

# 1 Domestic Violence in India



## A Summary Report of Three Studies



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### Violence against Women in India: Evidence from Rural Gujarat

Leela Visaria

Gujarat Institute of Development Studies

### Best Practices among Responses to Domestic Violence in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh

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### Responses to Domestic Violence in Karnataka and Gujarat

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and SNTD Women's University, Mumbai

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INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN

Washington, DC

September 1999

Funded by USAID/India

# Preface

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), in collaboration with Indian researchers, is pleased to present the first in a series summarizing the research studies being undertaken in India on domestic violence against women. The summary reports presented in this volume have been prepared by the ICRW team—comprised of Barbara Burton, Nata Duvvury, Anuradha Rajan, and Nisha Varia—in consultation with the individual research teams. The Introduction and Conclusions have been written by the ICRW team synthesizing findings across the three studies. The ICRW team takes full responsibility for any errors or omissions. The interpretations of findings in the full report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the individual research teams.

The ICRW team wishes to acknowledge the incisive comments by Geeta Rao Gupta and Jacquelyn Campbell on the draft of this report. The excellent editorial support by Charlotte Feldman-Jacobs and the unstinting administrative support by Miriam Escobar are gratefully acknowledged.

**Nata Duvvury**  
Project Director

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This publication was made possible through support provided by the Office of Women in Development, Global Bureau, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of Cooperative Agreement No. FAO-A-00-95-00030-00. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID.

# Introduction

The International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) is conducting a three-year research program, which began in 1997, on domestic violence in India in partnership with researchers from a range of Indian academic and activist organizations.<sup>1</sup> A National Advisory Council, representing the different constituencies in India that address the issue, provides guidance for the program. The goal of the program is to provide reliable and sound information with which to identify, replicate, expand, and advocate for effective responses to domestic violence. The program has three components: first, assessing patterns and trends of domestic violence by identifying and analyzing existing data sets; second, conducting population-based surveys to estimate prevalence and to increase the understanding of determinants and outcomes of domestic violence; and third, distilling lessons learned from an analysis of on-going programmatic and policy interventions. [All of the individual studies supported through this research program are briefly summarized in Box 1]. In this volume, we present summary reports of the first three studies to be completed. The first is a household study by Leela Visaria that enumerates and elucidates trends of domestic violence in rural Gujarat and provides a backdrop to the intervention studies. The other two studies, one by Nishi Mitra and the other by Veena Poonacha and Divya Pandey, document and analyze the range of organized responses to domestic violence against women being implemented by

the state and non-governmental sectors in India and are hereafter referred to as the “response studies.”

## Domestic Violence: A Public Issue

According to available statistics from around the globe, one out of every three women has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This is an average based on available national surveys across industrialized and developing countries (World Health Organization 1997). Statistical evidence on the actual prevalence of domestic violence in India is scant however. The few studies available indicate that physical abuse of Indian women is quite high, ranging from 22 percent to 60 percent of women surveyed (Rao 1996 and Mahajan 1990). Most of the available information consists of qualitative studies of very small sample size. The only large-scale indicator of violence against women is the data relating to crimes against women published by the National Crimes Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. The records of the bureau reveal a shocking 71.5 percent increase in cases of torture and dowry deaths during the period from 1991 to 1995 and may reflect increased reporting of violence. In 1995, torture of women constituted 29.2 percent of all reported crimes against women. In another study, 18 to 45 percent of married men in five districts of Uttar Pradesh, a large state in northern India, acknowledged that they physically abused their wives (Narayana 1996). And in a study by Ranjana

<sup>1</sup> The research program in India is part of the larger global grants program called Promoting Women in Development (PROWID) being implemented by ICRW in partnership with CEDPA and funded by USAID.

## Box 1

### Program Descriptions

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#### **An Analysis of Primary Survey Data from Gujarat**

Leela Visaria, *Gujarat Institute of Development Studies, Ahmedabad.*

This population-based study presents a picture of domestic violence as reported by 346 married women in rural Gujarat. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, this project explores the magnitude and correlates of violence; forms and reasons given for violence; and women's options for support.

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#### **An Analysis of Hospital Records in Thane District, Maharashtra**

Surinder Jaswal, *Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai.*

This study examines the records of hospitals and community health outposts in Thane District. The project studies the construction of the definition of violence by both the community and the providers of care as well as reconstructing specific incidents of violence through in-depth interviews.

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#### **An Analysis of Records of Special Cell for Women and Children Located in the Police Commissioner's Office in Mumbai**

Anjali Dave and Gopika Solanki, *Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai.*

This study analyzes the records of Mumbai's Special Cell, a collaboration between the police and the Tata Institute of Social Science. The project addresses how the language used in recording cases influences the investigative process and the final resolution of the case.

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#### **An Analysis of Records of NGOs in Bangalore**

Sandhya Rao, Hengasara Hakkina Sangha, *Bangalore.*

Using the records of non-governmental organizations in Bangalore, this study explores domestic violence as a human rights issue. Included in the sample are a feminist organization working on violence issues for the last twenty years and a shelter which was established in the 1920s.

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#### **An Analysis of Court Records in Bangalore District**

V.S. Elizabeth, *National Law School, University of India, Bangalore.*

This study examines the records of a family court in Bangalore, three district level courts, and the High Court. The project examines cases to understand the judicial interpretation of existing laws that have an impact on domestic violence and to identify the gaps in investigative procedures that result in non-conviction.

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#### **A Population-Based Survey of Domestic Violence**

*International Clinical Epidemiologists Network (INCLIN).*

This multi-site study is being conducted by local researchers in seven sites: Lucknow, Bhopal, Delhi, Nagpur, Chennai, Vellore, and Thiruvananthapuram. The project explores the magnitude of violence, risk and protective factors, and health and economic outcomes. The methodology addresses ethical, safety, and training issues involving survey respondents and interviewers.

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#### **Responses to Domestic Violence in the States of Gujarat and Karnataka**

Divya Pandey and Veena Poonachana, *SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.*

This study examines state, collaborative, NGO, and community-based initiatives addressing domestic violence in Gujarat and Karnataka.

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#### **Responses to Domestic Violence in the States of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh**

Nishi Mitra, *Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai.*

This study examines state, collaborative, NGO, and community-based initiatives addressing domestic violence in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

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Kumari (1989) of dowry abuse it was revealed that one out of every four dowry victims was driven to suicide.

Globally, violence within the home is universal across culture, religion, class, and ethnicity. Despite this widespread prevalence, however, such violence is not customarily acknowledged and has remained invisible—a problem thought unworthy of legal or political attention. The social construction of the divide between public and private underlies the hidden nature of domestic violence against women. Legal jurisprudence has historically considered the domain of the house to be within the control and unquestionable authority of the male head of household. Thus, acts of violence against members of the household, whether wife or child, were perceived as discipline, essential for maintaining the rule of authority within the family.

In the last two decades, the Indian women's movement has contributed to a growing public awareness of violence against women. Women activists have mobilized and pressed for significant changes in the criminal code and police procedures in order to address various acts of violence. For example, throughout the 1980s, Indian society witnessed numerous protests by women's organizations against dowry deaths, custodial rape, abductions of women, *sati* (the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre), amniocentesis used for sex selection of children, sexual harassment of young girls and women in public places, trafficking, and prostitution.

What is unmistakable about these campaigns is that they often have focused on those acts of violence that either occurred in or had impact upon the public space. Thus, while the subordination of women in the private sphere was the implicit theoretical framework for many of the activists, the public-private divide still continued in practice. State responses to violence such as passing the amendment 498A to the Dowry Act of 1983 (discussed further in Nishi Mitra's report to follow), establishing All Women Police Stations, or setting up family counseling cells,

marked the beginning of attempts to provide some options outside the family to women facing domestic violence. However, except for sensational cases, the insidious everyday violence experienced by huge numbers of women has remained hidden in the private domain.

In several international conventions, there has now been explicit acknowledgment of the state's responsibility for human rights violations by private actors in both the public and private spheres. The Vienna Accord of 1993 and the Beijing Platform of 1995 together crystallized the principle that women's rights are human rights.<sup>2</sup> The frameworks that these conventions established have created a space in which once private issues like domestic violence can be understood as human rights violations of public concern. In this way, human rights discourse has begun to dissolve the public-private divide and has provided a moral momentum for direct response by national governments and non-governmental actors. It is this momentum which informs our research.

## Development and Violence

A parallel shift in the discourse on women in development has sought to change the perception of women from one of beneficiaries to one of active participants in development. This has involved redefining development to encompass a process that replaces constraints with choices. A factor clearly responsible for inhibiting the choices of women in development is domestic violence. Abuse has been observed to impede the public participation of women, undermine their economic efficiency, cause increased health burdens, and impose a drain on scarce national resources (Heise et al. 1994). For example, a World Bank study (1993) highlighted the cost of violence in terms of the health burden, estimating that rape and domestic violence "account for five percent of the healthy years of life lost to women of reproductive age in demographically developing countries." An Inter-American Development Bank study (Morrison and Orlando 1997) indicated that domestic violence resulted in a loss of US\$1.56 billion in Chile (more than 2 percent of Chile's GDP in 1996),

<sup>2</sup> These documents culminated from the 1993 United Nations World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing.

when considering only the loss of women's wages. Few studies have attempted to calculate the entire economic cost including the provision of all services by the state. But a study in New Wales, Australia, estimated that the overall cost was Aus\$1.5 billion a year (NCVAW 1993). This limited evidence suggests that the economic implications alone are serious enough to warrant special attention to violence as a development priority.

A reciprocal concern is whether and how development efforts can impact violence within the home. Limited evidence from studies on microcredit lending programs, for example, suggest that improved household income by women and greater control over that income by them reduce the level of violence within the home (Schuler 1998; Kabeer 1998). It is equally possible, however, that development efforts can shift and intensify gender dynamics within the household and exacerbate incidents of violence. To determine the impact of development interventions on violence against women requires an analysis of specific factors and behaviors thought to trigger violence in individual households (the focus of Leela Visaria's study to follow) and the ways in which the gender dynamics of power within the household as well as the community are affected by development efforts. Even without unraveling these complex interconnections, it is clear that violence, and even the threat of violence, is a crucial factor that inhibits women's participation in development and is, therefore, a central constraint for realizing their full potential.

### **Research Issues**

The formulation of effective and sustainable intervention strategies to address domestic violence against women requires a comprehensive understanding of all dimensions of the problem. This includes identifying the victims and perpetrators, the evident risk and protective factors, the common outcomes of violence, and the real needs of survivors. Equally important is research to document the responses implemented so far to identify gaps in existing strategies and to distill possible lessons for future strategies. Such research on domestic violence, however, must first attend to a series of methodological issues concerning ethics

and safety, the determination of an appropriate mix of research methods, and the definition of domestic violence.

### **Definition of Domestic Violence**

Definitions of domestic violence can be broad or focused, amorphous or targeted. The reason that the definition of violence is important is because it shapes the response. For example, a community response, whether it be legal reform or the provision of support services, is shaped by a particular understanding of what constitutes domestic violence and whether it is to be conceptualized as an intra-family conflict, or a criminal violation of rights. The definition implied by the law is especially critical as it defines standards and thus impacts broader social perceptions of the problem. Elements of the definition that need to be considered then are the boundaries of the relationship between the perpetrator and the abused, the norms of acceptable behavior, and the specific acts that constitute violence.

A frequent perception of domestic violence against women is that it is limited to physical harm perpetrated on adult women within a marital relationship. While this understanding may capture a large universe of the experience of women, it is predicated on the assumption that women primarily live in nuclear families. Across cultures, there are a variety of living arrangements ranging from joint families to nuclear families to single parent families. Moreover, women may be in an established relationship or in the process of separation or divorce. Violence is often not restricted to the current husband but may extend to boyfriends, former husbands, and other family members such as parents, siblings, and in-laws. A definition that acknowledges these multiple possibilities would lead to interventions that are more inclusive of the experiences of all women.

