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Responses to Domestic Violence in Karnataka and Gujarat

Veena Poonacha and Divya Pandey

Introduction

This study seeks to document and briefly assess organized responses to domestic violence currently available in two states of India: Karnataka and Gujarat.

In order to survey and assess these responses in their various forms, domestic violence was first defined broadly to comprise those acts of intimidation and cruelty such as mental, emotional, financial, and physical abuse of a woman, which may make a woman or her family members seek the support of agencies outside of the family and kin group. The study, therefore, is designed to examine the response by these public agencies to matters previously relegated to the private sphere. This study does not address, however, the nature, causes, or effects of domestic violence. Instead, the research concentrates exclusively on how state and voluntary organizations respond to the problem. These responses vary considerably and include: measures taken by the criminal justice system, voluntary community "sensitization" and awareness programs, state welfare policies, and voluntary economic and social empowerment programs for women. They also include state and volunteer efforts to advocate for and intervene into individual women's lives by providing counseling, emotional support, and short stay facilities. In order to clarify and document the character and variety of these responses, this project has undertaken in-depth case studies of selected state and non-governmental organizations.

Methodology

The selection of organizations for study followed from a detailed questionnaire mailed to all organizations working for women within the two states. In Karnataka, 180 questionnaires were sent out to organizations and in Gujarat 300 were sent; 60 and 100 responses, respectively, were received. After careful scrutiny of these responses and discussion with NGOs and project consultants, a sampling criteria was established based upon an organization's particular ideology, outreach, activity focus, and the socio-cultural variables of specific sub-

regions, such as local economic characteristics and the presence of particular tribal or caste populations. Based upon these criteria, ten organizations from each state were selected for further study. In examining each of these organizations closely, and in its own social and historical context, the aim was to understand 1) the specific ideological principles operating in the organization, particularly in relation to social change and gender; 2) the organizational structure, decision-making process, and staff morale; and 3) the actual intervention strategies undertaken to deal with domestic violence.

In the field, this data was collected through interviews with the leadership of each organization, interviews with the staff and the beneficiaries (whenever possible), organized small group discussions with personnel, observation of typical practices and interventions, and examinations of available reports and records. At the completion of the fieldwork, state-level workshops were arranged in Ahmedabad (January 19, 1998) and in Bangalore (January 29, 1998), to which all participating NGO and government personnel were invited to discuss the findings and give feedback. From this data, case studies were prepared and the organizations classified into five categories: historically significant organizations; government initiatives; organizations which work closely with the government; feminist organizations, and community-based organizations that also address women's empowerment [See Appendix for detailed listing]. In each of these categories, researchers observed the presence of committed personnel working under difficult circumstances. It is hoped that in the more comprehensive analysis that follows, respect for the unique contributions and efforts made by each organization is represented.

Case Study Review

A condensed analysis and typology of the organization case studies is reviewed below. First, the range of existing responses in both state and non-governmental sectors is presented and classified according to type and approach to domestic violence. Second, the most common types of responses to domestic violence are described and briefly analyzed. Finally, the particular strategies and effectiveness of certain non-governmental organizations are described and assessed.

Range of Responses

The types of interventions that currently exist are based on a diversity of perspectives regarding the role of women, the causes and consequences of domestic violence, the most appropriate manner of changing behavior, and the role and purpose of intervention. Broadly, the responses may be classified into two groups: those that seek to prevent or eradicate domestic violence altogether and those that seek to react to specific instances of domestic violence. Within

these two categories are a variety of different responses distinguished by their target group and their expected outcome: theory building measures emerging from research at multiple levels, or intervention strategies focused upon the victim or potential victim, the community, and the state. Below is a brief review of the range of responses included in the immediate study.

Intervention strategies focused on community and state.

The most commonly found responses were actions that have emerged to assist individual women in legal redress for crimes committed against them. This type of response is only useful, however, when women leave their homes and come forward to speak out about their experience and the visibility of the problem increases. Examples of such interventions include the passage of laws such as Section 498a, designed to protect women from domestic violence [1]. The existence of such laws is certainly a significant state-level response intended to provide opportunities for fair and just property settlements, to encourage prosecution of offenders, and to establish a standard of acceptable behavior toward women and family members. Legislative advocacy on or about these laws undertaken by national and state level entities on behalf of women has been and continues to be an important method of raising political consciousness, and improving policies regarding family, women, and children.

Additional examples of organized advocacy efforts include community policing initiatives such as the Mahila Suraksha Samiti and the Women's State Committee in Gujarat, which operate at the district and state levels to promote prevention, pressure state bodies, and mobilize public awareness campaigns. While these efforts have great possibility, they have not proved to be effective in Gujarat due to political pressures and have not yet been tried in Karnataka. There have also been efforts to make new laws more effective, and to make law enforcement officers and the criminal justice system more accessible to women and more responsive to their complaints. Examples of this effort include the development of All Women Police Stations (AWPS), the presence of special legal aid and advocacy services, and public awareness campaigns about the law and about legal rights.

Intervention strategies focusing on victim.

Family counseling and mediation services which offer to help families avoid legal prosecution and to immediately resolve conflicts between individual women and other family members were also found in the All Women Police Stations in state funded family counseling cells or units, and among a wide range of non-governmental organization providers. Additional intervention strategies include short-term supportive services offered to women who seek help, such as

short- and long-stay shelter homes, child care services and primary school centers, special women's courts, medical and psychological service referrals, educational facilities, and assistance in accessing financial maintenance. However, researchers noted that such services were less frequently available.

When and if a woman comes forward to complain of violence, she may also benefit from the provision of longer-term reconstructive programs that can be effective in changing her situation and insuring her continued safety from violence whether or not she leaves her family. Some state providers and many non-governmental organizations have developed responses to this need for longer-term support. Vocational training and income generation programs are important examples of how some organizations provide women with the economic independence and autonomy they need to protect them from further abuse. Similarly, schemes for re-housing, job placement, education and skill building, de-addiction, psychological counseling, treatment for male offenders, spiritual instruction, and other forms of self-empowerment for women and community development exist in different locations throughout the region.

Preventive measures.

In an effort to prevent violence against women altogether, a different kind and quality of preventive community-oriented response occurs in some settings that seeks not just to address individual cases, but to transform social relations at a more systemic level. Although this type of organized response was found to be much less common, there was evidence of this important work throughout the region. State-sponsored public awareness campaigns about dowry, domestic violence, legal rights, and gender justice are taking place at locations in several rural and urban areas. Concentrated outreach efforts, public rallies, legal and health literacy camps, programs directed to young women, and networking between local groups are also being initiated by non-governmental organizations in several locations. The formation of women's self-help collectives in targeted rural communities is also a significant initiative being undertaken by some state and non-governmental organizations who intend this to be both a preventive measure and a reactive response to individual victims of domestic violence. Similarly, holistic efforts to foster widespread community development, and attempts to politically empower certain traditionally marginalized social groups such as dalits, tribals, slum dwellers, rural workers, poor women, sex workers, or women prisoners are examples of this more comprehensive response to violence against women taking place in both Karnataka and Gujarat.

An Analysis of Particular Responses

Although this range of responses is diverse, the most common type of response to domestic violence found in this study appears to be short-term and reactive rather than long-term or preventive. Intervention strategies of both state and non-governmental sectors focus primarily on the provision of short-term support services for individual women: either legal or counseling support through women's police stations and/or family counseling cells. Shelters or short-stay homes and self-help women's collectives were less frequently found. With the exception of the collectives, all of these measures depend entirely on individual women who initiate the search for help outside the home; these measures are not oriented toward women who are unable or unwilling to do this. It is important to note then that the actual impact of this more reactive type of response may be limited to a small percentage of those in need. Below is a closer analysis of these significant intervention strategies.

All Women Police Stations. A

All Women Police Stations (AWPS) were created initially in an effort to reinforce the criminalization of domestic violence and make police stations more approachable and less intimidating to women with complaints. The main police stations are customarily viewed as frightening places for women to go and thus not likely to encourage the reporting of intimate crimes. Further, it was thought that police stations designated specifically for the investigation of crimes against women and children would undertake investigations in a gender-sensitive manner, and follow up cases seriously. Such stations, it was thought, would also provide related services such as counseling and forensic services in cases of doubtful deaths. As a result, All Women Police Stations (or Mahila Police Thanas) are now generally responsible for cases involving domestic violence, dowry-related offenses, sexual harassment, trafficking of women and children, rape, and other crimes against women. Procedures to respond include filing a complaint, trying to resolve the issue with the accused through counseling or mediation, or sending the case to court. Police officers may collect evidence including medical reports, fingerprints, eyewitness accounts, and circumstantial evidence. If this evidence supports the charge as a cognizable case, the police can then arrest and charge the accused.

Contrary to these stated purposes and goals of AWPS, however, the case studies of AWPS in Karnataka and Gujarat revealed poor quality services and low rates of utilization. Although some AWPS personnel stated that women travel long distances in order to come specifically to the all-women stations, and that women reportedly feel more comfortable bringing sex-related cases to these stations, the number of recorded and prosecuted cases in the official records remain low for

the size of the stations' jurisdictions. This is attributed in part to a kind of discriminatory attitude and a lack of gender awareness among the police and a lack of any accompanying changes within the judicial process. For example, cases often have to be dowry-related to be taken seriously, and the first procedural step in dealing with new cases still seems to be counseling and family reconciliation, regardless of whether or not that is the most appropriate action for a particular woman.

Field researchers and station personnel have pointed to many problems with All Women Police Stations that include inadequate training of staff, insufficient facilities of the station, and poor integration of the women's station with the rest of the police force. In case studies of the Bangalore and Ahmedabad stations, researchers explored many of these issues.

Location: Obviously, the idea of creating a separate public space conducive to distressed women's needs involves maintaining an environment that allows for privacy, comfort, and safety from sexual harassment. Because the police in Bangalore and Ahmedabad have transferred the jurisdiction of sex-related crimes to the AWPS, women are discouraged from registering complaints elsewhere. As a result, women victims are forced to travel great distances to register their complaints with the AWPS and can no longer be sure of speedy neighborhood police protection. Yet, the stations do not offer health services for women in need of medical attention, and have only minimal infrastructure and facilities such as transportation, running water or clean restrooms.

Training: The role and training of female police officers constitutes another pressing concern. Though the assumption was that women officers would be more sensitive to gender-related crimes by virtue of being women, the reality is that they are not necessarily any more aware or competent to respond to these crimes. Women police officers were found to lack training and were not sensitized to gender issues. For the most part, they shared the perception found within the police force generally that private family matters were not a concern of law enforcement. Common problems observed at the stations included the neglect of duties, the lack of conscientious attention to forms and investigative procedures, judgmental comments, and an unwillingness and lack of preparation to counsel women. Without proper training, evidence can be easily missed, undocumented or tampered with in such a way as to weaken a woman's case. Derogatory or uncooperative remarks were often made to women who approached the station. This had the effect of reinforcing their powerlessness, defeating the purpose of creating the station, and possibly putting women in further danger. Researchers noted as well that the displacement of gender-related crimes onto the women's stations prevents the rest of the police force

from being informed about and sensitized to the nature and significance of these crimes.

Workplace issues: The researchers found that female police officers also contend with other job issues that have a direct impact on their ability to function in this role. As they confront the pressures of entering a traditionally male profession, the segregation of the all women's station may prevent them from integrating into the larger police force. As women, they face greater discrimination in receiving promotions and receive less respect for their work. Moreover, their lack of training and their isolation in the all women stations prevent them from gaining the necessary experience to transfer to other stations. In addition, at the women's stations, they have to work longer hours and take on additional responsibilities that interfere more dramatically with their efforts to balance roles between their profession and their home. This appears to contribute to very low morale among officers.

Family Counseling Cells. A second and very common response to domestic violence present among both state and voluntary institutions is the Family Counseling Cell (FCC) or unit. The national Central Social Welfare Board (CSWB) initiated a nation-wide effort to fund these cells in and around police stations and among a network of voluntary organizations in response to perceived increases in family- and marriage-related crimes and disputes. The hope was that these cells might help to strengthen and improve family ties with the help of community intervention and thus avoid legal prosecution. Overseen by state-level Voluntary Action Boards (VAB), the official mandate for the cells was to facilitate reconciliation and an amicable settlement before undertaking any legal action, and to support and maintain the family unit for the sake of the children. Centers were to provide preventive, referral, and rehabilitative services to the victims of domestic violence and what is termed "marital maladjustment". Together with the VAB and the state-level CSWB, the cells were to be overseen by a sub-committee of professional experts who might advise and monitor the practices and activities of each cell.

Government and non-governmental efforts are thus uniquely combined in the implementation of the FCC as both the police counseling cells and those situated within non-governmental organizations share a common mandate and funding source. Case studies show that there are differences, however, between state and NGO practices, and among NGOs, and, therefore, the character and quality of FCC services can vary dramatically. In other words, the state-directed nature of the FCC scheme does not necessarily standardize or universalize the approach or practice of each cell. Variations are evident in the ongoing training available for personnel hired to perform the counseling, the relationship between the cell and local law enforcement, and in the overall approach to counseling and domestic

violence. Regional economies, caste, class, and ethnic dynamics, and the political history and ideology of each organization also impact the structures and practices of these units.

Significant differences are evident in the many ways domestic violence is conceptualized at the cells. For example, in the Bangalore police counseling cell, counselors state that they define domestic violence as a problem of control and that it is a pattern of gradually accelerating abuse arising first from verbal insults to physical assaults. Counselors state that it is important, therefore, to attend to early warning signs of abuse in a marital relationship. As a consequence of this thinking, counselors here believe that it is their job to remain non-judgmental and encourage women to speak up about their abuse, and to help them to think clearly over time about their options. They then assist in finding ways through mediation and joint counseling to address the violence, but not necessarily end the marriage. Follow-up home visits also may occur in order to insure the continued safety of women who have returned to their homes. Police authority in compelling joint counseling sessions and adherence to agreements is seen to be an important feature of their service.

