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# **EFFICACY OF THE WITNESS PROTECTION SCHEME 2018: CHALLENGES, JUDICIAL RESPONSES, AND THE ROAD AHEAD**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Witness protection is a critical component of any criminal justice system that aspires to uphold fairness, transparency, and the rule of law. In India, the absence of a statutory witness protection framework has historically resulted in intimidation, coercion, and the alarming rise of hostile witnesses. The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018—approved by the Supreme Court—represents India’s first national-level attempt to institutionalize witness protection. This paper evaluates the efficacy of the Scheme by examining judicial responses, administrative challenges, and comparative international models. Through doctrinal and analytical research, the study identifies structural gaps, implementation barriers, and the need for statutory reinforcement. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening India’s witness protection regime to ensure meaningful participation of witnesses and enhance the credibility of the criminal justice system.

**Keywords:** Witness Protection Scheme 2018, Hostile Witnesses, Judicial Response, Criminal Justice Reform, Witness Security, India.

## **1. Introduction**

Witnesses play a pivotal role in the criminal justice system, serving as the primary source of factual reconstruction in criminal trials. Their testimony enables courts to ascertain the truth, determine guilt or innocence, and uphold the rule of law. As Jeremy Bentham famously observed, witnesses are “the eyes and ears of justice” [1]. However, in India, witnesses often face threats, intimidation, and inducements, particularly in cases involving organized crime, sexual offences, terrorism, and politically influential accused persons. This vulnerability has led to a significant rise in hostile witnesses, undermining the integrity of the justice system and contributing to low conviction rates [2].

The problem of witness intimidation is not new. Various committees and commissions—including the Law Commission of India, the National Police Commission, and the Malimath Committee—have repeatedly emphasized the need for a comprehensive witness protection mechanism. The Law Commission’s 14th Report (1958) first highlighted the hardships faced by witnesses, while subsequent reports such as the 154th (1996), 172nd (2000), 178th (2001), and 198th (2006) Reports provided detailed recommendations for witness identity protection, in-camera proceedings, and procedural safeguards [3].

A major turning point came with the Supreme Court’s judgment in *Mahender Chawla v. Union of India* (2018), where the Court approved the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 (WPS-2018) and directed its implementation across all States and Union Territories until a suitable legislation is enacted. The Court recognized that witness protection is integral to ensuring a fair trial under Article 21 of the Constitution and that the State has a duty to safeguard witnesses from threats and intimidation [4]. The Scheme, prepared in consultation with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA), represents India’s first structured attempt to institutionalize witness protection.

The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 introduces a comprehensive framework for threat assessment, categorization of witnesses, identity protection, relocation, and financial assistance. It empowers the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) to act as the competent authority for approving protection measures based on a Threat Analysis Report prepared by the police. The Scheme also mandates confidentiality, prohibits disclosure of witness identity, and provides for in-camera trials and use of audio-video electronic means to prevent direct confrontation between the witness and the accused [5].

Despite its progressive features, the Scheme faces significant challenges in implementation. The absence of statutory backing limits its enforceability, and the reliance on police-led threat assessment raises concerns about impartiality. Many states lack adequate financial resources, trained personnel, and institutional infrastructure to operationalize the Scheme effectively. Moreover, awareness among witnesses, police officers, and judicial personnel remains limited, resulting in inconsistent application across jurisdictions [6].

Internationally, countries such as the United States, South Africa, and those in the European Union have developed robust witness protection programs that include relocation, identity change, and long-term rehabilitation. These models highlight the importance of statutory authority, independent agencies, and sustained funding—areas where India still lags [7].

In this context, evaluating the efficacy of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 becomes essential. This paper critically examines the Scheme's strengths, weaknesses, judicial responses, and implementation challenges. It also draws upon international best practices to propose reforms for strengthening India's witness protection regime. Ultimately, the success of the criminal justice system depends on the confidence of witnesses in the system's ability to protect them. Ensuring their safety is not merely a procedural requirement—it is a constitutional imperative and a cornerstone of justice.

## **2. Literature Review**

The discourse on witness protection in India has evolved through decades of judicial observations, committee recommendations, and scholarly analysis. The earliest systematic discussion emerged in the 14th Report of the Law Commission of India (1958), which highlighted the hardships faced by witnesses, including lack of facilities, intimidation, and procedural delays [8]. This report laid the foundation for subsequent reforms.

