The Impact of a Gender-Sensitive Training for Police Officers on Gender-Based Violence in India

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Fieldwork: DAI Research & Advisory Services Private Limited

Sample: 3,526 police officers in 419 police stations

Target group: Police

Outcome of interest: Gender attitudes and norms Attitudes and norms Gender-based violence

Partner organization(s): Bihar Police, Mittika, Fonds d'Innovation pour le Développement (FID)

Gender-based violence is a barrier to women's health, safety, and agency, but often goes underreported. Researchers are evaluating the impact of a gender-sensitization training for police officers in Bihar, India, using expressive arts techniques, on police officers' attitudes towards gender-based violence as well as women's safety and economic agency.

Policy issue

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a significant threat to women's health and safety, and presents a barrier to their agency. In 2018, it was estimated that one in three women around the world experience gender-based violence in their lifetime, and 7 percent of women have experienced non-partner sexual violence.[1], Experience of GBV, as well as real and perceived threats of GBV, restrict women's mobility and labor force participation. Fear of GBV may also influence women's decisions about human capital accumulation.[2], Despite high levels of GBV, underreporting to police is extremely common. An analysis of survey data from 24 countries between 2004-2011 found that only 7 percent of women that had experienced GBV reported to a formal source.[3] Underreporting could be driven in part by police that are hostile or dismissive of GBV reports due to overestimation of false reports and victim-blaming, which may undermine women's trust in the system. The resulting lower reporting of GBV could further exacerbate the problem.

Most interventions designed to prevent GBV are centered around women, but increasingly interventions are engaging boys, men, and law enforcement to address the issue. One type of intervention that has been rarely tested uses a pedagogy that involves behavioral insights along with applied theater. Can a gender-sensitive training correct victim-blaming attitudes and overestimation of false reporting amongst police officers? Furthermore, can improving mindsets lead to women's increased safety and economic agency, including female police officers?

Context of the evaluation

The state of Bihar, India, where this evaluation took place, is the third most populated state in the country and one of the poorest.[4] Despite high violence and crime in Bihar, there are only 81 police officers per 100,000 citizens, and only 17 percent of officers are female. Reporting of crimes against women has increased at 7.5 percent annually since 2012, but still remains low. The 2015

Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reveals that, on average, only 3 percent of victims reach out for support with the police, while 42 percent of surveyed women in India reported being a victim of intimate partner violence. In addition to high levels of GBV, in urban areas in Bihar, only 6.4 percent of women participate in the workforce, and even fewer in rural areas. Bihar also ranks last among India's 35 states in the Gender Related Development Index (GDI).

Prior to this evaluation, researchers surveyed police officers in Bihar and found that many held victim-blaming mentalities and held low beliefs in the trustworthiness of victims. For instance, approximately 65 percent of police officers believed that more than 50 percent of rape cases are false and that 60 percent of women are at fault for molestations if they wear jeans or own a mobile phone.



Woman at police station across desk of police officer

Photo credit: PradeepGaurs, Shutterstock.com

Details of the intervention

Researchers partnered with the Bihar police and a Delhi-based NGO called Mittika for the curriculum design. Additionally, the research team also collaborated with several high-ranking Indian Police Services (I.P.S) Officials and leading applied theatre professionals who work extensively on participatory approaches to drive social change on topics of gender, caste, and other forms of social inequalities. Together, they designed a gender-sensitive training for police officers to test whether they could correct victim-blaming mindsets to improve police practices and foster a more friendly police environment for women, thereby improving women's safety.

Researchers randomly assigned 217 police stations to the intervention group and 202 stations to the comparison group. The intervention group received a 27-hour intensive training, split into three full days and four two-hour follow-up sessions spread over two months. The full-day sessions were held in groups of thirty officers with two facilitators and covered the following themes:

1. sense of civic service for all;
2. perceptions and biases towards GBV;
3. inequality and discrimination towards GBV victims;
4. GBV behaviors that include empathy, victim-blaming, and beliefs about the truthfulness of reports;
5. technical skills regarding GBV;
6. survivor-centered policing skills; and,
7. women in policing and workplace behaviors.

The follow-up sessions were designed to support officers on how to use the concepts in their daily practices.

The curriculum and methodology for these trainings were developed by the Research Team in collaboration with Mittika. The curriculum especially benefited from the critical inputs of Ms. Jaya Iyer, an award-winning theater professional with more than 25 years of experience, who is also one of the pioneers of 'Theater of the Oppressed' in India. Additionally, the team also collaborated with several senior Indian Police Service (IPS) Officials, including Ms. Sutapa Sanyal, the former Director General of Police, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajyabardhan Sharma, the former Additional Director General of Police, Bihar. The trainings used principles of applied theatre such as 'The Theatre of the Oppressed', Psychodrama, and other immersive activities to create 'safe spaces' to voice differing opinions, enact soft skills, build empathy through shared narratives, and facilitate discussions for building new norms.

Researchers measured the impact of the training on officer's attitudes towards GBV through a survey conducted prior to the intervention and following the intervention. Officers were asked about their attitudes towards GBV reporting, as well as their knowledge of technical laws and soft skills. Researchers measured the officers' ability to put the training into practice through a decoy test, where they sent surveyors to report GBV at police stations. Researchers also conducted a survey to measure the impact of the intervention on working conditions for women police officers. The entire intervention and data collection activities were implemented by DAI Research and Advisory Services.

Results and policy lessons

Research ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. World Bank. 2019. "Gender-Based Violence (Violence Against Women and Girls)." https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls

2. Siddique, Zahra. 2022. "Media-Reported Violence and Female Labor Supply." Economic Development and Cultural Change, 70(4). https://doi.org/10.1086/714009 ; Borker, Girja. "Safety First: Perceived Risk of Street Harassment and Educational Choices of Women." World Bank Policy Research Working Papers, August 2021.

3. Palermo, Tia, Jennifer Bleck, & Amber Peterman. 2014. "Tip of the Iceberg: Reporting and Gender-Based Violence in Developing Countries." American Journal of Epidemiology, 179(5), 602–612. https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwt295

4. Census of India. Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India. 2011.