Definitions of domestic violence rest upon not only the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim but also upon norms of acceptable behavior. There is considerable difference of opinion regarding which behaviors or manifestations should be considered violent, as well as the level of

intensity and frequency required to label a relationship as violent. Another contentious issue is how to evaluate the intent of the act, why the act was initiated, and whose view should determine this. For instance, Indian field experience indicates that significant numbers of women do not perceive acts as violence if they perceive them to be justified. The social construct surrounding the ideal “good woman” clearly sets the limits for acceptable norms beyond which verbal and physical assaults translate into a notion of violence. Thus, wife beating is not seen as an excessive reaction if the woman gives cause for jealousy or does not perform her “wifely” duties adequately, such as having meals ready on time or adequately caring for children. This is further complicated by a common belief that violent acts are an expression of love and merely a desire to help the subject be a “better” person.

The core of a definition of domestic violence consists of all the acts that constitute violence. Some definitions are narrow and focus on a specific act of violence and others are broader and incorporate the full range of acts. In India, public discourse and the media equate domestic violence with dowry violence. This incomplete representation undermines awareness of the widespread, daily psychological, physical, and sexual abuse women confront that is often unrelated to dowry. As a result, newspapers may fail to report the less sensational stories that do not involve bride-burning and unnatural death. Indian legislation on marital violence perpetuates this narrow definition. For example, both Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code and the Dowry Prohibition Act emphasize violence within the context of dowry harassment. However, informal discussions with women by researchers and activists have underlined the need for greater study of other factors and characteristics associated with abuse.

A further critical element in the definition of violence is whether it is framed as an exclusively interpersonal act or seen more broadly as an expression of power that perpetuates the subordination of women. If it is the former, the definition would only include those acts which might be seen as crimes and thus focus

only on acts which result in physical evidence. If it is the latter, the definition of violence would include all acts of “physical, verbal, visual or sexual abuse that are experienced by women or girls as threats, invasion or assaults and that have the effect of hurting her, or degrading her and/or taking away her ability to control contact (intimate or otherwise) with another individual” (Koss et al. 1994). Such a definition more fully captures all the different processes by which women undergo subordination within intimate relations and fits more directly into a human rights perspective.

In this research program, the underlying framework for any of the operational definitions of domestic violence adopted by specific studies resembles this latter view: that the process of subordination becomes manifest in a wide range of violent acts. The definition in each study attempts to be as broad as possible. For instance, the study by Leela Visaria has explicitly considered psychological, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in her analysis of forms of abuse. Similarly, both the studies on responses to violence against women examined herein explicitly state an operational definition of domestic violence that includes mental, emotional, and financial abuse of a woman. These acts of intimidation and cruelty led women or their family members to seek the support of agencies other than the family.

### *Issues of Methodology*

Given the complexity and sensitivity of domestic violence, it was essential to use a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and tools for analysis in the research. All three studies rely on a mix of methods such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, participant observation, and review of secondary sources along with survey formats. Both response studies made an attempt to ensure the participation of the women and organizations from whom data was gathered. One way to ensure participation was through conducting workshops that brought together various organizations involved in response efforts to elicit a wider information base of ongoing efforts. These workshops were essential as there are no currently existing compila-

tions of responses or of the organizations involved in these issues. Another positive outcome of these workshops was that the sharing of information resulted in better networking among the organizations working on violence against women. Further, the researchers shared the progress of the analysis with the participant organizations and incorporated feedback from the agencies surveyed into the reports. In addition, each research team will hold final workshops with key stakeholders to report the findings and facilitate networking between organizations to develop advocacy efforts.

A methodological dilemma that emerged while designing the response studies was whether the existing knowledge base was sufficient to evaluate the effectiveness of responses. One concern centered on whose perception was primary—that of the woman experiencing violence, the NGO, the state or some outside “objective” entity. Second was the determination of what constitutes a successful outcome: an immediate resolution to the specific incident, a legal resolution that enables the woman to leave if she so chooses, or a court prosecution and police investigation. A third concern was how to decide which indicators should be used to gauge the impact of responses and whether the data exist to assess impact. The perspectives of the women experiencing violence are crucial for evaluating effectiveness of responses. The researchers consciously decided, however, that as these studies were an early effort to document and understand the response efforts, the more immediate goal would be an initial survey and brief assessment of the range of community and state responses. From this outcome there would then be an attempt to distill lessons from field experiences and to generate criteria for evaluation.

### **Ethical Issues**

A study of domestic violence also generates diverse ethical issues. First, a household survey asking women if they have been beaten is often considered inappropriate to implement given the widespread acknowledgment of the ethical and safety concerns involved. Qualitative methods are better suited and require significant rapport to gather high quality data.

In Leela Visaria’s study close rapport was built with the women of the community over a period of two and a half years. Her study is unique in that the issue of domestic violence emerged from the women themselves as an important element to consider if their status and autonomy were being researched. Given this self-identification of the problem and the rapport that was established between the surveyed women and the interviewers, the detailed survey of their experience of domestic violence had a very low non-response rate (1.2 percent). Concern for the immediate safety of women interviewed and for the responsibilities of the researcher in discovering these dangers constitutes a significant ethical dilemma for those involved with this issue.

### **A Description of the Studies**

The three studies together provide an understanding of the degree of domestic violence being experienced by Indian women in a rural setting, the possible protective factors and the existing options available to women outside of family and friends. They also point to new directions for strategies to reduce, and hopefully eliminate, domestic violence in India.

### **Violence against Women in India: Evidence from Rural Gujarat**

Leela Visaria’s study on five villages in Kheda district is a preliminary exploration of the prevalence of domestic violence against women, the correlates of violence, the forms of abuse and the reasons given for abuse. The findings of the study dramatically underscore the universality of the experience within the home across age, community, and education. It also points to several interesting dimensions such as the lower incidence of violence among joint families, the difference in impact of higher educational status of men compared to that of women on levels of violence, and the complex linkages between correlates of violence, forms of abuse, and reasons given for abuse. Her study also indicates some of the possible links between the gender division of labor within the household and incidents of violence. The study highlights the lack of options for women in rural communities to address domestic violence. Yet her analysis makes evident the possible points of entry for inter-

vention strategies that would strengthen family and community responses.

Visaria's study provides an important backdrop to the SNDT University and TISS response studies. These two studies provide a critical look at the ongoing programmatic efforts by both the government and the non-governmental sectors. Both studies have focused in particular upon the issue of partnership between civil society and the state, which has emerged as a central element in the implementation and monitoring of human rights obligations. The range of responses that have been considered include: 1) judicial and police responses, 2) state welfare policies, 3) sensitization programs conducted within the community and in specific sectors such as the judiciary, 4) enabling actions undertaken by the voluntary organizations for economic and social empowerment of women, and 5) support to the individual woman to fight for rights and rebuild her life. A critical outcome from both studies is the development of a typology of this range of responses that is analytically rich and provides a tool to develop criteria for evaluating effectiveness.

### ***Best Practices among Responses to Domestic Violence in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra***

The second study, by Nishi Mitra of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), focuses specifically on the governmental and non-governmental interventions and responses being implemented in the states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. This study undertakes a non-random, cross-sectional survey of various actors involved in interventions. A qualitative

analysis of purposively selected samples of state and NGO responses was also undertaken. Counseling oriented towards preserving family inviolability is found to be a predominant response in the state sector. The non-governmental sector does attempt to extend the range of services provided by offering an array of rehabilitative programs. An issue that Mitra probes is the extent to which the government interventions are contradictory in nature, and in particular whether the efforts at family counseling undermine legal and judicial responses.

### ***Responses to Domestic Violence in Karnataka and Gujarat***

The focus of the SNDT University study by Veena Poonacha and Divya Pandey is on the interventions and responses being implemented in the states of Gujarat and Karnataka. The study provides a comprehensive examination of the range of responses through in-depth case studies of organizations. Some of the factors that are considered critical to the content and implementation of the responses are: a) the philosophy of the organization with regard to social change and gender relationships; b) the organizational history; c) decision-making processes within the organization; d) the organizational structure; e) the quality of services and f) staff morale. A finding of the study is that the prevailing types of response or intervention strategies, among both state and non-governmental sectors, are in essence reactive to individual complaints and are, therefore, short-term in their impact. The study, however, also points to the emergence of a variety of innovative, grassroots efforts to address domestic violence more proactively.

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# Study 1

## Violence against Women in India: Evidence from Rural Gujarat

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### Introduction

The nature of domestic violence, its causes, and its prevalence must be fully understood in order to plan effective prevention and intervention strategies. Research should examine not only the determinants and consequences of violence but also relevant economic, social, and cultural factors. Most of the current Indian literature focuses primarily on the linkages between the socialization of women into subordinate positions, male patriarchy, and domestic violence (Krishnaraj 1991; Heise et al. 1994; Miller 1992). However, these explanations do not provide an understanding of how violence seeps into certain relationships or why husbands abuse their wives. As determinants of violence, proximate factors like economic stress, alcohol consumption, and allocation of time, need to be explored empirically and theoretically. This community-based study presents a picture of domestic violence as reported by married women in rural Gujarat. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, the project explores the magnitude, onset, and forms of violence. In addition, it studies reasons given for abuse, correlates of violence, and women's options for support.

### Genesis of the Study

The study emerges from a larger project funded by the Ford Foundation in New Delhi that is examining the relationship between women's education and health seeking behavior. The data was collected through repeated visits to five villages in Kheda district of central Gujarat between May 1993 and January 1997. As part of the study, a baseline survey of

the entire population was conducted to assess the socio-economic and health situation of the region. From this census, a statistically random sample of 450 currently married women with at least one child less than three years of age at the time was selected. The majority of these women were contacted twelve times in the span of three and a half years. The data instruments from the large study investigated the relationship between:

- ▶ Women's education and their autonomy;
- ▶ Their health seeking behavior and management of illnesses suffered by their children; and
- ▶ Their treatment seeking behavior regarding their own gynecological problems.

While exploring these issues, many of the women in the survey suggested that violence was an important indicator of women's autonomy and power within the household. This feedback led to a few exploratory focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. These were held to understand the broad parameters that could be explored in a community-based quantitative survey on violence. The insights gained were valuable in designing the survey, which was conducted between December 1996 and January 1997 in all five villages.

### Study Design and Survey Instruments

From the original sample of 450 women, 346 were contacted for the violence study. The attrition of nearly 100 women is due primarily to permanent out-migration and temporary leaves of absence from the



village. Only four women declined to participate. The questionnaire addressed both current and past episodes of violence. Supplementing the initial five focus group discussions and the survey, 36 in-depth interviews were conducted to facilitate open-ended dialogue with the participants. The interviewers selected survey respondents who may have had family members present at the time of questioning and needed more privacy to speak freely, those who made inconsistent or deliberately misleading statements, and those who were particularly open in discussing the violence they experienced in their marriage. Interviews were recorded with permission.

### Location of the Study

The participants in the study come from a relatively prosperous area approximately 15 kilometers from Anand, location of the successful Amul dairy co-operative.<sup>3</sup> Nearly 55 percent of the households in the study own a milch animal; 86 percent have access to piped water; and 60 percent have electricity available for domestic use. In addition, almost 10 percent of the husbands of the respondent women were reported to be salaried employees. Men and women exhibit different levels of education. Half of the women have no formal schooling and 30 percent have eight or more years of schooling. The level of literacy was much higher for men, with only 17 percent without formal schooling and 48 percent with eight or more years of schooling.

### Magnitude of Violence

Two-thirds of the women surveyed reported some form of psychological, physical, or sexual abuse. Of the total sample, 42 percent experience physical beatings or sexual assault. An additional 23 percent suffer abusive language, belittlement, and threats. This large proportion resonates with high levels of violence recorded in other parts of India. About 36-38 percent of women in a Tamil Nadu study and 42-48 percent of women in an Uttar Pradesh study reported violence (Jejeebhoy 1998). In one village in Punjab,

75 percent of the women from scheduled caste households reported regular beatings (Mahajan 1990).

### Onset of Violence

*When I was pregnant with the first child—a girl—the altercations between us had started and have since continued. He is like a strong pepper, hot, so that even with a slight provocation or fault, he loses his head and fights. He tolerates nothing.<sup>4</sup>*

During the in-depth interviews, some women commented that once the initial inhibition was broken, it was not difficult for men to beat their wives. Most women remembered the first argument with their husbands. In most cases, the problems started within the first year of marriage and before the birth of any children. Women reported that after having children, the violence did not decrease but their husbands became accustomed to abusing them. Many also felt that if they listened quietly, their husband's abuse might die down. If instead a woman defended herself or responded angrily, the confrontation usually worsened and could escalate to physical violence. A woman often retaliated when her husband insulted or blamed her parents for her perceived shortcomings.

### Correlates of Violence

*He started enjoying drinking and would come home drunk and start beating me. Now I am married for 15 or 16 years and have two boys of school going age. And I get beaten up.*

The women in the study were divided into those who experienced both psychological and physical abuse, those who experienced psychological abuse, and those who did not report any abuse. The results show that each form of abuse cuts across all age, caste, and education lines (see table 1). Identifying trends

<sup>3</sup> The Amul dairy (Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation—GCMMF) is comprised of 10,183 village milk producers' cooperatives in Gujarat. This cooperative has 1.95 million members, produces 6 million liters of milk per day, and sold 455 million dollars worth of products in 1997-98. The sale of milk fetches cash income for the households.

<sup>4</sup> These quotes are taken directly from field interviews. In order to protect the privacy of these individuals, no identifying information has been given.



of the different forms of abuse, common precipitating factors thought to trigger the violence, and magnitude of violence across these correlates can establish the widespread prevalence of violence across categories and contribute to the design of more specific prevention and intervention strategies. In addition, the social and economic conditions that may foster different types of violence can be examined through such an analysis.

Despite slightly higher numbers of young brides reporting abuse, the relationship between age, duration of marriage, and violence is weak. The most

widespread violence was reported among women from the Thakore and Baraiya castes (80 percent), other low castes (75 percent), and scheduled castes (74 percent). Though relatively less, large numbers of Muslim women (56 percent) and high caste women (45 percent) also indicated abuse from their husbands. Differences in the rates of physical abuse account for most of the variation between caste groups. While all women reported similar rates of psychological abuse (23-28 percent), a smaller proportion of high caste women (17 percent) additionally indicated physical abuse compared to low caste women (57 percent).

**Table 1**  
**Magnitude of Violence in Entire Sample (N = 346)<sup>2</sup>**

|                            | Psychological Abuse | Psychological and Physical Abuse | No Reported Abuse | Percentage Distribution of Sample |
|----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>All</b>                 | 42 %                | 23 %                             | 35 %              | 100 %                             |
| <b>Caste</b>               |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| Scheduled                  | 23 %                | 48 %                             | 29 %              | 15 %                              |
| Lower                      | 20 %                | 57 %                             | 23 %              | 47 %                              |
| High                       | 28 %                | 17 %                             | 55 %              | 26 %                              |
| Muslim                     | 23 %                | 33 %                             | 44 %              | 12 %                              |
| <b>Age of Woman</b>        |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| 15 – 24                    | 26 %                | 52 %                             | 22 %              | 24 %                              |
| 25 – 34                    | 23 %                | 38 %                             | 39 %              | 66 %                              |
| 35 +                       | 17 %                | 47 %                             | 36 %              | 10 %                              |
| <b>Woman's Education</b>   |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| No formal schooling        | 16 %                | 60 %                             | 24 %              | 49 %                              |
| Lower primary              | 35 %                | 41 %                             | 24 %              | 10 %                              |
| Upper primary              | 24 %                | 41 %                             | 35 %              | 16 %                              |
| Secondary +                | 32 %                | 10 %                             | 58 %              | 26 %                              |
| <b>Husband's Education</b> |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| No formal schooling        | 14 %                | 68 %                             | 19 %              | 17 %                              |
| Lower primary              | 15 %                | 62 %                             | 23 %              | 14 %                              |
| Upper primary              | 26 %                | 47 %                             | 27 %              | 21 %                              |
| Secondary +                | 28 %                | 25 %                             | 47 %              | 48 %                              |
| <b>Living Arrangement</b>  |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| Nuclear                    | 23 %                | 50 %                             | 27 %              | 60 %                              |
| Joint                      | 23 %                | 30 %                             | 47 %              | 40 %                              |
| <b>Years of Marriage</b>   |                     |                                  |                   |                                   |
| 1 – 5                      | 40 %                | 35 %                             | 25 %              | 6 %                               |
| 6 – 10                     | 24 %                | 40 %                             | 36 %              | 57 %                              |
| 11 – 14                    | 18 %                | 51 %                             | 31 %              | 25 %                              |
| 15 +                       | 21 %                | 40 %                             | 39 %              | 12 %                              |

<sup>2</sup> Because of rounding, not all rows add up to 100% exactly.

Reported violence declined with the increasing education of both men and women. Though incidence did not fall below forty percent for any group, abusive relationships were reported more frequently among illiterate women (76 percent) and illiterate men (81 percent) than women and men with secondary schooling or more (42 percent and 53 percent respectively). Violence also varied with living arrangements – 53 percent of women in joint families reported abuse compared to 73 percent of women in nuclear families. It is important to note that the rate of psychological violence among both groups is the same, the 20 percent differential is due to higher numbers of women in nuclear families reporting physical abuse.

When grouped by age and duration of marriage, all categories of women reported either psychological or physical abuse at incidence levels ranging from 60 percent to 75 percent. An interesting finding is that differences in overall violence by these groupings are statistically insignificant. Contrary to some expectations that violence might subside with age, adult children, and adjustments, women who suffer abuse early on continue to experience it throughout their marriage. As one respondent who had been married for several years remarked, “The frequency or intensity of beating or quarrels have not really decreased. It should have with the passage of time, but nothing of that sort has happened.” The data suggest that as women age and have been married longer, forms of violence actually shift towards more physical violence. For example, while women who had been married 1-5 years reported similar levels of physical and psychological violence (35 percent and 40 percent, respectively), the responses of women who had been married 11-15 years demonstrated a shift towards more physical violence. About 51 percent of these women reported physical abuse and 18 percent reported psychological abuse.

### **Precipitating Factors of Abuse**

*If the food is not according to his taste, and if the quantum of salt in the vegetable is too much, or it is very pungent or not fully*

*cooked, he loses his temper. If he thinks that I have not kept the house tidy and clean, he loses his temper. He does give me money to manage the house, but if the money is all spent and I ask for more, he loses his temper and picks a quarrel. When he picks a quarrel, he blames my parents and uses very foul language for them. I cannot tolerate that and so we fight.*

A central question in understanding and addressing abuse is how underlying patterns of gender subordination and the use of violence for conflict resolution manifest themselves daily. Women in the study frequently attributed an outburst of violence against them to proximate causes or precipitating triggers such as “mistakes” in running the household. The catalysts cited most often include: not preparing meals on time (66 percent), not cooking meals properly (51 percent), not caring for the children properly (48 percent), and economic stress (48 percent). Though marital violence in India is often equated with dowry violence, just one percent stated that inadequate dowry precipitated the abuse. During the in-depth interviews, women stated that while these incidents described above are often the initial catalysts for violence, their husband’s anger was aggravated further when the women resisted verbal abuse by defending themselves or using harsh language.

Though reports of precipitating incidents such as preparing a meal late or not disciplining a child may seem trivial, they are indicative of the many demands on women’s time. In addition to work and responsibilities outside of the home, most women in the study are also expected to be responsible for maintaining the household, caring for the children, and preparing meals. Such gender-specific responsibilities like collecting fuel and water are time-consuming and labor-intensive. The pressure of completing all of these tasks “properly” may reinforce these dynamics of gender subordination and become an excuse for violence.

Other existing literature has gone further in examining the possible underlying factors. One study in

Karnataka found that alcohol use and dowry were primary and important determinants of abuse (Rao 1997). Others argue that hierarchical gender relations, perpetuated through gender socialization and socio-economic inequities, are the root cause of violence against women (Heise, Pitanguy, and Germaine 1994). In addition to economic inequality between men and women, David Levinson (1989) outlines three other factors that together help predict violence against women: a pattern of using physical violence for conflict resolution, male authority in the home, and a divorce restriction for women. In the current study in Gujarat, only three women reported dowry-related violence. This low number may be due to higher prevalence of dowry harassment in urban, higher caste families not represented in a rural sample. The Gujarat findings support Levinson's predictors of violence. The lack of women's power within the home as well as constraining social and economic factors which provide few options outside of marriage were indeed associated with high levels of abuse.

## Forms of Violence

*Besides using abusive language, my husband hits me with whatever he can lay his hands on. When he is really mad, he flings a stick or whatever is in his hand freely towards me. He does not kick or pull my hair or bang against the wall. But hitting me in the back or slapping is what he does most of the times. In a fit of rage, he even asks me to leave home and go to my parents' house. But how can I go? I have children and this is my home.*

In this study, reported violence takes many forms. The most frequently reported types of violence against a woman include abusive language (80 percent), beatings (63 percent), forcing her back to her parental home (52 percent), and threats to throw her out (51 percent). Other types of abuse include refusing to give money to manage the household, protracted criticism, and getting angry with the children. Two-thirds of the women who were abused reported physical violence. Of the women who reported physical

violence, the most frequent forms are slaps (100 percent), having objects thrown at them (63 percent), and beatings with a stick (58 percent). Approximately ten percent of the women who were physically abused indicated they required medical attention after getting beaten, yet only 38 percent of these sought treatment. Despite the fact that there were few inquiries specifically on the subject of sexual abuse, 20 percent of women reporting physical violence described violence of a sexual nature.

Women in the survey who reported violence experienced an average of three different forms of abuse. In addition, 45 percent of the women reported that their husbands used abusive language in the presence of their children, and 63 percent said that this occurred in front of their parents as well. Many women grew to tolerate abusive language in the presence of their in-laws, but felt physical beatings in their presence were demeaning and corrosive of their self-worth.

## Precipitating Factors for Domestic Violence

Looking at the data as a whole helps to understand the overall contours of domestic violence, but it is essential to examine the survey responses more closely in light of its complex nature. Table 2 provides more detailed information on the linkages among the precipitating factors for abuse. Furthermore, the analysis suggests potential inhibiting factors for domestic violence against women.

With a sensitive and socially charged topic like domestic violence, questions about under-reporting arise. Differences in reported violence by group, for example by caste or levels of education, are difficult to analyze because of concerns that some women may face stronger social pressure to keep violence private and hidden, and therefore may not be reporting violence to interviewers. The consistent interaction between researchers and participants in this study over a long period of time hopefully minimized this possibility. Furthermore, many women in all categories did report violence. An analysis of these reports can provide important data regarding possible differences in experiences of violence and in trends

**Table 2**  
**Correlates, Forms, and Reasons Given for Abuse among Women Experiencing Violence (N=228)<sup>3</sup>**

|                            | Forms of Abuse   |                  |                              | Reasons Given for Abuse |                      |                        |
|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
|                            | Abusive Language | Physical Assault | Threats to force out of home | Meals not ready on time | Economic constraints | Children not cared for |
| <b>Caste</b>               |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| Scheduled                  | 78 %             | 68 %             | 60 %                         | 65 %                    | 68 %                 | 43 %                   |
| Lower                      | 91 %             | 74 %             | 62 %                         | 72 %                    | 55 %                 | 47 %                   |
| High                       | 48 %             | 38 %             | 35 %                         | 50 %                    | 18 %                 | 45 %                   |
| Muslim                     | 79 %             | 58 %             | 38 %                         | 58 %                    | 33 %                 | 67 %                   |
| <b>Age of Woman</b>        |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| 15 – 24                    | 80 %             | 66 %             | 51 %                         | 58 %                    | 45 %                 | 51 %                   |
| 25 – 34                    | 79 %             | 62 %             | 56 %                         | 66 %                    | 51 %                 | 49 %                   |
| 35 +                       | 87 %             | 74 %             | 56 %                         | 83 %                    | 44 %                 | 39 %                   |
| <b>Woman's Education</b>   |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| No formal schooling        | 91 %             | 79 %             | 64 %                         | 76 %                    | 59 %                 | 44 %                   |
| Lower primary              | 88 %             | 54 %             | 50 %                         | 73 %                    | 35 %                 | 38 %                   |
| Upper primary              | 80 %             | 63 %             | 46 %                         | 46 %                    | 54 %                 | 57 %                   |
| Secondary +                | 38 %             | 24 %             | 22 %                         | 43 %                    | 16 %                 | 60 %                   |
| <b>Husband's Education</b> |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| No formal schooling        | 96 %             | 83 %             | 67 %                         | 75 %                    | 65 %                 | 44 %                   |
| Lower primary              | 86 %             | 81 %             | 62 %                         | 81 %                    | 65 %                 | 40 %                   |
| Upper primary              | 89 %             | 64 %             | 53 %                         | 74 %                    | 47 %                 | 38 %                   |
| Secondary +                | 73 %             | 53 %             | 50 %                         | 61 %                    | 40 %                 | 58 %                   |
| <b>Living Arrangement</b>  |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| Nuclear                    | 82 %             | 68 %             | 57 %                         | 70 %                    | 51 %                 | 49 %                   |
| Joint                      | 77 %             | 57 %             | 43 %                         | 57 %                    | 42 %                 | 47 %                   |
| <b>Years of Marriage</b>   |                  |                  |                              |                         |                      |                        |
| 1 – 5                      | 53 %             | 47 %             | 33 %                         | 47 %                    | 27 %                 | 47 %                   |
| 6 – 10                     | 79 %             | 62 %             | 51 %                         | 59 %                    | 46 %                 | 50 %                   |
| 11 – 14                    | 87 %             | 73 %             | 57 %                         | 73 %                    | 60 %                 | 55 %                   |
| 15 +                       | 85 %             | 65 %             | 65 %                         | 88 %                    | 46 %                 | 23 %                   |

<sup>3</sup> Because women gave multiple answers to questions about forms and reasons for abuse, the rows are not meant to add up to 100%.

by caste, age, and education. The knowledge of such distinctions can in turn guide the design of appropriate intervention strategies.

The forms of violence reported vary across caste. Women from the scheduled and lower castes reported much higher incidence of physical abuse than other survey respondents (see table 1). They were also more likely to report that their husbands threatened to force them out of the home or back to their parents' house. For example, 35 percent of high caste women in abu-

sive relationships mentioned that their husbands threatened to expel them from the house compared to 62 percent of lower caste women. Precipitating factors also varied: while all women mentioned complaints about meal preparation and child care, 68 percent of scheduled caste and 55 percent of lower caste women who had reported some type of violence listed economic stress as a precipitating factor for abuse. Another difference among castes was that a greater proportion of high caste women (20 percent) reported feeling that others instigated the vio-

lence in their homes compared to Muslim women (12 percent) or lower caste women (10 percent). Reported forms and factors seen to be prompting violence among scheduled caste and lower caste women are oriented around economic constraints and being thrown out of the house. These women have few options outside the marital home. Higher caste women may be more concerned about social stigma and they may be less likely to report physical abuse.

Two important results of the survey contradict the popular perception of the young bride in a joint family being the most vulnerable to violence. In this study, women living in nuclear families reported more violence, and this violence continued as women aged. Likewise, economic constraints were consistently offered as a precipitating factor by approximately half of the women, regardless of their age. However, problems with meals not being prepared on time were cited more frequently by older women: 83 percent of women aged 35 or older listed it as a factor prompting abuse compared to 58 percent of women aged 15-24.

Similarly, higher percentages of women married for longer periods of time mentioned some form of physical violence as compared to newly married women. Women who had been married fifteen or more years commonly reported having objects thrown at them (54 percent) and beatings with a stick (42 percent). Reports of abusive language also increased with length of marriage: 53 percent of newlyweds reported verbal abuse as compared to 85 percent of women married for more than 15 years. Lastly, women who had been married for several years were threatened with eviction from the house more frequently – 65 percent as compared to 33 percent of women married for one to five years. Large differences did not exist in the magnitude of violence experienced by women who had been married for a short time as compared to those who had been married for a long time. However, the number of different precipitating factors and the forms of violence both increased with the length of the marital relationship. These findings could indicate that, with time, abuse inten-

sifies to the point where everything becomes an excuse or trigger for violence.

Many of the greatest differences in incidence, forms, and precipitating factors occurred by level of education. While rates of reported psychological abuse in the entire sample were similar across different groupings, reported physical violence dropped from 60 percent among women with no formal schooling to 10 percent among women with secondary schooling. However, as mentioned previously, even among women with more than secondary school education, two out of five reported some form of violence. Of these women, the most frequently reported forms and factors triggering violence differed from the rest of the sample. Among these abused women, smaller percentages of educated women reported abusive language or threats of being forced out of the home. The factors that women with greater education cited for precipitating violence also differed from the rest of the sample: 43 percent of educated women reported issues with meal preparation compared to three-fourths of women by other groupings. These women were more likely than women with no schooling to cite child care (60 compared to 44 percent) and the instigation of outsiders (19 compared to 11 percent) as factors precipitating the violence.

The magnitude, precipitating factors, and forms of violence also declined with husband's education, but to a smaller degree. For example, 91 percent of women with no schooling reported abusive language compared to a much lower 38 percent of women with secondary schooling. While 96 percent of men with no schooling abused their wives verbally, the violence declined less substantially to 73 percent among men with secondary schooling.

### **Communication with Others about Violence**

*I do not have relatives living nearby, but there are neighbors. It is not that the neighbors play any role in the quarrels or instigate my husband against me. In fact,*

*they sometimes take my side and tell my husband that since you do not earn regularly, how do you expect your wife to run the house.*

A woman's access to support or alternatives may affect her situation with domestic violence. In this study, three out of five women confronting violence were able to confide in others, usually neighbors or female in-laws residing in the household. However, family members and neighbors are reluctant to intervene because violence is seen as a private, family affair. In other cases, they sometimes feel helpless to stop the abusive husband.

Of women who maintain silence, 75 percent emphasized concern for the honor of their husband and family as the primary reason for staying quiet. The isolation of women in violent households deepens when social and economic constraints preclude visits to their natal home. After women have children, visits to their parents' home decline. Other reasons women cannot go home include a social acceptance that women endure hardship with their in-laws, the unwillingness to depend on married brothers at their natal home, and the apprehension that a subsequent return would be humiliating if their husband did not come to fetch them back. Even for women who are able to go to their natal home after a confrontation, 30 percent reported that they do not tell their family the reason for their visit.

## Perceived Options

*One does often feel like running away from it all. But where does one go? There should be a place where women can go. The only place is parents' house but they will always try to send you back. Also, when there are children, where can one go? Sometimes I do feel quite suffocated, but when I think of the children, I cannot take any steps in haste. My children would not eat food prepared by anyone else. So I have to live for them.*

Especially when they were unable to access their parental home for support, abused women felt they had few alternatives. Although many reported that they had thought about running away or committing suicide, they felt these options were not feasible because of their young children and the lack of places to go.

Barbara Miller (1992) listed some options that may seem viable for women who are considering escape from an abusive situation, including: support from the natal home, divorce/separation, bearing sons, age, and committing suicide. As a result of the concerns discussed above, women cannot always go to their natal home, and divorce carries a great deal of social stigma for higher caste women. Lower caste women, who have poor access to and control over economic resources, may have no place to go. Survey results did not show that abuse lessened with the birth of sons or with increasing age. Even suicide is not an option because many women do not want to abandon their children.

Public support institutions such as shelter homes are an option but are still not easily or widely accessible to most women. Measures such as approaching the police or women's groups for legal actions must be examined carefully as other ways by which women can address violence. These solutions may have little value until women have more economic options outside of marriage. In the private sphere, one important source of support is the natal family. At present the natal family is often constrained by social norms, the status vis-à-vis the conjugal family, and economic resources. Natal families should be strengthened to act as mediators. In searching for the most effective strategies, the voices and perspectives of women survivors are crucial.

## Conclusion

The research suggests that in the present Indian rural setting, solutions to much of domestic violence must be found within the family setting and within the community setting. Strategies that should be explored further are education of women and girls;

gender-sensitive education directed at males; the formation of women's groups to minimize isolation and increase power; and the use of mass media to promote more balanced, healthy perceptions of male-female relationships.

The results of this study, though limited by lack of multivariate analysis to establish significance of factors, present a glimpse into both the severity and endemic nature of marital violence. The research also helps to increase the understanding of the social and

economic pressures that limit the power and options of women in violent relationships. Understanding both immediate precipitating factors and underlying causes for abuse as well as the structures that women feel comfortable tapping for support provides a starting place for designing initiatives to counter violence. The ways in which correlates such as age, caste, education, and duration of marriage are associated with different forms and factors is an important finding that can aid in informing context-specific efforts in domestic violence prevention and intervention.

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## Study 2

# Best Practices among Responses to Domestic Violence in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh

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### Introduction

Violence against women has been recognized as one of the eleven critical areas of concern by the Indian government in its 1995 Country Report for the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing. This is a significant change from just over two decades ago when the 1975 landmark "Status of Women in India" report did not even include violence as a chapter. Yet, few concrete estimates of the magnitude of violence in India exist. The number of cases of violence against women that are reported to the police under legal classifications of cruelty, torture, and dowry death, give just a small indication of the problem. Torture and cruelty by husband or in-laws constituted the major kind of crime amongst all reported forms of violence against women in 1995, accounting for 29 percent of all reported cases. Further, these reports had increased dramatically, from 21,106 in 1991 to 36,219 in 1995. There is an urgent need for organized responses on the part of the state as well as the non-governmental or voluntary sector to address the epidemic of domestic violence.

However, there are few studies that document the existing responses to domestic violence or assess their effectiveness. A study on institutional responses to domestic violence was undertaken by the Women's Studies Unit at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, in 1997-98 to fill this gap. In reviewing the above national statistics, it was noted that the two

states of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra together account for 29.7 percent of total registered crimes against women. Further, Maharashtra registered the highest number of cases of torture and cruelty by husband and/or his relatives and Madhya Pradesh is a close second. This research study was undertaken by Tata Institute in order to analyze the range of government and non-governmental responses to domestic violence in these two states, to identify "best practices", and to suggest criteria for evaluating effective responses to domestic violence.

### Scope and Methodology

This research study has consciously addressed issues related to research design, and attempted to develop a suitable methodology to study domestic violence. The study has been largely exploratory in nature.

The choice of the locale of study was dictated by a number of valid factors. As noted above, both states are regarded as crime prone regions with a high incidence and prevalence of crimes against women. But their similarities end here. In terms of development indicators, Maharashtra has a strong track record whereas Madhya Pradesh is counted among the least developed states. The voluntary sector in Madhya Pradesh is of recent origin and the women's movement is still in its nascent stages. Maharashtra, on the other hand, has witnessed various reform movements and has been the center of a vibrant and ac-



tive women's movement. This contrast shows a context for different responses in the states and provides an opportunity to explore socio-culturally appropriate interventions. These regional variations have also been reflected in the different approaches to data collection adopted for the two states.