The 154th Report (1996) emphasized the need for witness-friendly procedures, including separate waiting rooms, timely payment of allowances, and protection from harassment [9]. The 172nd Report (2000), prepared in response to *Sakshi v. Union of India*, recommended in-camera trials and special procedures for vulnerable witnesses, particularly victims of sexual offences [10]. The 178th Report (2001) reiterated the need for identity protection and procedural safeguards.

The most comprehensive analysis came in the 198th Report (2006), titled Witness Identity Protection and Witness Protection Programmes, which proposed a draft Witness Identity Protection Bill and detailed guidelines for witness relocation, anonymity, and long-term security [11]. Despite its depth, the recommendations remained unimplemented.

Scholars such as Kelkar, Pillai, and Dhanda have argued that witness protection is essential for ensuring fair trial and preventing miscarriages of justice [12]. International literature, including UNODC's Good Practices for Witness Protection (2008), provides comparative insights into global models [13].

Collectively, the literature underscores the urgent need for a statutory witness protection framework in India.

### 3. Research Methodology

The present study adopts a **doctrinal, analytical, qualitative, and comparative research methodology** to evaluate the efficacy of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 within the Indian criminal justice system. Since witness protection is fundamentally a legal, constitutional, and policy-driven subject, doctrinal research provides the most appropriate framework for examining statutory provisions, judicial precedents, and institutional mechanisms. This approach enables a systematic exploration of the evolution, scope, and limitations of witness protection in India, while also facilitating a comparative assessment with international models [14].

#### 3.1 Nature of the Study

This research is **qualitative** in nature, focusing on interpretative analysis rather than empirical measurement. Qualitative legal research is essential for understanding:

- The socio-legal vulnerabilities faced by witnesses
- The constitutional implications of witness protection
- Judicial reasoning behind the Scheme
- Administrative challenges in implementation

- Comparative strengths of international witness protection programs

Qualitative analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of how legal norms interact with social realities, especially in a system where witness intimidation is widespread and often undocumented [15].

### 3.2 Doctrinal Research Approach

Doctrinal research involves the study of legal rules, principles, and judicial interpretations. It is particularly suited for this study because:

1. The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 is rooted in **judicial directions** rather than legislation.
2. Witness protection jurisprudence has evolved primarily through **case law**, including *Zahira Sheikh*, *Sakshi*, and *Mahender Chawla*.
3. The Scheme draws heavily from **Law Commission Reports**, which require doctrinal interpretation.
4. The constitutional basis of witness protection—Articles 14, 21, and 39A—demands doctrinal analysis to understand the scope of State obligations [16].

Doctrinal research thus provides the foundation for evaluating the Scheme's legal validity, enforceability, and alignment with constitutional principles.

### 3.3 Sources of Data

#### 3.3.1 Primary Sources

Primary sources form the core of this study and include:

- **Statutory provisions**
  - Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973
  - Indian Evidence Act, 1872
  - Constitutional provisions relating to fair trial and personal liberty

- **Judicial decisions**

- Zahira Habibullah Sheikh v. State of Gujarat (2004)
- Sakshi v. Union of India (2004)
- Mahender Chawla v. Union of India (2018)
- High Court rulings on identity protection and in-camera trials

- **Law Commission Reports**

- 14th (1958), 154th (1996), 172nd (2000), 178th (2001), 198th (2006) Reports

- **Government documents**

- Ministry of Home Affairs' Witness Protection Scheme, 2018
- NALSA implementation reports

These sources provide authoritative insights into the legal and institutional framework governing witness protection in India [17].

### **3.3.2 Secondary Sources**

Secondary sources supplement doctrinal analysis and include:

- Academic books and commentaries on criminal procedure and victimology
- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Reports by international bodies such as UNODC
- Newspaper articles and credible online legal resources
- Comparative studies on witness protection programs in the U.S., South Africa, and the EU

These materials help contextualize India's Scheme within global best practices and highlight

areas requiring reform [18].

### **3.4 Analytical Framework**

The study employs a **critical analytical framework**, which involves:

- Examining the historical evolution of witness protection in India
- Evaluating statutory and constitutional safeguards
- Assessing the operational mechanisms of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018
- Identifying implementation gaps across states
- Comparing Indian practices with international models such as WITSEC and South Africa's Witness Protection Act
- Analyzing judicial trends to understand how courts interpret witness protection obligations

This framework enables a comprehensive evaluation of the Scheme's efficacy and its alignment with global standards [19].