A slightly different approach to counseling is adopted by certain non-governmental organizations such as the Prajna Counseling Center in Mangalore; Astitva Mahila Utkarsha Sanstha in Valsad, Gujarat; and the Ahmedabad Women's Action Group. In general, these groups view domestic violence as a systemic problem that demands some form of widespread social change. Interventions for individual cases of domestic violence usually draw from a range of diverse services based upon an individual woman's needs, such as legal aid, temporary shelter, vocational or skill-building, de-addiction and recovery support, psychological counseling and the opportunity to participate in local activism. Counselors at these NGOs state that individual interventions are meant to be opportunities for women to gain confidence in themselves, to learn to seek help from other women, and/or to expect different behaviors after a process of long term support or empowerment. And counseling itself is viewed as a complicated and potentially long process that involves creating a congenial atmosphere of trust, helping women vent their feelings of distress, and providing her with support to identify her own solutions. Family reconciliation is seen to be one possible outcome of this intervention only if it is in the best perceived interests of the woman. Personnel at these organizations report being encouraged and supported in their efforts to gain additional training, to network with other organizations and professionals dealing with domestic violence, and to engage with national and international dialogue about the issue.

In the Family Counseling Center located at the Devadasi Rehabilitation and Physically Handicapped Welfare Board in Bijapur, the circumstances appear to

be quite different. Situated in a rural and impoverished area, this center evolved out of a program designed originally to “rehabilitate” devadasis and other marginalized women with forms of vocational training, micro-credit schemes, and various forms of economic incentives to get married [2]. This FCC is staffed by just two counselors and attempts to provide counseling and family intervention to cases of domestic violence and what they call “marital maladjustment.” Researchers note that domestic violence is seen by these staff members to be caused by differences of opinion between spouses, extra-marital affairs, and alcohol. Reconciliation between the couple is usually sought via joint counseling, stamp paper agreements, and/or intervention by community elders. If no reconciliation is possible, individuals are referred to family courts or non-governmental organizations in other communities. Any mental health problems that arise must be referred to facilities in urban centers. Counselors here stated that the center is not well promoted and that they get relatively few domestic violence cases. They believe this is due to the fact that the local traditions and lack of education and opportunities for women make it difficult for women to speak out or approach the center. Furthermore, as nearly 75 percent of households in the area are joint families, disputes are inevitably over property. Widespread poverty makes it difficult then to address any domestic violence issues without first addressing economic difficulties. Counselors here state that they feel isolated, underfunded, and inadequately trained for the kinds of cases they get.

Similarly, in the Bahini Samaj (BS), located in the rural Panchmahal District of Gujarat, the FCC is staffed by one full-time counselor, four local lawyers and a doctor who offers services for free. The procedure at this FCC is to first record complaints, then send a letter to the “opposing” or accused party to request a meeting. The counselor is then expected to hear both sides and give suggestions for possible resolution. If the opposing party won't attend, BS staff may summon the police or village elder (the sarpanch). Every effort is made to keep the family unit intact. Domestic violence, according to the personnel at BS, occurs because of a lack of education, alcoholism, bad peer influences and “the natural expressions of the genders in a household.” Members of staff explained that women may use their “sharp tongues” and men will “hit and beat.” For the sake of the children, marital reconciliation is the primary goal of counseling and organizations must have the power to compel erring spouses to behave. Researchers observed that counselors at BS were hesitant to intervene in any way that compromises or challenges local authority structures.

These examples offer a glimpse of the variables influencing the quality and character of services provided by these cells. Differing perspectives regarding the nature of domestic violence and the role of women in the community have a direct relationship to the type and outcome of counseling services offered. In an

FCC which is mandated specifically to keep families together at all costs because of a belief that domestic violence is a problem emerging from differences between individuals, marital maladjustment and/or property disputes, the practice and approach to counseling is oriented accordingly. In an FCC which retains some commitment to the state mandate but seeks primarily to help support and empower women to resist and avoid abusive and violent experiences, the approach to counseling is quite different. Staffing, funding, and training differences also contribute to these distinctions. Organizations that resist or cannot afford to keep their personnel informed of new knowledge about the issue and in contact with other relevant organizations, may offer a poorer quality of counseling services.

Researchers observed that most counseling cells hire qualified professional social workers as counselors. However, those at police counseling cells are more able to network and train with other professionals in an urban area, or get quick reinforcement from police when and if protection or legal intimidation is necessary to ensure agreement between disputing parties. Further, the police station counseling cells are given increased public visibility and local credibility due to their closer association with the police and state machinery and their apparent neutrality with regard to family disputes. At the same time, it is because the counselors themselves are not police officers that some families report feeling comfortable confiding in them. Where complainants might not approach the police normally, it appears that they will approach a station that has an FCC in it because of the presence of the social workers who are seen to be friendly, sympathetic and well connected to the protection of law enforcement. It is also the observation that FCCs located in the All Women Police Stations (AWPS) are more likely to coordinate their efforts with the police than those located elsewhere.