The methodology was designed to interweave a quantitative survey of field practices with a qualitative analysis of purposively selected samples of government and non-governmental responses. The absence of a directory of NGOs for Madhya Pradesh led to a pilot visit in several districts to locate agents and agencies that would be key informants and to arrive at possible areas of inquiry. This process yielded a rounded perspective on the range of responses to domestic violence in Madhya Pradesh. In contrast, a well-documented directory of NGOs exists for Maharashtra. From a total of 301 NGOs listed, the 128 that were reportedly working on the issue of domestic violence were contacted through a brief questionnaire on their activities and willingness to participate in the study. The same process was followed in Madhya Pradesh after the pilot visit. Twenty NGOs from Madhya Pradesh and 74 from Maharashtra responded.

The actual selection of districts was dictated by different factors in both states. In Maharashtra, the pilot questionnaire defined the areas of research in terms of the NGO sector. But, in Madhya Pradesh, districts were selected based on a combination of factors such as areas with visible people's initiatives, those showing poor female development indices, areas with high crime rates, or substantial tribal populations. A total of 13 districts in Madhya Pradesh and 18 in Maharashtra were covered in the search.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, using an interview guide developed out of the categories of inquiry that emerged during the pilot visits. Secondary data sources such as government policies and programs, reports of various departments, and plans were also analyzed to contextualize the responses.

This research study has thus concluded that a methodology combining a quantitative measure, such as a survey, and a qualitative analysis of purposively selected samples, is an effective strategy for obtaining an approximate representative sample of the entire range of interventions. At the same time, this combination makes for an inquiry that is sensitive to the variety and complexity of responses possible.

During the course of the study, the absence of a sound database on domestic violence and specifically on responses to domestic violence became apparent. This lacuna needs to be addressed for strengthening advocacy as well as for developing a deeper understanding of the issue.

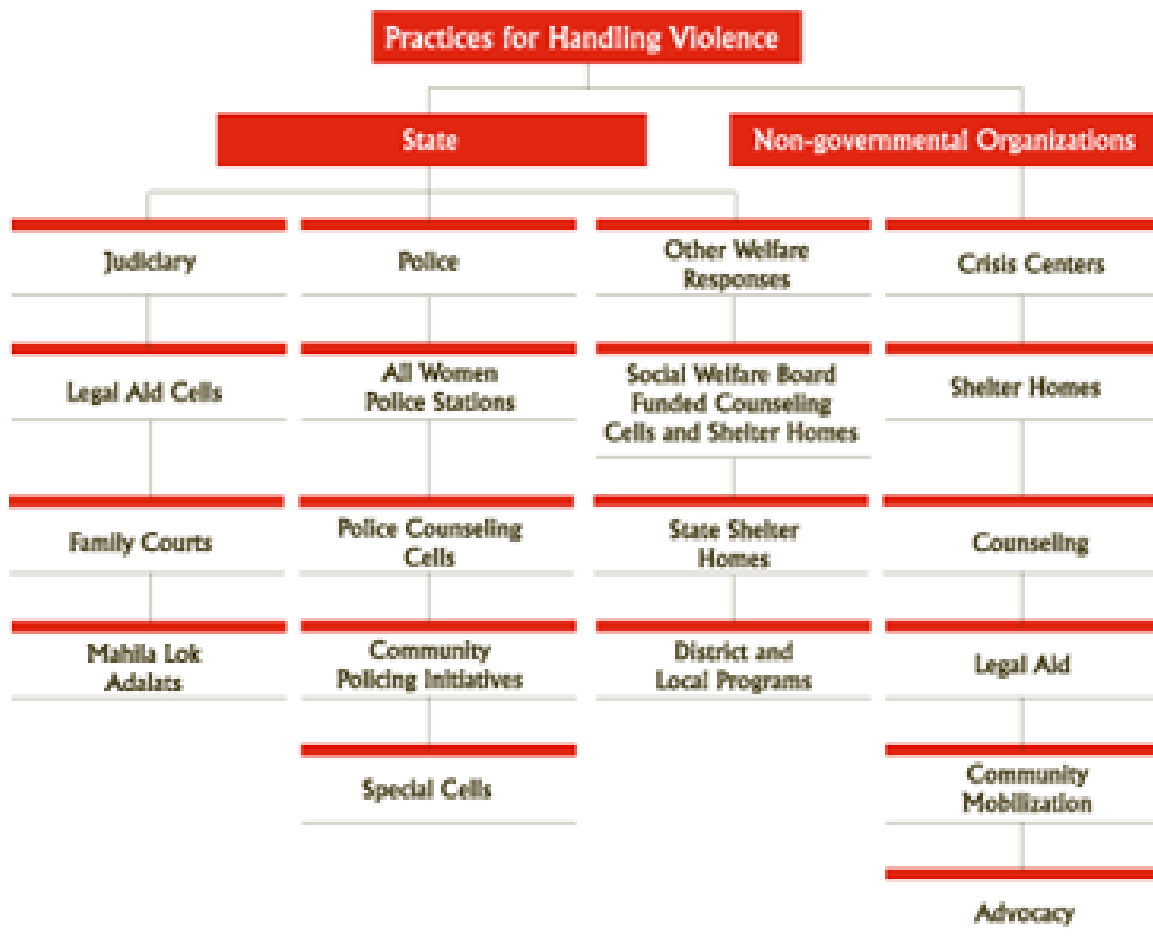
### **The Range of State and Non-Governmental Interventions**

A broad overview of the range of responses to domestic violence reveals innovation and concern on the part of the state as well as the NGO sector to address the issue of domestic violence. For the purposes of this study, domestic violence was defined as physical, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse experienced by an adult woman within her home. The universe of research encompasses both state and NGO responses to domestic violence (see figure 1, Charting the Universe of Research). State responses covered included a) judicial responses, such as legal aid cells, family courts, women's courts; b) police responses in the form of All Women Police Stations, police counseling cells, special cells maintained by NGOs within police stations, and community policing initiatives; c) welfare responses such as shelter homes and counseling cells, and d) a few innovative experiments at the local level. The range of NGO responses varied from provision of alternate shelter, counseling, community mobilization, and education and awareness efforts to advocacy efforts.

#### **State Interventions**

Foremost among state interventions have been the criminalization of domestic violence and the passing of several amendments to address the issue of dowry harassment and dowry death. Other measures have

**Figure 1**  
**Charting the Universe of Research**



involved efforts to make legal services more accessible to women. This has resulted in the setting up of Legal Aid Cells, Family Courts, *Lok Adalats* or Peoples' Courts, and *Mahila Lok Adalats* or Women's Courts. Attempts to make the police more accessible to women have taken the form of All Women Police Stations. Police counseling cells, community policing initiatives, and special cells run by NGOs at police stations have also sought to address different needs of women experiencing abuse. Among the other state responses have been counseling cells and shelter homes. Certain states initiated district-level programs to address the additional needs of income generation and employment.

### **NGO Interventions**

Ideologically, various organizations are positioned differently on women's issues. Their understanding

and activism on other issues like poverty, casteism, illiteracy, and alcoholism inform their positions on the issue of domestic violence. However, responses in the NGO sector have attempted to address the practical as well as the strategic interests of women.

While some organizations have reached out to affected women directly with legal aid, family intervention, alternative shelter, and economic programs providing income-generating opportunities, many others have refrained from tackling the issue of violence head on. Those organizations operating with an understanding of the structural nature of domestic violence seek to empower women through education, legal awareness, asset creation, and mobilization of strong women's groups. Innovative methods to build community awareness and support include street plays, exhibitions, mass meetings, orga-

nizing elderly women to welcome every new bride to the village, and mock funeral processions publicizing violence. By attempting to make domestic violence a part of public discourse, the NGO community has begun to deconstruct the myth of the private nature of the problem.

A significant feature of NGO activity, especially in Maharashtra, has been its outreach to diverse socio-economic groups including the upper and middle classes that have been largely invisible as seekers of state services. Given the limited options for Indian women outside of marriage, however, the NGO community has often placed greater emphasis on reconciliation when addressing the needs of women experiencing abuse. Viable alternatives for long-term shelter and strengthening individual economic capacity are still limited.

There have also been effective partnerships between the state and NGO sector. The special cells for women and children that work from the police station, as well as counseling cells located in police stations, are examples of coordination between the police and the NGO sector. This collaboration integrates valuable NGO experience with the state's financial resources to provide more sensitive and professional services to women victims. Although this partnership can sometimes limit flexibility in agenda-setting and operations, it can also infuse sometimes conservative state structures with more innovative NGO leadership.

### Close Analysis of Responses to Domestic Violence

Generally, this research seeks to understand the factors deemed critical to implementing an effective response to domestic violence. Such factors include: the particular perspective and approach to domestic violence, the range of services offered, and the quality of these services. What follows is an analysis of these factors in relation to specific intervention strategies. Overall, the number of state and NGO interventions providing both immediate and short-term supportive services appear to be larger than those

offering long-term preventive services. The research also shows that the overwhelming majority of strategies are aimed exclusively at women.

### Legal and Judicial Responses

The state's perspective and approach to domestic violence has the widest impact upon responses. Most of the state responses seek to mediate solutions to the problem of domestic violence in a manner that does not lead to the breakdown of marital relations. State initiatives include community-policing initiatives such as the *Mahila Dakshata Samiti* (women's advisory boards), police counseling cells, All Women Police Stations, family courts, and legal aid boards. The overriding concern in each of these efforts is to identify and work out solutions to immediate conflicts within the matrimonial household. This tendency is partly dictated by the field reality that many women may not necessarily opt for a break in the marriage, and partly by the state's own view that marriage is an inviolable institution that needs to be preserved.

■ **Judiciary.** In the last decade, the government of India has responded to domestic violence with several amendments in law. Most of the amendments have characterized domestic violence as dowry harassment and dowry deaths. Of these, Section 498A has been groundbreaking in highlighting the criminal dimension of mental and physical cruelty inflicted by the husband and/or his relatives for reasons that may extend beyond "unlawful demands." It is believed to have a strong deterrent value because of its immediate repercussions. Section 498A classifies domestic violence as a cognizable offense, which means that the accused can be arrested without a warrant. Therefore, it serves in deterring the abuser from inflicting harm on the woman. It also gives the woman leverage to negotiate a solution to her plight.

However, the implementation of Section 498A has raised many problems. "Willful women," it is claimed, misuse this law provision to take revenge against their husband and in-laws. Furthermore, police officials are hesitant in filing complaints under this section because of its potentially harsh impact on the

husband's family. There are also several practical constraints in seeking recourse under Section 498A. The complainant cannot realistically hope to gain access to her matrimonial home once she files a case. Thus, women without alternate shelter and financial support cannot exercise this option. The husband's family also often proposes withdrawing the case as a precondition for an easy divorce. As a result of these and other factors, conviction rates under this law section are very low. Analysis of court decisions in one particular district of Maharashtra, Yavatmal, for example, shows that only 2.2 percent of the cases brought under 498A during the period of 1990-96 resulted in conviction.

It is the strong deterrent value of Section 498A that has to be recognized in any discussion of best practices. One of the most important steps in bringing the issue of domestic violence from the private sphere to the public sphere is stressing its essential criminal content instead of projecting it as exclusively an internal family matter. Keeping it within the family not only makes it less amenable to legal intervention, it also prevents women from seeking relief. By their very nature, the judicial and the executive arms of the state are legal entities with the power to criminalize and take punitive action against offenders. This scope of the law should be leveraged to prevent domestic violence. Since the Government of India is one of the signatories to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), it is thereby obligated to respond with genuine and meaningful legal strategies to combat domestic violence.