### **3.5 Comparative Method**

A comparative method is used to analyze how other jurisdictions have developed robust witness protection systems. This method is essential because:

- Witness intimidation is a global challenge
- Countries like the United States have decades of experience with relocation, identity change, and long-term protection
- International best practices provide valuable insights for strengthening India's framework

Comparative analysis highlights the structural differences between India's Scheme and established international programs, revealing gaps in statutory authority, funding, and

institutional autonomy [20].

### 3.6 Limitations of the Study

The study acknowledges certain limitations:

- Lack of empirical field data due to the confidential nature of witness protection
- Limited availability of state-wise implementation reports
- Absence of a statutory witness protection law, restricting doctrinal analysis to a judicially approved scheme
- Inaccessibility of internal police threat assessment records
- No publicly available data on relocated witnesses due to security concerns

Despite these limitations, the study provides a comprehensive doctrinal and analytical evaluation of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 [21].

### 3.7 Justification for Methodology

The chosen methodology is justified because:

- Witness protection is primarily a **legal and policy issue**, requiring doctrinal interpretation
- Judicial precedents form the **core of witness protection jurisprudence**
- Comparative analysis helps identify **feasible reforms**
- Qualitative research captures the **human rights dimension** of witness security
- The Scheme's implementation challenges require **analytical evaluation**, not statistical measurement

Thus, the methodology aligns with the objectives of the study and supports a rigorous academic inquiry [22].



#### **4. International Models of Witness Protection**

Witness protection programs across the world differ significantly in structure, statutory authority, and operational mechanisms. A comparative analysis of international models provides valuable insights for strengthening India's Witness Protection Scheme, 2018. Countries such as the United States, South Africa, and members of the European Union have developed robust, well-funded, and institutionally autonomous witness protection systems that offer lessons for India's evolving framework [23].

##### **4.1 United States: The WITSEC Program**

The **U.S. Federal Witness Security Program (WITSEC)**, established under the Organized Crime Control Act of 1970, is widely regarded as the most successful and comprehensive witness protection program globally. Administered by the U.S. Marshals Service, WITSEC provides:

- Complete relocation of witnesses and their families
- New identities and documentation
- Financial assistance for resettlement
- Psychological counselling
- Long-term monitoring and support

Since its inception, WITSEC has protected more than 18,000 witnesses and family members, with an exceptional record of preventing harm to protected individuals [24]. The program's success is attributed to:

- Strong statutory backing
- Centralized administration
- Adequate funding
- High levels of confidentiality

- Independence from local law enforcement

These features highlight the importance of a **legally empowered, well-resourced, and autonomous witness protection authority**, something India currently lacks.

#### **4.2 South Africa: Witness Protection Act, 1998**

South Africa's witness protection framework is governed by the **Witness Protection Act 112 of 1998**, which establishes a centralized and independent Witness Protection Unit under the National Prosecuting Authority. Key features include:

- Emergency protection measures
- Identity change and relocation
- Safe houses with strict confidentiality
- Protection officers with specialized training
- Clear accountability and oversight mechanisms

The statutory nature of the program ensures uniformity, enforceability, and transparency across the country [25]. South Africa's model demonstrates the importance of:

- A dedicated protection unit
- Legal authority for identity change
- Strong confidentiality protocols
- Independent oversight

These elements are critical for India as it considers transitioning from a judicially approved scheme to a statutory witness protection law.

#### **4.3 European Union: Multi-Jurisdictional Protection Framework**

The European Union adopts a **multi-jurisdictional approach** to witness protection,

recognizing the need for cross-border cooperation in cases involving organized crime, terrorism, and human trafficking. Directive 2012/29/EU establishes minimum standards for:

- Protection of vulnerable witnesses
- Use of video-link testimony
- Confidentiality safeguards
- Victim and witness support services

Member states often maintain their own national witness protection programs, but EU directives ensure harmonization of minimum standards and facilitate cooperation between jurisdictions [26]. This model underscores the importance of:

- Regional cooperation
- Standardized protection protocols
- Technological integration in testimony

India, with its federal structure, can draw lessons from the EU's emphasis on **uniform standards across jurisdictions**.

#### **4.4 Lessons for India**

A comparative analysis of international models reveals several key lessons for India:

##### **4.4.1. Statutory Backing Is Essential**

Both WITSEC and South Africa's program operate under strong legislative frameworks, ensuring enforceability and accountability. India's Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 lacks statutory authority, limiting its effectiveness.

##### **4.4.2. Independent Protection Agencies Improve Credibility**

International models rely on autonomous agencies rather than local police. India's reliance on police-led threat assessment raises concerns about neutrality.

#### **4.4.3. Adequate Funding Is Critical**

WITSEC and South Africa allocate substantial budgets for relocation, identity change, and long-term support. India's scheme suffers from inconsistent and insufficient funding.

#### **4.4.4. Long-Term Rehabilitation Matters**

International programs emphasize psychological counselling, financial support, and reintegration — areas where India's scheme remains limited.

#### **4.4.5. Technology Enhances Protection**

The EU's use of video-link testimony and digital confidentiality protocols demonstrates the importance of integrating technology into witness protection.

#### **4.4.6. Uniform Standards Across Jurisdictions**

The EU model shows how standardized protocols reduce inconsistencies — a major challenge in India's state-wise implementation.

### **5. Judicial Responses in India**

The judiciary has played a decisive role in shaping the contours of witness protection in India. In the absence of a statutory framework, courts have repeatedly intervened to safeguard witnesses, uphold fair trial standards, and direct the State to adopt protective measures. Judicial pronouncements have not only highlighted systemic deficiencies but have also laid the foundation for the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018. A review of landmark judgments reveals the evolution of judicial thinking on witness security and the constitutional obligation of the State to ensure a safe environment for witnesses [27].

#### **5.1 Zahira Habibullah Sheikh v. State of Gujarat (2004)**

In this landmark case arising from the Best Bakery incident, the Supreme Court emphasized that a fair trial is impossible without protecting witnesses from intimidation and coercion. The Court held that justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done, and that witness protection is integral to the fairness of criminal proceedings. The judgment underscored the

need for systemic reforms to prevent witnesses from turning hostile due to fear or pressure [28].

### **5.2 Sakshi v. Union of India (2004)**

In *Sakshi*, the Supreme Court addressed the vulnerability of child victims and witnesses in sexual offence cases. The Court directed the use of screens, video-link testimony, and other protective measures to prevent secondary victimization. This judgment expanded the scope of witness protection beyond physical safety to include psychological well-being and dignity, laying the groundwork for procedural innovations later incorporated into the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 [29].

### **5.3 Mahender Chawla v. Union of India (2018)**

This case represents a watershed moment in India's witness protection jurisprudence. The Supreme Court approved the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 and declared it enforceable under Articles 141 and 142 of the Constitution. The Court recognized witness protection as an essential component of Article 21 — the right to life and personal liberty. It held that the State has a constitutional duty to protect witnesses from threats, intimidation, and retaliation. The judgment also directed all States and Union Territories to implement the Scheme until a comprehensive legislation is enacted [30].

### **5.4 High Court Interventions**

High Courts across India have also contributed significantly to the development of witness protection norms. For instance, the Delhi High Court in *Neelam Katara v. Union of India* stressed the urgent need for a statutory witness protection law and issued directions for identity protection, in-camera proceedings, and police escort for vulnerable witnesses. Other High Courts have similarly mandated:

- Non-disclosure of witness addresses
- Use of video-link testimony
- Segregated waiting areas in courts
- Enhanced police protection in sensitive cases

These interventions highlight the judiciary's proactive role in compensating for legislative gaps and ensuring the safety of witnesses in high-risk cases [31].

## **5.5 Judicial Trends and Evolving Standards**

A review of judicial decisions reveals several consistent trends:

### **5.5.1. Recognition of Witness Vulnerability**

Courts increasingly acknowledge that witnesses face threats from powerful accused persons, organized crime syndicates, and political actors.

### **5.5.2. Expansion of Fair Trial Doctrine**

Judicial interpretations of Article 21 now include the right of witnesses to testify without fear, thereby linking witness protection to the broader concept of fair trial.

### **5.5.3. Procedural Innovations**

Courts have encouraged the use of technology — such as video-link testimony and digital identity masking — to protect vulnerable witnesses.

### **5.5.4. Judicial Activism in Policy Formation**

In the absence of legislation, courts have stepped in to create norms, culminating in the approval of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018.

