

## Press Release

### Status of Policing in India Report 2025: Police Torture and (Un)Accountability

**New Delhi, March 27, 2025:** The Status of Policing in India Report (SPIR) 2025 was launched yesterday evening, March 26, 2025, 6:30 PM, at the India International Centre by a distinguished panel of experts, including Justice S. Muralidhar, former Chief Justice of the Odisha High Court, Ms Vrinda Grover, lawyer and activist, Dr Amar Jesani, public health expert and the Editor of the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics, and Mr Prakash Singh, IPS (Retd) and a former DGP of UP, Assam and BSF.

The SPIRs have been brought out since 2018 by Common Cause and Lokniti-CSDS. Sixth in the series, the SPIR 2025 on 'Police Torture and (Un)Accountability' is the only report of its kind in India to focus on police high-handedness and custodial violence at police stations across the country. The report highlights the pervasive issue of police torture and violence and the systemic failures in oversight mechanisms designed to ensure justice and fairness to those in police custody.

The report launch was followed by a panel discussion on 'Police Torture and Accountability: Where are the Safeguards?', with noted experts examining the role of legal frameworks, oversight institutions, and systemic reforms in addressing police torture and unlawful use of violence. The panel discussion was introduced by the panel's moderator **Professor Suhas Palshikar** (Chief Editor, Studies in India Politics and Co-founder, Lokniti) who remarked that the trends found in this report should worry any citizen of India and the question is not only about the impunity of the police, but also on how society accepts the heinous crime of torture.

Former IPS officer **Mr. Prakash Singh** started the discussion by condemning police torture in several of the cases mentioned in the report. *"It is a painful reading for me, as it exposes the weakness of the police"*, he said. He raised the foundational issues of lack of proper definition of torture and the need to understand the reasons behind why they are committed, *"What is torture? In India there is no definition of torture. Does a slap constitute torture? I don't think so. Torture is much more serious, there has to be grievous hurt, solitary confinement, waterboarding..."*. He also highlighted the fact that a majority of police personnel do believe that legal procedures should be followed instead of killing 'dangerous criminals', and how more than 70% of police personnel support education on human rights, prevention of torture, and evidence-based interrogation techniques. He concluded his speech by remarking how police's reluctance to use force can work to the detriment of the public and protection of property.

Public health expert **Dr Amar Jesani**, highlighted the role of medical professionals and medical techniques in perpetuation of police torture. He talked about "scientific torture techniques" often employed by the senior police officers, which leave minimal physical traces. He also questioned the objective and efficacy of torture, saying, *"There is no research on how effective torture is."* He brought in the important perspective of prejudices within the medical community

leading to the perpetuation of torture. *"In 1995, IMA received international funding to get data on torture. They found that 60% of doctors believe that torture by police is necessary", he said.*

Advocate **Vrinda Grover** added to the discourse on the lack of a legal definition of torture. She said, *"Recently, three new criminal laws have been brought in, and we are told by the government on the floor of the House in Parliament that these laws are being decolonized... One of the things that was absent from the colonial law, the Indian Penal Code (IPC), was the offence of torture... One would have imagined that this was high time for torture to be introduced as an offence. Its silence and omission today are very striking."* She added, *"The Indian state signed the UN Convention Against Torture as far back as 1997. However, we have not ratified it. The reason we have not ratified it is that under the Indian Constitution, there is a requirement that a domestic law must first be passed, and only thereafter can ratification take place"* Ms. Grover also talked about the bias within the police, asserting, *"There is an institutional bias in the police force, we refuse to recognize it and correct it."*

**Justice S. Muralidhar** began his address with a satirical take on the issue, giving the analogy of a bear being tortured by the police to confess that it is a fox. In his enthralling address, he brought in many important aspects of police torture and the complicity of various actors in a light-hearted speech. He brought in the dangers of making confessions before the police admissible in court. He said, *"...double meanings have crept their way from English to Hindi. A suspect after making a confession to a police officer, goes to the magistrate and narrates 'sir, my sister, my mother, they were also brought before me, they were tortured before my eyes'. The police officer said 'if you don't sign now' I will encounter you'."*

The findings of the Status of Policing in India Report 2025 reveal an alarming disregard for constitutional protections against police excesses. Despite clear legal safeguards, custodial torture remains a systemic issue, with a large section of the police personnel justifying its use to a great extent. The absence of stringent oversight mechanisms, police disregard for due process and external safeguards, and reluctance to enforce accountability perpetuate a culture of impunity. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive police reforms aimed at eliminating torture, ensuring due process, and restoring public faith in law enforcement institutions.

SPIR 2025 presents an in-depth analysis of police torture and its far-reaching consequences on justice and human rights. Amid growing concerns over custodial violence, legal safeguards, and the lack of accountability, this report presents critical insights into the state of policing in India and the routinisation of torture. It evaluates existing legal provisions, their enforcement, and gaps in oversight mechanisms that allow such violations to persist. The findings shed light on the challenges of enforcing police accountability and the urgent need for institutional reforms.

The study included a survey of police personnel of all ranks across 17 states and UTs. In addition to this, in-depth interviews were conducted with other accountability actors—lawyers, judges and doctors—to gauge their perceptions and experiences with cases of police torture. The study also examined government reports, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) data, National

Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) statistics, and utilised the Right to Information (RTI) to obtain crucial data from the concerned departments.

Some of the highlights of the report are given below:

- The police report poor compliance with arrest procedures. Overall, 41 percent police personnel said that arrest procedures are “always” adhered to, while 24 percent said that they are “rarely or never” adhered to. Kerala reported the highest compliance (94% said “always”), while Jharkhand reported the poorest compliance (8% said “always”). IPS officers (33%) are the least likely to say that these procedures are always complied with, while upper subordinates (49%) are the most likely to say so.
- An alarming proportion of police personnel justify the use of ‘third-degree methods’. Thirty percent of police personnel said that ‘third-degree methods’ are justified towards the accused in serious criminal cases. Nine percent said they are justified in petty offences. IPS officers and those respondents who often conduct interrogations are the most likely to justify the use of third-degree methods.
- Thirty percent of police personnel have a high propensity to justify torture, and another 32 percent have a moderate propensity to justify it. IPS officers are the most likely to have a high propensity to justify torture (34%), as are police officers who often conduct interrogations (37%). One out of two police personnel from Jharkhand (50%) and Gujarat (49%) have a high propensity to justify torture, while those from Kerala (1%) are the least likely to justify it.
- Eleven percent of the police personnel feel that hitting/slapping family members of the accused is absolutely justified, and 30 percent said that it is sometimes justified. A quarter of the respondents (25%) justify slapping “uncooperative” witnesses, while nine percent justify the use of third-degree methods against them.

**Access the full report here:**

[https://www.commoncause.in/wotadmin/upload/SPIR\\_2025.pdf](https://www.commoncause.in/wotadmin/upload/SPIR_2025.pdf)

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