Yet, state-directed police counseling cells appear to suffer badly from insufficient funding and poor infrastructure. Geographical isolation can also handicap both government and non-governmental counseling cells from providing adequate referrals for mental and medical health, childcare or shelter homes. Further, a lack of respect for counseling as a profession among police officers and within the larger community, combined with the fact that counselors are usually overworked, underpaid, and not widely understood outside of their profession, undercuts the professional effectiveness of these centers. It remains difficult to recruit committed social workers willing to make the sacrifices necessary to do this work.

With regard to the implications of state and voluntary partnerships, the case studies indicate a remarkable diversity of approaches and outcomes among the different family counseling cells. This very diversity suggests some degree of

autonomy from state authority. However, this independence is also constrained by concessions inevitably required for NGOs working with law enforcement and the judiciary. The case studies did show that in the interest of maintaining harmony between community authority structures, family households, and individual women, concern for women's safety can be compromised. Furthermore, the actual effectiveness of the cells is not easily measurable due to difficulties with follow-up and record-keeping. The final limitation of the FCCs generally is that they are still dependent upon women actively seeking their services. If incidents of domestic violence remain submerged and hidden, then this response to domestic violence may only be able to address the tip of the iceberg.

Shelters and Short-Stay Homes

Less commonly, several non-governmental organizations provide short-stay homes or shelter facilities for women and their children with the help of government grants. These shelters are intended to give women an alternative place to live until they are able to either return to their families or obtain some other form of housing. Many of these shelters arose originally in order to serve traditional populations of homeless or marginalized people, such as orphans, widows, disabled, deserted or destitute women, unmarried mothers, devadasis, and impoverished rural or slum residents. Thus, other victims of domestic violence may come to share space with these women and become a part of programs to rehabilitate and support formed by the larger organization. While it appears to vary somewhat, in most cases, residents in the short stay homes are expected to find alternative housing within approximately three to six months. They may have the opportunity to be included in skill-building, vocational training, and education activities of the organization, and they may be given assistance in finding a job and permanent housing. The research indicates that it is difficult to determine the overall effectiveness of these homes in keeping women out of danger, however. Long-term records are not always well kept and the nature and experience of living in the homes varies in ways that are difficult to characterize. Case studies do show that there are important differences in the ways in which these shelters are managed, the environment that they create for residents, and the goals that they appear to support.

Funding for the physical, administrative, and support facilities of short-stay homes was found to be a problem in several cases. Residents reported that very spartan living conditions, and a lack of child care contributed to uncomfortable living environments in some locations. Negative attitudes toward residents from the community at large and among personnel of the organization also contributed to the discomfort. Researchers noted that homes and shelters that stigmatized its residents were likely to attract only certain cases, and possibly

replicate many dynamics responsible for domestic violence at large. Case studies often found shelter residents given very strict regulations and restrictions about their hours, their visitors, and their activities, and there was a general perception of residents as women who have "gone astray." These characteristics negatively impacted the shelter environment for residents, and did not assist women in gaining self-respect or becoming empowered -- qualities seen by some to be essential in moving away from the experience of domestic violence.

Case studies indicate that shelters that view themselves in some way as partners working together with residents to address a widespread social problem create a very different residential environment. These are homes that, for instance, encourage residents to work together on solutions to their problems, to initiate their own programs, and/or become staff of the organization. Such environments are more conducive to the self-empowerment of residents. These changes often impact the local community as well and shelter residents have been encouraged, in a few instances, to participate in or initiate public awareness and education campaigns within the community. It was also observed that homes that are able to provide child care, primary school facilities, varieties of productive vocational training, libraries, and a holistic approach to counseling and shelter offer an environment more conducive to long-term rehabilitation and growth, and serve a broader clientele.

Self-Help Collectives or Village "Sanghas"

A less common but nonetheless unique and important organized response to domestic violence is the practice of facilitating local women's collectives or sanghas at the village level. These collectives are small self-governed groups of women managed primarily by the voluntary sector, with the help of state funds. The creation and development of such groups is intended to foster new opportunities for women to gain economic and political power at the local level. In many ways, this might be seen as both a preventive and reactive response to domestic violence. Although these collectives operate with different logistical strategies locally, a commitment to certain principles was found to be shared by all. First, the collectives are generally meant to be self-directed and oriented exclusively toward local needs as they are perceived and assessed by the members of the collective. Although the collective may be initially facilitated by the NGO and given technical and economic assistance, the groups are ultimately expected to become self-sustaining and self-governing. Secondly, the collectives are intended to help the community improve its quality of life by increasing access to government and non-governmental programs, financial schemes, economic support, and political power. Helping women to empower themselves locally through the increasing stature of the collectives is perceived to be, according to most examples studied, one important measure toward community

development generally. In other words, the empowerment of community women is seen to accelerate wider economic and social development.

