

PRESS RELEASE

The world's most dangerous countries for women 2018 by Thomson Reuters Foundation

As per a recent poll titled 'The world's most dangerous countries for women 2018' Thomson Reuters Foundation has proclaimed India as the most dangerous country for women. This proclamation is based on an opinion poll, rather than any reports or data.

Reuters has used a flawed methodology to arrive at this claim. The ranking is based on a perception poll based on responses to simply six questions. The results are not derived from any kind of data and are solely based on inherently subjective opinions. Further, the poll has been conducted with 548 respondents, which have been defined by Reuters as 'experts focused on women's issues'. However, information on their designation, credentials, country of expertise or qualifications is not available thus reliability is an issue. The methodology given by the organisation also includes 'policymakers' as one of the respondents. However, no information or opinion has been sought from this Ministry regarding this poll.

The six questions posed as part of the poll cannot fairly be applied to all countries. E.g. the age bar for defining child marriage is different in every country, mutilation as a means of punishment, female genital mutilation, stoning etc. are not practiced in India.

Further, it is due to open data sharing, a consultative policy formulation process and transparent systems of the government that problems affecting women can be highlighted. There is open communication of the government with the media, researchers and NGOs thus creating the opportunity for public debate. The strong public discourse and independent media in the country are able to openly discuss sensitive issues of violence against women and debate is encouraged. It is due to this open system that issues of women are highlighted in India, thus perhaps building the perception that the situation in the country is particularly bad.

The poll has collected opinions of 548 persons on healthcare, discrimination, cultural traditions, sexual violence, non-sexual violence and human trafficking. India is far ahead of many countries in most of these areas and has also seen significant improvement in indicators when compared with its own performance in previous years. Therefore, the ranking of India is a surprise and clearly inaccurate.

For example, as per Sample Registration Survey (SRS) released in June 2018, India has registered a significant reduction of 22% in Maternal Mortality Ratio since 2013. Further, sex ratio at birth has significantly increased across the country, pointing to a drop in sex selective abortions.

On the economic front too there has been huge progress – over 45.6 lakh SHGs have been promoted across the country for women's livelihood with over Rs. 2000 crore available

in their revolving funds. More than 1.26 crore bank accounts have been opened under Sukanya Samruddhi Yojana to ensure financial inclusion of girls and more than half the Jan Dhan bank account holders in India are women. In primary and secondary levels of education, India has achieved Gender Parity with equal enrolment of girls and boys. It is thus not accurate to say that women in India lack access to economic resources.

There is positive data in the areas of violence too. There has been a drastic reduction in child marriage over the years, with reports of marriage in the age group of 0-9 years now being nil. Further, the percentage of women age 15-19 years who were already mothers or pregnant has dropped from 16% in 2005-06 to 7.9% in 2015-16.

As per NCRB data, 38,947 cases of rape have been registered in the year 2016. In the year 2014 and 2015, 36,735 and 34,651 cases were reported. The increase in reporting is a result of the favourable environment for women to access police authorities. Further, the rate of rape in India stands at 0.03 per 1000 population whereas US has reported a much higher figure of 1.2 rapes per 1000 population. The cases of acid attack are only incidental in the country and as mentioned earlier, practices of stoning, female genital mutilation etc. are not seen here. India can thus not possibly be the worst in the world in terms of violence.

Data on bonded and forced labour is also dropping drastically and the reports of crime are being dealt with seriously. Trafficking will also be comprehensively addressed through the recently prepared Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018.

Despite data to the contrary, the usage of an opinion poll to peg India as the most dangerous country for women is clearly an effort to malign the nation and draw attention away from real improvements seen in recent years.

Ever since the unfortunate incident of 2012, the entire country has been alert about the safety of women and ensuring their equality at home, in the economy and in society at large. The government has been taking a lead in this direction.

The recently enacted Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act 2012, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013 and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance 2018 have provided more stringent punishment for rape, have broadened its definition and included new offences such as acid attack, stalking, sexual harassment, voyeurism, disrobing and sexual violence against boys below 18 years of age. Amendment in The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 has also broadened the definition of child in need of care and protection to include those children who are at imminent risk of child marriage. The Act also allow juveniles (16 years or older) to be tried as adults for heinous offences like rape and murder.

State Governments are increasing representation of women in police to 33% of the total strength, to make the force more women-friendly. Institutional support mechanisms have

also been put in place like 193 One Stop Centres and Women Helplines in 31 States to provide 24 hour emergency and non-emergency response including police assistance, legal aid and legal counselling, medical aid, psycho-social counselling, temporary shelter etc. The institutions have provided support to over 12 lakh of women in the past ~3 years.

The bill making instant triple talaq a criminal offence has been approved which grants equality to Muslim women and is a powerful measure for women's empowerment.

To ensure women have equal opportunities, loans worth Rs. 2,25,904 crore have been extended to 7.88 crore women entrepreneurs, under the MUDRA Yojana. Over 50% of the certifications provided under the PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana have been to women. More women are joining the workforce and starting to control economic resources. Over 5 lakh women Directors currently appointed in companies, which is highest ever number in India.

Under PMAY (Urban), houses are being allotted in the name of the female head of the household or joint name of male head and wife. In PMAY (Grameen), this is being done where government land is allotted, and encouraged in other cases. Over 2 lakh houses for women sanctioned under PMAY (Grameen). The right of women to ancestral land is also being encouraged.

The government has further launched multiple scholarships with special focus on education of girl child in secondary as well as higher education which are showing significant positive outcomes. Dropouts rates have come down dramatically and more women are carrying on their education to college level and beyond.

Maternal health has also shown significant improvement with concerted efforts having been made by the government. In a major step, maternity leave has been extended to 6 months so women do not lose their jobs or income due to pregnancy. Cash incentives are also being given to mothers across the country to encourage them to register pregnancies, deliver in hospitals and access pre and post natal care.

These efforts have shown results and the life of the average Indian woman is far improved from a decade ago. She is also in a much better position than a number of women in other countries around the world. Facts clearly show that the opinion of India as the most dangerous country for women is not a reflection of reality.
