

# Indian women at risk in mental institutions

December 3 2014

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From left to right, Human Rights Watch (HRW) activists Shantha Rau Barriga, Meenakshi Ganguly, Bhargavi Davar from Babu Trust for Research on Mind and Discourse, HRW's Kriti Sharma, and Smriti Minocha from Human Rights Law Network, release a report titled "Treated Worse than Animals: Abuses against Women and Girls with Psychosocial or Intellectual Disabilities in Institutions in India," in New Delhi, India, Wednesday, Dec. 3, 2014. Women and girls with disabilities in India are pushed into mental institutions, where they live in unsanitary conditions and are at constant risk of physical and sexual violence, Human Rights Watch said in a report Wednesday. (AP Photo /Manish Swarup)

Women and girls with disabilities in India are pushed into mental institutions, where they live in unsanitary conditions and are at constant

risk of physical and sexual violence, Human Rights Watch said in a report Wednesday.

The report details the lives of [women](#) and girls with disabilities in six cities across India between December 2012 through November 2014, and involved more than 200 interviews with women and girls with psychosocial or [intellectual disabilities](#) as well as their families, caretakers, [mental health professionals](#), and government and police officials.

While India's public health system is in a state of disrepair, those suffering from mental disabilities are especially vulnerable in country where there is little education about such illnesses and people who suffer from them are often either shunned or mocked.

Mental hospitals are still commonly called "mad houses" and in the absence of community support, families often cover up illnesses like depression and bipolar disorder instead of seeking help. Both men and women suffer from a lack of care and neglect, but in this deeply misogynistic country women are much more vulnerable to abuse.

"Women and girls with disabilities are dumped in institutions by their family members or police in part because the government is failing to provide appropriate support and services," said Kriti Sharma, researcher at Human Rights Watch.

"And once they're locked up, their lives are often rife with isolation, fear and abuse, with no hope of escape."

The report called "Treated Worse than Animals: Abuses against Women and Girls with Psychosocial or Intellectual Disabilities in Institutions in India," documents involuntary admission and arbitrary detention in mental hospitals and residential care institutions across India

It also studies the abysmal conditions—the overcrowding and lack of hygiene and inadequate general health facilities—as well as the forced treatment and the abuses the women and [girls](#) suffer.

Official disability estimates in India are vague. The most recent 2011 census estimates that only a little over 2 percent of the country's 1.2 billion population has a disability—including 1.5 million people with intellectual disabilities and a mere 722,826 people with psychosocial disabilities such as schizophrenia or bipolar condition.

These figures are strikingly lower than international estimates by the United Nations and World Health Organization which estimate that 15 percent of the world's population lives with a disability.

Less than 1 percent of India's federal budget is allocated to mental health.

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