Particular approaches and beliefs about domestic violence appear to vary then between village collectives and there is no standard approach or response mandated by the larger facilitating organization itself. Further, since self-reliance and locally determined ideals and solutions are central to the modus operandi of this strategy, outside professional counselors, mediators, lawyers, doctors, and even police are not necessarily included or even important to the collectives in dealing with domestic violence. Instead, responses to domestic violence emerge idiosyncratically and organically from culturally consistent solutions devised by local authority structures and from the gradual increase in women's collective power. The hope, according to field observation, is that if women are given increased educational, economic and political status through these village collectives or sanghas, they will be in a better position to take a stand against domestic violence. This can occur if the formation of the sanghas succeeds at making the villages come to better value a woman's life and at creating a support system for women within their traditional communities. The researchers noted examples of sanghas choosing to intervene as a group in individual cases brought before the collective, or putting pressure on local elders councils or panchayats to respond more effectively to cases of dowry harassment, suspicious deaths, extra-marital affairs or physical abuse. The case studies also offered examples of collectives acting as follow-up monitors over households troubled by violence. This practice can also insure adherence by husbands or families to agreements made with the collective. Case studies also indicate that as members of the collective become literate and seek education, networking with other sanghas and NGOs can increase the community's awareness about domestic violence and alter the types of solutions generated by the collective.

This particular organized response appears to be a very innovative and potentially effective method of addressing domestic violence against women in rural and impoverished communities. The careful attention to maintaining village autonomy from the organization and from the government appears to reinforce the ideals of political and economic empowerment sought. Further, it is evident that the significance attached to economic initiatives and income generation helps to give the collective automatic credibility in the eyes of its members and of the community because economic needs are typically top priority issues for poor rural communities. The attention to collective organization also helps to put a primacy on speaking out and sharing problems with other women. This has helped isolated or victimized women by providing a forum within which to speak and be heard. For these reasons, such a holistic approach to women's needs seems to be a very powerful way of linking

problems of empowerment in the community to power within household relationships.

A review of the case studies, however, points to certain concerns with the sustained quality and consistency of village sanghas as a response to domestic violence. These collectives can still remain isolated, provincial, and resistant to outside ideas about intimate violence, gender, and mental health. The lack of systematic or consistent responses to cases of domestic violence means also that there is no automatic guarantee of safety for women. As determined by the review of family counseling strategies, efforts to maintain community harmony and respect for local authority structures can also compromise women's interests. Further, the success of this approach may be limited to certain populations. Although there has been success in certain impoverished urban communities, sanghas may be most useful in rural, isolated areas or among populations that are distinct or clearly identified. Similarly, although efforts to nurture political identity movements among marginalized groups are to be lauded, the link between community development, women's improved status, and protection from violence is not guaranteed. Nevertheless, the self-help collectives offer a tremendous model of innovative, sustainable, and holistic intervention.

Analysis of NGO Responses

By and large, the case study research shows that a wider and more diverse set of responses to domestic violence occurs in the voluntary sector and/or in partnerships between the voluntary and government sectors. Preventive measures and intervention strategies directed at the community, such as attention to the long-term needs of victims, vocational training and income generation, concerted public outreach programs to target populations unable to access services, and some forms of community awareness and consciousness-raising about women's rights and domestic violence, occur more frequently in the non-governmental sector. For this reason, an assessment of non-governmental strategies and organizational structures is important to this research project.

The case studies reveal that NGOs vary according to particular features that are significant to their effectiveness: their political perspective, including their definition of and approach to domestic violence; their relationship with the local community; the management structure and practices; and the type of support services, reconstructive tools, and preventive activities offered.

The significance of an organization's political ideology or paradigm to the kind and quality of services provided cannot be overstated. In each case, field researchers have determined this through a small look into the history of each

group, the mission statements and organizing principles stated by founders, the culture and values implicit in the organization's practices, the character of staff interactions, management strategies and, most importantly, the definition of and particular approach to domestic violence and to individual women. In general, the groups studied can be classified according to two primary political perspectives: 1) those who assert the need for some kind of widespread systemic or social change to address gender injustices, including domestic violence, and 2) those who insist that the status quo needs to be reinforced in the face of periodic breakdowns and/or weaknesses, such as domestic violence.

The first of these perspectives—what might be called the social transformation perspective—is more likely to link its activities in response to domestic violence with proactive measures and more wide-ranging and long-term services such as political empowerment, education, community consciousness-raising, and advocacy for women. This generates an approach to counseling which seeks to support the needs of individual women ahead of the needs of the family. Such an approach emerges from a belief that domestic violence is among many forms of subordination and oppression expressed systemically toward women and that changing a woman's prospects involves changing her status and her self-esteem. This perspective is invoked in projects such as the People's Movement for Self-Reliance in Kollegal, Mysore District, which seeks to organize and empower dalit political and cultural consciousness through the facilitation of women and men's village sanghas. In this framework, political justice for dalits in general is dependent upon improving economic conditions and the pride of cultural identification for the community at large. Domestic violence is thus addressed through a larger scheme of empowerment for the village. This perspective is also clearly evident in those organizations that identify themselves as feminist organizations, in the principles expressed by self-help collectives and certain development organizations, and in such groups as Sumangali Seva Ashram in Karnataka.

