

Mistreatment and Coercion: Unethical Sterilization in India

Female sterilization in India overwhelmingly dominates the contraceptive method mix used across the country, at a colossal 75%. In addition to this, 85% of the family planning budget is used for promoting and implementation of female sterilization through camps in rural India. Through these camps, women continue to be pushed into the procedure, often with a glaring lack of informed consent. Sterilization in India has long been used as a means of target-driven population control, disregarding the reproductive autonomy of women in favour of curbing population growth. Although the National Population Policy 2000 broke new ground in prioritizing reproductive rights over population control, the existence of sterilization camps and the rampant, disproportionate promotion of the procedure demonstrate that implementation 18 years on remains to be fully realized.

In 2015, the *Devika Biswas v Union of India* case challenged appalling sterilization camps that were taking place across the country, rounding up poor women and loading them like cattle into abandoned schools, sterilizing them in barbaric and highly unsanitary conditions, without anesthesia. These camps resulted in many deaths, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, the women did not consent to the procedure – many of them were young and in the reproductive age group of 18-39. In a landmark judgment, the Supreme Court outlawed the camps and directed various states to provide compensation to the families of the victims.

Nevertheless, sterilization in India is still problematic. Ground level health workers are heavily incentivized to encourage women to undergo the procedure, rather than promoting condom or oral contraceptive pill usage. Sterilization remains a procedure that is performed at a disproportionately high rate when compared with other nations. This book will look at sterilization through a rights-based lens, to shed light on how sterilization has been used for years as a weapon to impede reproductive autonomy and champion coercive population control tactics, at the expense of women's bodies. The book also highlights the struggle through the use of law to change the way family planning programmes especially female sterilization was being implemented

INDIA'S FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMME

