in the judicial system to ensure swift justice.

The summit underscored the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in ensuring long-term empowerment for survivors of domestic violence. No single intervention—whether skilling, legal aid, or mental health support—can work in isolation. Survivors need a holistic ecosystem that simultaneously addresses economic, psychological, and legal barriers.

The way forward must include:

1. Survivor-led initiatives that ensure programs are responsive to survivors' real needs.
2. Policy advocacy for stronger implementation of the PWDVA and survivor-friendly legal reforms.
3. Collaborations between the government, the private sector, and civil society to build sustainable economic models for survivors.
4. Public awareness campaigns to destigmatise survivors and encourage community-based support.

By strengthening these pathways, we can move closer to a society where survivors of domestic violence are not just free from abuse but are fully empowered to lead safe, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Glimpses of the Summit



Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals and organisations whose support and contributions were instrumental in making the Uttar Pradesh Domestic Violence Stakeholders' Summit a resounding success.

Our Partners

Hosts: Invisible Scars Foundation and Vanangana

Venue Partner: IIM Lucknow, Prabandh Nagar, IIM Road, Lucknow

Gift Bags: Goonj

Planning and Organisation Support: Vanangana

Guest of Honour and Chief Guest:

Prof. Roop Rekha Verma, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lucknow and Professor of Philosophy, Activist against gender-based violence

Moderators and Panelists

Moderators: Madhavi Kuckreja, Astha Bamba, Viiveck Verma

Panelists: Hina Desai, Shinjini Singh, Archana Singh, Ekta Viiveck Verma, Vrinda Shukla, Kavita Bundelkhandi, Richa Singh, Avdhesh Gupta

Attending Organisations

NAV BHARTIYA NARI VIKAS SAMITI

Gramin Punarnirman Sansthan

KURSATH FOUNDATION

Jan Vikas Kendra

Sri Ramanand Saraswati Pustakalaya

Anchal Samajik Vikas Samiti

Navbharat samaj Kalyan Samity

Prayas Jan Utthan Samiti

Aarambh Foundation
Sadbhavna Trust
Sabla
Anchal samajik vikas's samity
SAHAYOG
Nari chetna Foundation
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DEHAT India
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Astitwa Samajik Sanstha
HUMSAFAR
TARUN CHETNA
Initiative Foundation
Baseri Samajik Sansthan
Bhartiya Jan Sewa Ashram
Saajhi Duniya
Dasra- Rebuild India Fund
Gramonnati Sansthan
Vanangana
Swabhimani Samiti
Sangharsheel Mahila
Vanangana
Bhartiya Jan Kalyan Seva Sansthan
Sahayog
Social Action for Knowledge Building and Awareness Raising (SAKAR)
Mitra Bundelkhand
Peoples Voice

KALYANAM BHAVAH CHARITABLE TRUST

Manthan Foundation

People Voice

One Stop Centre

IPS 1090

The Third Eye

Bundelkhand Dalit Adhikar Manch(BDAM)

Writing and Designing the White Paper

Pranjali Sharma

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About Invisible Scars Foundation and Vanangana

Invisible Scars Foundation is a non-profit organisation headquartered in Hyderabad, dedicated to centering domestic violence and abuse conversations in the space of gender based violence. It helps Domestic violence & abuse (DVA) survivors of all ages and genders. The organisation works PAN India as well as with NRI survivors, and has covered the length and breadth of the country, supporting survivors. It aims to bring essential assistance directly to survivors' doorsteps, enabling them to focus on what truly matters during challenging times. Through a confidential, non-judgmental, compassionate, and inclusive approach, it ensures that survivors receive the assistance tailored to their specific circumstances. The organisation empowers survivors with available resources, including educational materials and customised toolkits. Invisible Scars Foundation has partnered with several NGOs, Legal Professionals, Police, and Other Domestic Violence and Abuse ecosystem stakeholders to create a countrywide network of empathetic professionals. ISF provides awareness, first-level support, mental health support, legal counselling, litigation support, shelter, skilling, livelihood, other ad hoc necessities, and policy advocacy.

Vanangana, a rural community-based women's rights collective, located in Bundelkhand, Uttar Pradesh, has been operating from Chitrakoot since 1993 and Banda since 2003. Vanangana is combating the grave and pervasive problem of violence against women by making Dalit women an important part of village development and thus ensuring their safety as well as an influential position in the social ladder. By creating platforms that allow women to come together, Vanangana enables them to identify common problems, confront them through collective action, and demonstrate the impact to the entire community. In all efforts to access justice, the organisation allows leadership to emerge from within the communities. Working strictly within the socioeconomic framework, Vanangana is uncompromising about the judicial system and promotes a multilayered application of the law, which cuts across social hierarchies.



INVISIBLE SCARS FOUNDATION

Impacting 20,000 Domestic Violence & Abuse Survivors

SERVICES WE OFFER

Survivor Support

FIRST LEVEL SUPPORT

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

LEGAL COUNSELLING

SKILLING/LIVELIHOOD

LITIGATION SUPPORT

SHELTER SUPPORT

MISCELLANEOUS

Sustainable Ecosystem Building

AWARENESS

CAPACITY BUILDING

POLICY ADVOCACY

If you or someone you know is facing
Domestic Violence & Abuse,
Reach out for Support!

HELPLINE



+91 90151 22122

Mon-Sat 9am-9pm