Other interventions within the judiciary such as the *Lok Adalats* and *Mahila Lok Adalats* (Women's Courts) are constrained by their lack of punitive power. As a result, these bodies function primarily as conciliatory mechanisms and rely exclusively on mediation counseling to bring the erring parties to an understanding. Interviews with key informants suggest that, even as conciliatory mechanisms, they do not effectively serve their purpose. While counseling has its own value in dealing with marital discord, it may not be

an adequate response in all instances of violence. Hence, the state's excessive dependence on it needs to be more critically explored.

■ **Law Enforcement.** In keeping with efforts to encourage reporting of crimes against women and more sensitive handling of such cases, the creation by the state of All Women Police Stations is an important step. These stations have great value in making police services more accessible to women and India is perhaps one of the few countries where such an effort has been made systematically. Such interventions may have been designed for the socio-cultural environment of a particular region and this partly justifies the need for All Women Police Stations in a state such as Madhya Pradesh, where women are very reluctant to approach male police officials.

However, these All Women Police Stations are seen as token measures and suffer from several inadequacies. The ingrained male bias in the police system against the capabilities of women prevents female staff or complainants from benefiting fully from the stations. Female officers are seen as incapable of physical combat. The stations suffer from lack of adequate personnel, infrastructure, support, and cooperation. For instance, the study observed that the Mahila Police Thanas in Madhya Pradesh are not operating at full staff strength. Several vacancies have not been filled and they are poorly supplied in terms of vehicles, equipment, toilet facilities, water supply, and competent personnel.

Beyond a lack of personnel, women's issues are not seen by police officers as hard core police work and, hence, there is a tendency to dismiss the work of the AWPS as secondary. Opportunities for training and skill development are few. And, since there is limited interface between mainstream police officials and women who work in the Mahila Police Thanas, exposure to other aspects of policing is minimal. This is later held against policewomen in matters of promotion. Mahila police stations appear in fact to be seen as punishment postings, outside the ambit of real police work, both by male officials and female

officials. In addition, the implicit pressure to register all complaints pertaining to women at the AWPS only creates problems for women who may be unable to travel long distances and robs them of the right to approach general police stations for redress. In the absence of proper training and sensitization, it is unlikely that the police stations are going to become more effective in handling cases of domestic violence just because more women have been recruited. The Mahila Police Thanas are an example of an innovative response that has failed due to the lack of a wider integrated policy to facilitate the process of implementation.

### *Supportive Services*

State policies, staffing, and budget decisions have a powerful impact on the development and sustenance of widespread supportive services for women suffering from domestic violence. These services may include alternative shelters, child-care facilities, counseling, income generation projects, and education programs. Although many non-governmental organizations also offer different types of support for women, they are still influenced by state funding and agendas.

One of the most significant short-term welfare responses of the state to domestic violence has been the provision of alternate shelter through short stay homes, often in partnership with the voluntary sector. However, there are several drawbacks attached to the functioning of these homes. Research data shows that in seven of the shelter homes surveyed in Madhya Pradesh, only 112 women accessed shelter services despite a combined capacity for 370 residents. Government-run shelter homes, often perceived as shelter for a woman and her dependents, usually restrict both the number and age of the dependents as well as the mobility of residents. The ambience is typically one of strict policing and not particularly conducive to recovery from the emotional trauma that women experience with an abusive partner. Further, recreation facilities and infrastructure for residents is often lacking. Shelter homes sponsored by the state but managed by voluntary agencies are

less restrictive, yet there are still relatively few childcare arrangements and working women may thus be forced to take the children with them or make separate arrangements. Despite these drawbacks, the provision of alternative shelter is a critical element of a strategy to address gender-based violence in a concerted way. However, the state appears to place shelter homes and other supportive services as a priority below remedial counseling. For example, in 1997 only 0.03 percent of the total expenditure of the Central Programme, Social Welfare Board in Madhya Pradesh was set aside for the maintenance of shelter homes whereas in the same year, 6.9 percent of the funds were set aside for counseling activities.

Other factors that impact the provision, accessibility, and sustainability of short-term and supportive services include location, staff morale, degree of institutional commitment, and the dynamic between state and voluntary sectors. For example, urban areas are more likely to garner state attention. In general, government services to women suffering from domestic violence in rural areas exist in policy but not in practice.

The staff morale and working conditions of state run and sponsored agencies also determine the quality of services offered. Salaries are very low and service conditions highly noncompetitive. The remuneration paid to visiting specialists and other personnel is abysmal. In the case of legal aid boards, the hearing fees paid to lawyers are unrealistically low and there is alleged corruption among even those advocates who volunteer their services. The terms of work are not likely to attract competent professionals from the field.

The degree of institutional commitment is also a crucial factor in the sustainability of intervention by local government bureaucracy. In Madhya Pradesh, for example, there have been several innovative schemes to provide supportive services such as income generation, skill building, or education and literacy programs. However, it has been found that such strategies depend largely on the personal motivation and interest of the executing officials. The transfer of offi-

cially committed to the programs can cause a virtual halt in services.

The relationship between state and voluntary sectors appears to be a key factor in implementing effective strategies. Programs where voluntary agencies have collaborated with state agencies have shown success. However, many NGOs are dependent solely on government funds for their operation, and this impacts their actual performance. Field evidence does indicate that those interventions that have combined the legal mandate of the state and the expertise of the voluntary sector have shown promising results. A good illustration of this is the Special Cell for Women and Children in Mumbai, operated by the Tata Institute of Social Science, and counseling cells located in police stations.

Equally important to this type of partnership have been the efforts by NGOs to creatively draw from the range of available government schemes. In the case of income-generation and economic self-reliance programs, the approach of the voluntary sector, particularly at the shelter homes, has been to try and utilize government resources for production and marketing. For example, a few of the NGOs studied have utilized government schemes such as the Khadi and handloom industries board to secure contracts and sell the finished products. Many of the income-generation programs in government-run shelter homes, on the other hand, offer limited traditional skills building such as stitching, tailoring, and knitting. Further, the research shows that in some instances, these government-run programs are simply non-functional.

### **Efforts to Rebuild Women's Well-Being**

In addition to this hesitation to intervene proactively, few strategies exist that address women's trauma, or that help women rebuild their lives and their self-esteem. For instance, psychological and medical services and facilities are virtually non-existent among both sectors. Counseling that focuses on the practi-

cal rather than on emotional and therapeutic rejuvenation is observed to have a limited value in building the woman's sense of the self and such therapeutic counseling was found to be nearly absent. Thus, psychological concerns surrounding a woman's fears of further abuse, the dilemmas she may be facing about continuing to stay with the abuser, concern for her children and her own negative self identity largely go unaddressed. This more comprehensive attention to her needs is simply not on the agenda of most of the counseling cells sponsored by the state, nor are there counselors skilled or trained to facilitate this process. Opportunities to upgrade the skills of counselors through regular training and chances to network with other professionals are for the most part limited as well. It may also be noted that social work curriculum and training does not necessarily provide specialized inputs in women-centered counseling.

Moreover, the need for immediate and effective medical care has not been adequately addressed by either the state or the NGO sector. At state run shelter homes, for example, apart from an initial mandatory health check up to rule out diseases, women cannot go to even a civil hospital for health problems unless there is an emergency because of lack of transport and strict rules surrounding mobility. Services for the mentally ill are also very poor.<sup>5</sup> Medical check ups are seen by some shelters as necessary only for the gynecological and "moral health" of the residents. The study cites the case of one caretaker of a particular shelter home who proudly admitted that she personally checks whether the girls are having their periods!

### **Preventive Services**

State intervention in the area of *preventing* domestic violence has been cursory. At best, there have been limited state initiatives focusing on legal literacy and the dissemination of information on legal services. However, general outreach to women within communities is low and many women remain unaware of services that are available. The state agenda has occasionally favored taking proactive, progressive

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<sup>5</sup> The study found wardens at one shelter home complaining that cases of mentally ill women are a "headache." Staff are clearly ill prepared to handle these cases. It was shocking to note during the course of data collection, the case of a particular government shelter home where the warden keeps a jar full of medicines that are given to all the girls who show any kind of psychological problem.

steps to combat certain traditional community practices such as that of community prostitution. The research has examined, for example, initiatives taken against a form of community prostitution practiced by the Bedia tribals of Madhya Pradesh. Even in the face of strong opposition from the tribals, the state instituted several schemes and programs to stop this community-condoned form of prostitution. Such concerted action stands in sharp contrast to the government's reluctance to assume a similar stand on domestic violence. Again it is evident that the state remains hesitant to step into what is conceived to be the private sphere.

### **Determining Best Practice**

The identification of best practices involves recognizing successful programmatic and policy components of responses to domestic violence by examining the impact and outcomes of existing efforts. The first step is to identify the characteristics of a quality and effective response. The analysis of contemporary NGO and state services suggested that quality and effective interventions are those that exhibit the following characteristics: cultural specificity in design, wide-ranging and diverse services, easy accessibility, multiple funding sources, and an emphasis on collaboration with various sectors and on a holistic treatment of the problem. Ethical and moral leadership as well as community mobilization also surfaced as characteristics of effective programs.

Integration of all of the best practice criteria is essential for delivering effective responses to domestic violence. For example, state responses such as All Women Police Stations, Family Counseling Cells, Family Courts, *Lok Adalats*, and *Mahila Lok Adalats* have each attempted to make primarily legal and reconciliation services more accessible to women. However, they still lack adequate institutional support and training. Further, they are unable to provide a holistic treatment of the problem and typically offer only a small range of services. By promoting "reconciliation", these services place the family itself outside the scope of critical inquiry. Alternatively, voluntary action has provided a wide variety of innovative responses to do-

mestic violence. Many NGOs have extensive reach (including remote and rural areas), have mobilized community awareness, and have used a range of strategies to prevent domestic violence as well as to rebuild the lives of women victims. However, without financial autonomy, the voluntary sector is forced to compete for funds against each other. This can inhibit effective efforts to work collaboratively. Similarly, organizations that depend upon the state for financial support may have to adopt a less critical stance toward state-directed approaches, and this can inhibit innovation, cultural sensitivity, and community support.

The research shows that those models of intervention that have integrated strategies from both sectors and provide a diversity of services create the most successful overall response. The development of such an integrated response to domestic violence should be informed by a multi-layered strategy that empowers women through education and legal literacy, and through enforcement of legislation on minimum age at marriage, inheritance of property, and maintenance rights of women. For example, a successful coordinated response may combine preventive strategies involving the community; remedial strategies that empower the woman to seek legal remedies and help rebuild her self; and recuperative services which work either directly or through referral networks to develop long-term viable livelihood options. In short, services that facilitate a movement from being a victim to a survivor of domestic violence are the most sustainable.

With these factors in mind, the analysis points to the following areas for action:

- ▶ **Criminalize Violence:** It is imperative that the state recognizes the criminal nature of domestic violence and takes adequate measures to criminalize the offense. State reluctance to delve into what it sees as the private sphere is placing increasing numbers of women at risk. The state should utilize its legal mandate to take strong punitive action against wife batterers. The present mandate in India is effectively limited to dowry-related violence.