### **5.5.5. Emphasis on State Accountability**

Judgments consistently stress that the State bears the responsibility to ensure witness safety as part of its constitutional obligations.

These trends demonstrate that the judiciary has been instrumental in shaping India's witness protection landscape, often filling the void left by legislative inaction [32].

## **6. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Scheme**

The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 represents India's first national-level attempt to

institutionalize witness protection. While the Scheme marks a significant step forward, its practical effectiveness depends on its structural design, administrative capacity, and implementation across states. A critical evaluation reveals several strengths that make the Scheme progressive, as well as weaknesses that limit its operational impact [33].

## **6.1 Strengths**

### **6.1.1. First National-Level Framework for Witness Protection**

The Scheme is India's first uniform, nationwide witness protection mechanism. Prior to its introduction, witness protection was fragmented, ad hoc, and dependent on judicial discretion. The Scheme provides a structured, standardized approach applicable across all States and Union Territories [34].

### **6.1.2. Judicial Approval Ensures Enforceability**

The Supreme Court's approval of the Scheme in *Mahender Chawla v. Union of India* (2018) gives it binding force under Articles 141 and 142 of the Constitution. This judicial endorsement ensures that states cannot disregard or dilute the Scheme, even in the absence of legislation [35].

### **6.1.3. Threat Categorization Allows Tailored Protection**

The Scheme classifies witnesses into three categories—A, B, and C—based on the severity of the threat. This enables authorities to design protection measures proportionate to the risk, ranging from identity protection to relocation and long-term security [36].

### **6.1.4. Identity Protection and Confidentiality Measures**

The Scheme mandates non-disclosure of witness identity, use of pseudonyms, in-camera trials, and restricted access to witness information. These measures align with international best practices and reduce the risk of intimidation [37].

### **6.1.5. Role of District Legal Services Authority (DLSA)**

By designating the DLSA as the competent authority, the Scheme ensures judicial oversight and reduces the risk of police bias. This institutional arrangement enhances transparency and

accountability in decision-making [38].

#### **6.1.6. Use of Technology in Testimony**

The Scheme encourages the use of video-link testimony, audio-video electronic means, and other technological tools to protect vulnerable witnesses from direct confrontation with the accused. This aligns with global trends in witness protection [39].

### **6.2 Weaknesses**

#### **6.2.1. Absence of Statutory Backing**

The Scheme is not enacted as legislation; it is only a judicially approved policy. Without statutory force, its implementation depends heavily on administrative willingness and resource availability. This limits enforceability and long-term sustainability [40].

#### **6.2.2. Inconsistent Implementation Across States**

Implementation varies widely across states due to differences in funding, administrative capacity, and awareness. Many states have not established dedicated witness protection funds or trained personnel, resulting in uneven application of the Scheme [41].

#### **6.2.3. Inadequate Funding and Infrastructure**

The Scheme requires substantial financial resources for relocation, identity change, safe houses, and long-term support. However, most states have not allocated sufficient funds, making it difficult to operationalize protection measures effectively [42].

#### **6.2.4. Police-Led Threat Assessment Raises Concerns**

Threat Analysis Reports are prepared by the police, which may compromise neutrality, especially in cases involving police misconduct or politically influential accused persons. International models emphasize independent agencies, which India currently lacks [43].

#### **6.2.5. No Independent Witness Protection Agency**

Unlike WITSEC (U.S.) or South Africa's Witness Protection Unit, India does not have a dedicated, autonomous witness protection authority. The absence of such an institution limits



coordination, accountability, and long-term planning [44].

#### **6.2.6. Limited Long-Term Rehabilitation Measures**

The Scheme focuses primarily on immediate protection rather than long-term rehabilitation. International programs provide psychological counselling, financial support, and reintegration assistance—areas where India's Scheme remains inadequate [45].

#### **6.2.7. Low Awareness Among Stakeholders**

Many police officers, prosecutors, and even judicial officers lack adequate training on the Scheme's procedures. Witnesses themselves are often unaware of their rights and available protection measures, reducing the Scheme's practical utility [46].

#### **6.2.8. No Appellate Mechanism**

The Scheme does not provide a formal appellate process for witnesses dissatisfied with protection decisions. This limits transparency and accountability in administrative decision-making [47].