The second of these perspectives—which might be called the restoration or reinforcement of the status quo—is more likely to respond to domestic violence with measures which are reactive or immediate and short term, such as police enforcement, joint family counseling toward reconciliation, and short-stay homes with strict time limits. Domestic violence, according to this perspective, may be seen as a symptom of some kind of breakdown in an otherwise just or necessary system, and as caste, class or regionally specific. Incidents of violence are seen to emerge from intra-familial conflicts and quarrels due to outside stresses, personal differences and/or weakness of character. Thus, these organizations may see their purpose as simply tending to the gaps or holes in the system and finding ways to restore harmony and order as efficiently as possible. In counseling practices, this perspective might emphasize supposedly "objective"

or “neutral” positions among counselors, and a reconciliation of families through whatever measures are necessary. The case studies indicate that some organizations operate with both political perspectives present. This is apparent in organizations that offer, for example, counseling designed to reconcile families, as well as proactive measures to raise community consciousness about gender injustice, and to advocate for changes in local practices.

In most cases, the presence of these political perspectives has a direct relationship with the management structure and practices of an organization. The case studies revealed profound differences in the governing of organizations and showed a strong link between an organization’s approach to governing itself and the helping environment it creates for women in need. Many groups orient themselves around a hierarchical structure that dictates policies and procedures from the top down. In some cases, this has evolved over time because of a strong respect for one charismatic leader. Field researchers note that dedicated and charismatic individuals can provide powerful leadership to organizations, but can also prevent the organization from effectively institutionalizing its mission and practices among other personnel. This has the effect of leaving a large vacuum when leaders are no longer present. In other cases, hierarchical structures are the result of a directive from funders, or a government-led strategy for overseeing and advising the program. The advantages of a strict hierarchical structure include coherence and consistency over time, the opportunity for mainstream credibility within power structures in the community and within the state, and, depending upon the perspective and personality of the leadership, a clearly stated mission or doctrine.

However, case studies also identified other organizations that have worked to break away from a strict hierarchy and have attempted to try more innovative or collective forms of decision-making. The advantages of such a structure include the maintenance of an open and flexible position with regard to domestic violence and to intervention services, and the presence of positive staff and community morale due to regular chances for empowerment and growth. An organization’s commitment to, for example, enhancing women’s status or reflecting on the dangers of autocratic power and control, is more politically persuasive and effective in the community if it is also practiced within the organization itself.

After review of the case studies, field researchers note that organizations that appeared to offer high quality, consistently funded, sustainable programs responding to domestic violence are those organizations that work to:

Encourage staff to initiate and develop new programs and undertake new responsibilities;

Support group efforts to regularly network and obtain national-level training with other professionals and organizations;

Meet and discuss programs and policies collectively on a routine basis; and

Find ways to integrate community members and victims of domestic violence into organizational programs and decisions.

These measures are important if the organization is to remain flexible, responsive, and open for growth. It is the ability to remain flexible that distinguishes, in part, the private/voluntary sector from the larger state apparatus. And thus it seems important that organizations embrace this advantage. An analysis of the governing of individual NGOs can be seen then to provide important insights into the ideology and effectiveness of each organization.

Some additional observations were made by researchers regarding the impact of political perspectives on practices among non-governmental organizations. Foremost among these is the kind of social stigma attached to victims of domestic violence by a given community or organization. Some service providers appear to see domestic violence as a problem for a particular social or economic class or group, and the victims themselves as instigators of trouble in some way and in need of discipline or re-orientation. Case studies indicate that such an approach may serve to discourage other victims of domestic violence from approaching the organization for help. That is, if domestic violence is seen to be associated with under educated or poor women, middle class and upper class women are not likely to seek help or speak out about their own experiences with violence. Second, such an approach may do a disservice to community understanding of the problem and help to reinforce public perceptions that the family domain is not a concern of the state, that women are natural troublemakers in need of controlling and/or that it is women's organized interest in equality that is generating violence against them. Such an approach may also serve to silence and further impose oppressive beliefs and attitudes upon those women who do come forward. Due to the significant power of traditional socialization, it is clear from field research that many women will continue to believe that they deserve to be subordinate, that they deserve sexual harassment or that they are not worthy to have their lives and safety valued and protected under the law. Organizations perpetuating an attitude that reinforces this socialization are not likely to prevent domestic violence in the long run.