- ▶ **Promote a Holistic Approach:** A set of integrated responses that address the practical as well as the strategic needs of women provide the most meaningful and sustainable options to women facing abuse from intimate partners. This principle should inform the design and implementation of all intervention strategies dealing with domestic violence. Identifying primary and secondary stakeholders related to domestic violence is essential. At present the main actors involved include those associated with the judicial process, income generation, and education. Those in housing, child protection services, the private industry, and trade unions are some of the other stakeholders that need to be sensitized and involved in developing a well-coordinated, well-rounded response to domestic violence.
- ▶ **Coordinate Responses:** Greater coordination among various government departments, among agencies in the voluntary sector, and between the government and the NGO community can prevent duplication of services and ensure better utilization of scarce resources. A very important component of collaboration is disseminating information on what each sector has to offer and maintaining a steady flow of information. This coordination is currently lacking and should be promoted.
- ▶ **Institutionalize Responses:** Responses to domestic violence cannot and should not be dependent on the personal motivation and commitment of individual implementing officers. They should be institutionalized as one of the key welfare activities of the district. Institutionalized responses to domestic violence will ensure better continuity and also reflect state commitment to combat the problem.
- ▶ **Integrate Gender into Community, State Agencies, and Development Paradigms:** Women's access to and control over resources should be recognized and adopted as a primary indicator of development. Such a gender sensitization of all stakeholders should become an important component of effective responses to domestic violence. It should form part of the curriculum of training of the police, judiciary, bureaucracy, policymakers, social workers, counselors, and other service providers. Here again, it should be reiterated that gender sensitization should not be targeted at policymakers alone but also at implementers at all levels. Analysis of the existing training curriculum of all stakeholders should be undertaken to identify where and how gender concerns can be incorporated.
- ▶ **Address the Batterer:** State agencies as well as the NGO sector should work towards developing batterer-centered programs that address the perpetrator of violence. This has been attempted successfully in several locations throughout the world and has shown promise for replication.
- ▶ **Enrich the Existing Database:** It is also strongly recommended that the existing database on domestic violence be enriched with rigorous empirical research on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence. Wife battering has serious cost implications for health, legal and economic systems. Detailed research and analysis of these inter-linkages also needs to be undertaken to highlight the severity of the issue. Research should attempt to collate and analyze the potential of existing programs and schemes (both state and NGO) to address the issue of domestic violence, and suggest mechanisms for developing linkages as well as mechanisms to convert this potential into action plans. Such a study would yield more results if attempted at the state level.
- ▶ **Disseminate Information:** Many women are unable to escape domestic violence because they are unaware of available services and agencies working in this area. Therefore, disseminating information on the range of services available is essential.
- ▶ **Raise Public Awareness:** Another area to address in this context is that of generating public awareness on domestic violence as a violation of human rights and debunking the popular notion that transactions within a marriage are outside the realm of community intervention. Educational strategies aimed at changing attitudes, beliefs and biases of law enforcers, the judiciary and citizens need to be developed and implemented.



- ▶ **Ensure Accountability:** Mechanisms to enhance the accountability of the state and NGOs that work with women facing domestic violence need to be instituted. Such a system will provide the checks and balances required to monitor the quality of services that are offered. One of the reasons for the abysmal living conditions in state run shelter homes, for example, is a lack of accountability to the shelter residents, the state machinery, and to the taxpayer.
- ▶ **Improve Service Conditions of Service Providers:** It is imperative to upgrade the work conditions of service providers to attract competent and qualified personnel. This will also help to professionalize services and institute better accountability. Non-competitive work conditions reflect an attitude of charity that does not necessarily foster empowerment of the affected population.
- ▶ **Develop and Train Staff:** The issue of developing new skills and training of service providers has to be addressed decisively. Opportunities for networking and learning from each other's experiences should be encouraged and nurtured. This area has been addressed to a larger extent by the NGO sector than with state agencies, where training is often a one-time input. Regular training is more common for senior officials than those in the lower ranks. However, it is at these levels that practitioners are more in need of regular skill upgrades since they are directly in touch with the client group. Caretakers and wardens of shelter homes are a particularly important segment to target.

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## Study 3

# Responses to Domestic Violence in Karnataka and Gujarat

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### 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 (when 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.<sup>6</sup> 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

<sup>6</sup> See Mitra's report, at page 21, for further explanation of this statute and its implications.

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.** 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 these 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 stations 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 these 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 rehabilita-

tive 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 chil-

<sup>7</sup> 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 deity. The devadasi institution has become associated with temple prostitution; in addition, devadasis are often sold to brothels by temple priests.

dren, 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 ap-

proach 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 their residents were likely to attract only certain cases, and possibly replicate many dynamics responsible for domestic violence at large. Case stud-

ies 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 re-

spond 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 decisionmaking. 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.<sup>8</sup>

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

<sup>8</sup> In certain other non-India contexts, for instance, women may be stigmatized for staying in marriages which are abusive.

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 ac-

tivists, professionals, policymakers, and scholars around and about this issue are clearly healthy and invaluable endeavors.

## Appendix

### CASE-STUDY ORGANIZATIONS IN KARNATAKA AND GUJARAT CLASSIFIED BY SALIENT FEATURES

#### **Historically Significant Organizations**

Association of Social Health in India, Bangalore  
 Jyoti Sangh, Ahmedabad  
 Kasturba Stree Vikas Gruh, Jamnagar

#### **Government Initiatives**

All Women Police Stations at Bangalore and Ahmedabad  
 The Family Counseling Cells Located in Police Stations at Bangalore and Ahmedabad  
 The Mahila Suraxa Samiti, Ahmedabad  
 The Mahila Samakhya Programme, Raichur

#### **Government and Voluntary Organizations**

The Family Counseling Centre at the Devadasi Rehabilitation and Physically Handicapped Welfare Board, Bagalkot, Bijapur  
 Prajna Counseling Centre, Mangalore  
 Baghini Samaj, Dahod, Gujarat

#### **Feminist Organizations**

Astitva Mahila Utkarsha Sanstha, Valsad, Gujarat  
 Ahmedabad Women's Action Group  
 Jagrut Mahila Sangathan, Anand, Gujarat  
 Women's Liberation and Rehabilitation Society, Madhugiri, Tumkur

#### **Working With a Difference**

The Janodya Public Trust, Bangalore  
 Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanghatan and the Centre for Social Justice, Kutch  
 Sumangali Seva Ashram, Bangalore  
 The People's Movement for Self Reliance, Kollegal, Mysore District



# Conclusion

The three studies summarized in this volume together provide a broad picture of the degree of violence experienced by individual women and the level and reach of services offered by state and non-governmental organizations. A strong conclusion emerging from the three studies is that domestic violence is a pervasive phenomenon in India. The Gujarat study emphasizes that violence cuts across caste, class, religion, age, and education. While a greater proportion of low caste and less educated women report violence, even highly educated women report violence in large numbers. The survey results suggest that in spite of economic prosperity and high literacy rates, two out of every five women experience physical abuse at the hands of their husbands. Development strategies, therefore, need to address not only individual women's needs, but also general patterns of gender subordination.

In addition to depicting the prevalence of violence, the Gujarat study highlights women's lack of access to formal and informal mechanisms for redress in situations of abuse. The majority of women experiencing abuse do not access any form of medical care for either psychological or physical injuries. Two out of every five women in abusive relationships stay silent about their suffering because of shame and family honor. The lack of viable options keeps women trapped in violent situations. Nearly one-third of the women experiencing abuse had thought about running away, but most said that they feared leaving their young children and had no place to go. Social

and economic constraints further compound their sense of isolation. Lack of awareness about their rights and how to seek help renders these women more vulnerable to continued and escalating abuse by their husbands.

## Analysis of Responses to Domestic Violence

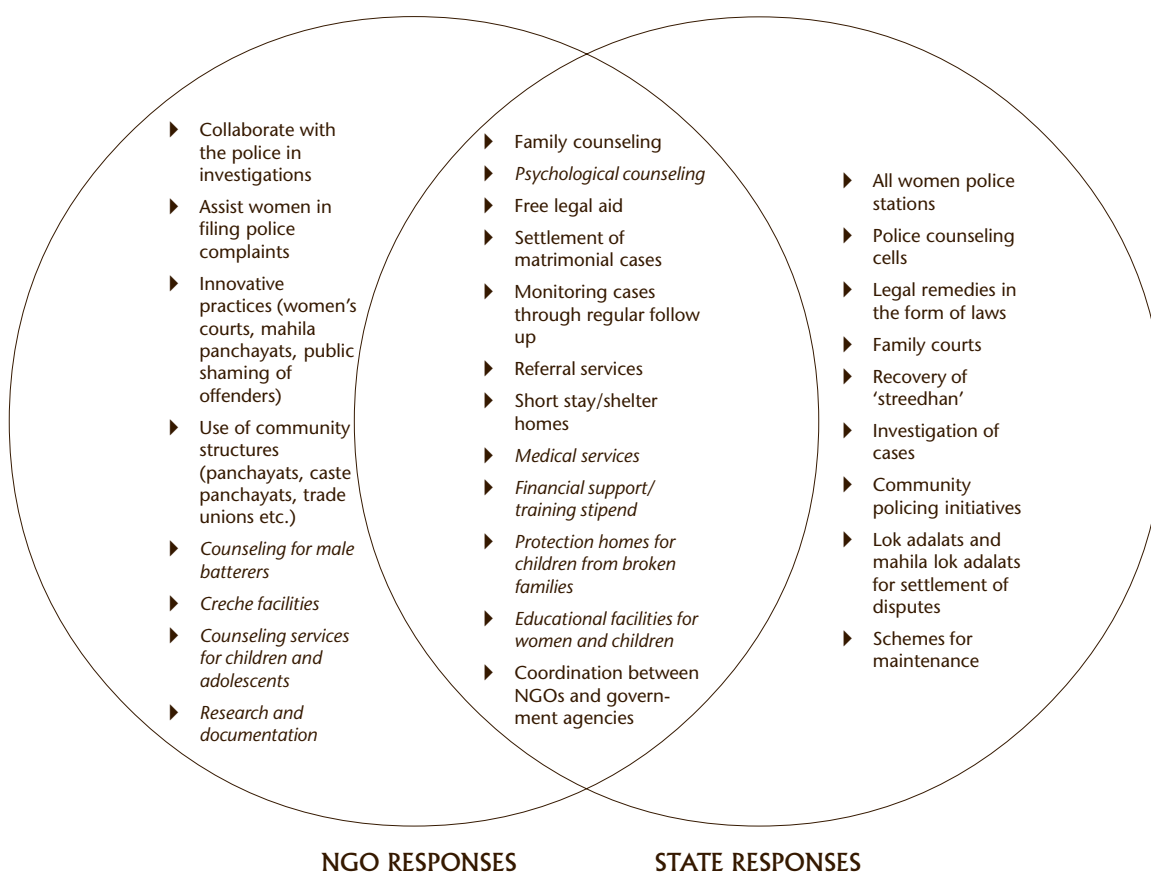
To address women's isolation, the NGO and state sectors have initiated a wide range of public intervention strategies. These efforts concentrate on different dimensions of domestic violence. Some focus on immediate needs such as short-stay homes to provide relief from abuse. Others are directed toward long-term or preventive measures such as the monitoring of existing cases, creating opportunities for economic self-reliance, consciousness-raising, and mobilizing the community to stop domestic violence.