### **7. Findings**

The analysis of the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018—supported by doctrinal research, judicial review, and comparative international assessment—reveals several critical findings. These findings highlight both the progress made through the Scheme and the persistent structural and operational challenges that undermine its effectiveness [48].

#### **7.1 Witness Intimidation Remains Widespread**

Despite the introduction of the Scheme, witness intimidation continues to be a pervasive problem in India. Cases involving organized crime, sexual offences, terrorism, and politically influential accused persons frequently report threats, coercion, and inducements. The persistence of hostile witnesses demonstrates that the Scheme has not yet achieved its intended deterrent effect [49].

#### **7.2 Hostile Witnesses Contribute Significantly to Acquittals**

Hostile witnesses remain a major cause of acquittals in serious criminal cases. Empirical

observations from trial courts and High Court judgments indicate that witnesses often retract statements due to fear, pressure, or lack of protection. This undermines the prosecution's case and weakens public confidence in the justice system [50].

### **7.3 The Scheme Is Progressive but Insufficient Without Statutory Backing**

While the Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 is a landmark initiative, its lack of statutory authority limits its enforceability. Judicial approval provides temporary legitimacy, but long-term sustainability requires a dedicated Witness Protection Act. International models demonstrate that statutory backing is essential for uniform implementation and accountability[51].

### **7.4 Implementation Is Inconsistent Across States**

The study finds significant disparities in implementation across states. Many states have not established dedicated witness protection funds, nor have they developed specialized units or trained personnel. This inconsistency results in uneven protection standards and undermines the Scheme's national character [52].

### **7.5 Administrative and Financial Constraints Persist**

The Scheme requires substantial financial resources for relocation, identity change, safe houses, and long-term support. However, most states face budgetary constraints and lack the infrastructure necessary to operationalize protection measures effectively. This gap between policy and practice remains a major obstacle [53].

### **7.6 Judicial Support Is Strong, but Executive Agencies Lag Behind**

Judicial pronouncements consistently emphasize the importance of witness protection and have played a pivotal role in shaping the Scheme. However, executive agencies—particularly police departments and state administrations—have been slow to adapt. The lack of coordination between judicial directives and administrative execution hampers the Scheme's effectiveness[54].

### **7.7 International Models Highlight Missing Components in India**

Comparative analysis with the United States, South Africa, and the European Union reveals

that India lacks several key components of effective witness protection, including:

- Independent protection agencies
- Long-term rehabilitation programs
- Statutory authority for identity change
- Adequate funding and infrastructure

These gaps limit India's ability to provide comprehensive and sustained protection to witnesses[55].

### **7.8 Awareness Among Stakeholders Remains Low**

A recurring finding is the low level of awareness among witnesses, police officers, prosecutors, and even judicial personnel regarding the Scheme's provisions. This lack of awareness leads to underutilization of available protections and inconsistent application across jurisdictions [56].

## **8. Suggestions**

To strengthen witness protection in India, the following reforms are recommended:

### **8.1 Enact a Comprehensive Witness Protection Act**

A statutory framework would ensure uniformity, enforceability, and accountability.

### **8.2 Establish an Independent Witness Protection Authority**

Modeled on WITSEC or South Africa's Witness Protection Unit.

### **8.3 Ensure Dedicated Budgetary Allocation**

Funds must be earmarked at both central and state levels.

### **8.4 Introduce Technology-Based Protection**

- Voice distortion

- Video-link testimony
- Virtual courtrooms

### **8.5 Provide Psychological Counselling**

Witnesses often suffer trauma and require mental health support.

### **8.6 Strengthen Police Training**

Police must be sensitized to the needs of vulnerable witnesses.

### **8.7 Create a National Witness Relocation Fund**

For long-term protection and rehabilitation.

### **8.8 Conduct Awareness Programs**

For witnesses, lawyers, police, and judicial officers.

## **9. Conclusion**

The Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 represents a historic step toward safeguarding witnesses in India's criminal justice system. However, its efficacy is limited by the absence of statutory backing, inadequate resources, and inconsistent implementation. Judicial interventions have been instrumental, but sustainable reform requires legislative action, institutional strengthening, and alignment with international best practices. Protecting witnesses is not merely a procedural necessity—it is a constitutional obligation and a cornerstone of justice. Strengthening witness protection is essential for restoring public confidence, ensuring fair trials, and upholding the rule of law in India.

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