Conclusion

In summary, the research undertaken has helped to document the range and variety of responses to domestic violence in Karnataka and Gujarat, and to identify some differences in the quality and sustainability of strategies. In order to determine what comprises the most effective responses, however, it is important to identify first what kinds of behaviors constitute domestic violence, what conditions make women come forward, and what types of actions are necessary to intervene in or prevent violations of women's human rights. By surveying the organized responses to domestic violence, researchers have begun to show the ways in which the state mechanisms, voluntary organizations, and community activists of Karnataka and Gujarat have attempted to answer these questions.

The close analysis of specific organizational responses also shows more directly the ways in which particular political paradigms, management structures, and types of available intervention inform and determine dramatic differences in the responses offered. The result of this analysis is an emerging picture of the gaps, contradictions, and obvious shortcomings of the strategies now employed. Below are several tentative recommendations based upon the collected data and analysis.

Recommendations

It is evident from this initial survey that some combination of reactive or immediate responses and proactive or long-term responses is necessary in every community. Family reconciliation is clearly a commonly desired end sought by most community intervention strategies and this is a telling and significant feature of the social response to violence against women in India [3].

In addition, however, it appears that proactive or holistic efforts to address domestic violence through community development schemes, women's self-help collectives, efforts to raise public consciousness and to empower women economically and politically, are also important. These strategies attempt to change conditions that might be responsible for domestic violence. These are the efforts that can potentially reach the vast majority of women who do not or cannot come forward to complain of domestic violence. It appears that these larger proactive efforts to prevent domestic violence however, are a much lower priority within mainstream and state-directed programs. The case studies show that the following preventive strategies need to be implemented.

Raise Public Awareness: Public awareness programs that are carefully imagined, designed and coherently oriented around economic and political

initiatives, and that include gender sensitization components, ought to be utilized in a variety of settings. In order to accomplish this, networks between organizations, between activists, and between state officers need to be strengthened; funding needs to be channeled toward improving mutual contact and communication between state and voluntary sectors; and meetings and conferences to address strategies need to be systematically encouraged.

Establish and Maintain Case Records: Case studies show that a more careful record-keeping and monitoring of each case is essential within individual organizations. This can help all providers to learn what is and is not an effective intervention, and can help each organization insure and sustain the safety of the women it works with. These case records and the documentation of follow-up procedures ought to be available in some kind of larger data base to facilitate a wider understanding of intervention strategies, and the common problems and patterns of domestic violence. Those cases that have been reconciled through stamp paper agreements, for example, need to be monitored and recorded to help organizations identify successful and less successful intervention strategies.

Address Physical and Emotional Trauma: Additional observation showed that with a few exceptions, organized responses to individual complaints are largely devoid of methods to address physical and emotional trauma. Access to medical facilities, links between hospitals and family counseling centers (including the sensitization of medical professionals to the indicators and needs of domestic violence victims), and attention to the problems of mental health are largely absent from this survey of organized responses. An awareness of the relationship between violence and trauma, the complexities of psychological health and/or the need for longer term counseling is an important component which needs to be further examined. Furthermore, efforts to reach the batterer or perpetrator of violence are nearly non-existent. Efforts to sensitize and sustain a dialogue about violence and gender with professional communities and workplaces, village and caste panchayats, worker organizations and other sites where men may gather would be an invaluable intervention toward this end. In addition, concerted attention by community leaders, counselors and/or activists to meet and work with men who are violent could provide an important missing intervention.

Create Crisis Referral Services: Another recommendation is to create local hotline or crisis referral services that can take calls from women or family members or concerned neighbors regarding a given case or incident, or an inquiry about legal, medical or psychological services. Such a service would allow organizations to reach those women who are less willing to come in person to a station or center some access to services and information, and would give others the opportunity to speak on behalf of a frightened woman.

Promote Gender Sensitivity and Human Rights Education: One interpretation of the case study findings would suggest that sustainable and effective responses to domestic violence in India may depend upon establishing a culturally consistent continuity between traditional practices and beliefs about family and community relationships, and new forms of consciousness about human rights, about women's need for equality, and about non-violence.

Continue the Policy Dialogue: A continued dialogue about appropriate responses to domestic violence should occur at the local as well as the national level, and measures that seek to unite state with voluntary initiatives are essential steps that ought to be pursued. Further, efforts such as this research project which seek to foster improved theory building and communication between activists, professionals, policymakers and scholars around and about this issue are clearly healthy and invaluable endeavors.

Notes

See Mitra's report, pp.27-43, for further explanation of this statue and its implications.

Devadasis are young women and girls whose lives are dedicated to the god of a particular temple. They sing and dance daily before the image of the diety. The devadasi institution has become associated with temple prostitution, in addition, devadasis are often sold to brothels by temple priests.

In certain other non-Indian contexts, for instance, women may be stigmatized for staying in marriages which are abusive.