The results from the two studies that examined responses to domestic violence suggest the following typology of responses: ameliorative services, reconstructive programs, and preventive strategies. Chart A shows a diagram listing existing ameliorative services in the state and non-governmental sectors. This category of responses describes the services a woman encounters when she first seeks outside assistance. It includes a range of short-term services catering to the immediate and practical needs of a woman, such as shelter, legal aid, medical aid, and remedial counseling. To sustain the impact, a smaller range of programs is oriented toward rebuilding the well-being

of the woman and the family (see Chart B). These reconstructive programs improve livelihoods, self-esteem, and empowerment. A crucial third category of responses consists of measures designed to prevent

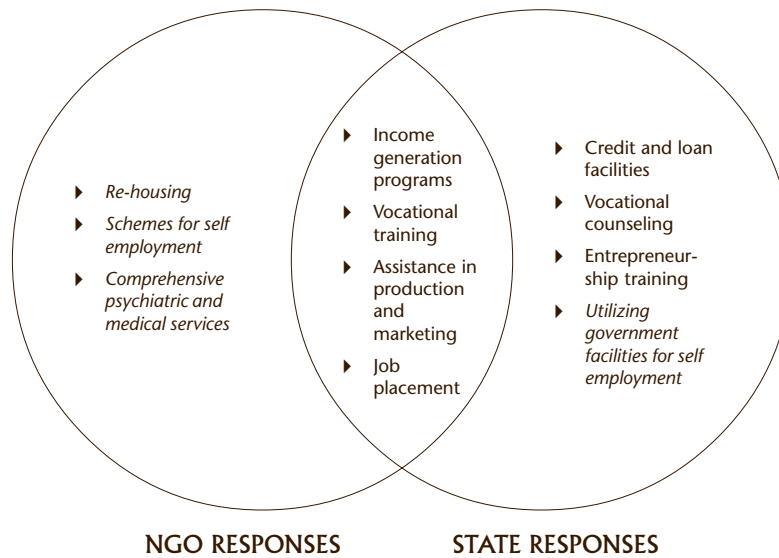
and eliminate the conditions responsible for domestic violence (see Chart C). Preventive strategies contribute both to empowering individual women and to raising community awareness.

### Chart A AMELIORATIVE SERVICES



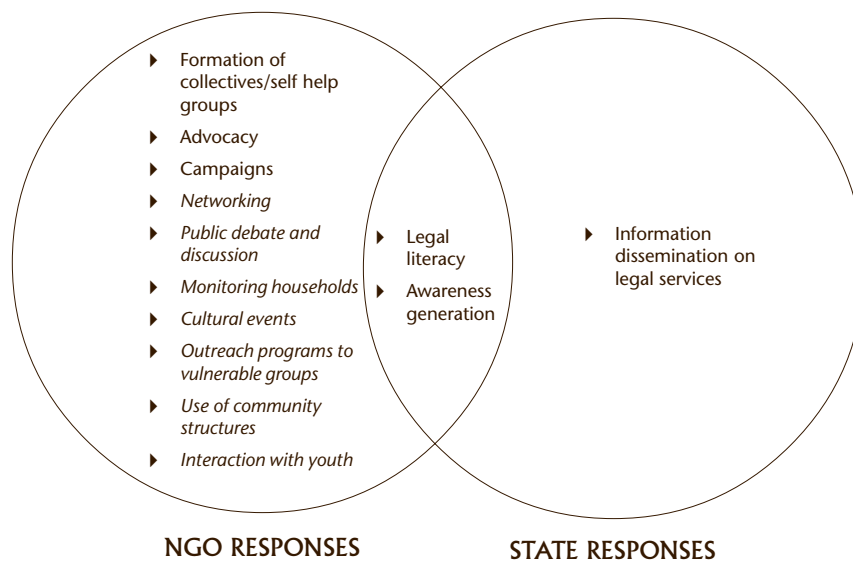
Responses in italics are those which do not exist or which occur rarely. The overlapping areas indicate those services undertaken by both the state and NGO sectors.

**Chart B**  
**RECONSTRUCTIVE TOOLS**



*Responses in italics are those which do not exist or which occur rarely. The overlapping areas indicate those services undertaken by both the state and NGO sectors.*

**Chart C**  
**PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES**



*Responses in italics are those which do not exist or which occur rarely. The overlapping areas indicate those services undertaken by both the state and NGO sectors.*

## Criteria for Effective Response

The two “response” studies have highlighted the range of interventions that currently exist in India and suggest criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. The findings underscore that there are two critical elements of an effective strategy: the availability of a wide range of accessible quality services together with interventions that seek to challenge the broader social and economic context that

exacerbates the imbalance in power between men and women. The research also highlights the value of involving the community in the design and implementation of interventions. In fact, the data suggest that interventions involving the community are more likely to be effective and sustainable.

Three primary criteria for evaluating effectiveness that emerge from the studies are the quality, impact, and

**Table 3**  
**Criteria for Evaluating Effectiveness of Responses**

| Quality of Responses  |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Range and choice of options</li> <li>▶ Culturally- and regionally-specific approaches</li> <li>▶ Women’s participation in design</li> <li>▶ Attention to batterers</li> <li>▶ Accessibility</li> <li>▶ Technical competence of service providers</li> <li>▶ Adequate remuneration of practitioners</li> <li>▶ Ongoing training</li> <li>▶ Infrastructure and facilities</li> <li>▶ Follow-up and monitoring</li> <li>▶ Involvement of community</li> <li>▶ Collaborative nature of intervention</li> </ul> |
| Impact of Responses   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Decrease in violence</li> <li>▶ Women’s greater access to and control over resources</li> <li>▶ Shift in underlying dynamic of subordination</li> <li>▶ Policy changes</li> <li>▶ Influence on community norms</li> <li>▶ Inclusiveness and scope of reach to women and families in need</li> <li>▶ Integration of responses into legal, social, educational, health, and cultural institutions</li> </ul>   |
| Sustainability of Responses   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Financial autonomy and sustainability</li> <li>▶ Level of community support</li> <li>▶ Replicability</li> <li>▶ Transparency and flexibility in organization structure</li> <li>▶ Leadership style, staff morale, and overall accountability</li> </ul>  |

sustainability of responses. Several key indicators are central to assessing each of these criteria (see table 3).

The quality of a given response may be determined by the type and variety of services available, the degree of cultural and regional sensitivity, the technical competence of personnel, and the involvement of the community. High-quality services offer a wide range of choices that are responsive to the diverse needs of women and their families, are accessible to all women, provide complete information, and include programs directed towards abusers. The competence, training, and commitment of staff are also significant elements of a quality response. Such personnel are recruited and retained by appropriate remuneration for their skills, provision of adequate facilities, and opportunities for professional growth. Women's participation and community involvement in the design and implementation of responses, as well as mechanisms designed to follow-up and monitor service-users, help ensure the long-term quality of responses.

A second criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of a response is the impact of interventions on the individual and the community. Indicators of impact include an evident decrease in the number of women experiencing violence; the inclusiveness, scope, and accessibility of services; and women's greater access to and control over resources. Indicators of impact upon the community include a shift in underlying dynamics of gender subordination, change in community norms, and influence on policy.

A final criterion for evaluating the effectiveness of a response is its sustainability. Assessing sustainability demands examination of financial viability and the level of community support. In addition, the leadership style, staff morale, transparency, and flexibility of the organization play significant roles in sustaining quality service. Personal rapport among and between staff and service-users, as well as the agency's accountability to women experiencing violence, are integral to the impact, quality, and sustainability of responses.

The studies have highlighted two examples of effective responses in India. One is the introduction of Section 498A by the state. This has provided a powerful legal tool with which to set a normative standard that does not condone violence against women within the home. The second is the formation of self-help collectives by the non-governmental sector. Self-help collectives such as the Mahila Samkhya program in Karnataka address violence uniquely through promoting women's empowerment: women's participation in *panchayat* elections, training in healthcare practices utilizing traditional remedies, development of economic activities, and the challenging of caste-based practices. These programs exemplify the integration of all three categories of responses.

The analysis has also highlighted two characteristics critical to the success of programs: partnership, and regional and cultural sensitivity. Collaborations between state and voluntary organizations such as family counseling cells within police stations show the value of partnerships between sectors with different strengths. The voluntary sector's strength lies in progressive ideologies, dedication to women's rights, and an innovative and often community-based mechanism for outreach. The state sector's financial and physical resources can support these response efforts and the authority and investigative power of the police helps to force the accountability of abusers. Further, among all response types there are examples of many innovative and culturally sensitive measures that have been effective. These initiatives derive from culturally and regionally specific practices, such as stamp paper agreements which are commonly employed for ratifying promises; mock community funeral processions that draw attention to the fatal consequences of domestic violence; village elders welcoming new brides to offer support to young women who are new to the community; and the use of street theatre and folk songs for awareness building.

A holistic response to domestic violence entails linking all short- and long-term support services, reconstructive interventions, and prevention strategies into a coordinated public response. Women who approach

any one service should be made aware of the entire spectrum of programs, interventions, and strategies available. For example, a woman who seeks help from a health care provider, a family counseling cell, or a police station, should be provided with access or referrals to a whole range of longer-term services and programs.

Within this holistic framework, several key recommendations emerge from the studies:

- ▶ **Introduce a Comprehensive Law against Domestic Violence:** There should be a comprehensive law that incorporates a broader definition of domestic violence. The definition should encompass all acts of physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and financial abuse that, in effect, hurt or degrade the woman or take away her ability to control contact with another individual. The legislation should address women of all ages, irrespective of marital status.
- ▶ **Improve Women's Economic Capacities:** Improve women's access to and control of income and assets, recognize her shared right to the family home and matrimonial property, and incorporate the principle of division of community property into divorce laws. Productive assets and property are critical to strengthening the economic and social status of women, providing income opportunities and improved respect for women outside marriage and family.
- ▶ **Strengthen and Expand Training and Sensitization Programs:** Programs designed to train, sensitize, and interlink those working at critical entry points to identify and treat abused women should be a priority, with one aim being increased accountability across institutions. Such programs should be organized for medical personnel, legal and enforcement personnel, the judiciary, counseling, and other support service providers. Among these, programs designed to sensitize health practitioners to the identification and appropriate treatment of abused women are of immediate necessity, given the crucial role this group plays and the current absence of such programs.
- ▶ **Use Media to Build Public Awareness:** Mobilizations of communities around campaigns such as that for "Zero Tolerance of Violence" requires NGOs and advocates to work effectively with all forms of media. This requires improved skills and capacity among NGOs to enter new forms of dialogue with journalists and media personnel to heighten awareness of human rights and their significance for addressing domestic violence.
- ▶ **Address Domestic Violence through Education:** Prevention of domestic violence ultimately depends upon changing the norms of society regarding violence as a means of conflict resolution and regarding traditional attitudes about gender. To achieve this, the concept of gender and human rights must be introduced in the curricula of schools, universities, professional colleges, and other training settings. Along with this, there must be recognition and commitment to the principle of free compulsory primary and secondary education for girls.
- ▶ **Implement Programs for Batterer:** Programs designed for the batterer must be introduced in both the state and voluntary sector. Apart from addressing male violence through the criminal justice system, it is imperative to design and implement counseling programs that would raise the gender sensitivity of men, explore norms of violent behavior, and provide therapeutic counseling as needed. In order to promote a holistic approach to prevention as well as intervention, the deficiency in programs designed for men needs to be addressed.
- ▶ **Provide Comprehensive Medical and Psychological Services:** Programs must integrate the provision of comprehensive medical and psychological care and support services for survivors of abuse. Immediate medical care is provided to some extent by different organizations but little attention has been paid to mental health services, such as therapeutic counseling, support groups, and family therapy. These are critical in rebuilding and sustaining the well-being of the woman and her family.

- ▶ **Integrate Child Support Services with Protection Services for Women:** All intervention programs need to better address the needs of children affected by violence. This is a critical area of intervention that forms the basis of prevention in a future generation of adults. In addition, shelter homes must be made more accessible to women with children in both principle and practice; for example, through providing childcare facilities. Although some shelters have a provision for allowing children, it is not encouraged.
- ▶ **Expand Involvement of the Corporate Sector:** An increase of financial resources is an urgent need for sustaining the existing interventions, improving the quality of such services, and implementing new innovations. Quality of services critically depends on better infrastructure as well as improved terms and conditions of those engaged in the provision of services. The corporate sector is an unaddressed stakeholder that should be encouraged to financially support preventive and supportive services to readdress domestic violence. Financial incentives in the form of tax breaks and/or subsidies should be introduced to encourage corporate sector funding of activities.
- ▶ **Increase Collaboration:** Because the range of services that need to be offered are extensive, it is not practical for a single agency to deliver all of them. Greater collaboration among state agencies, NGOs, and the corporate sector is essential. There are only a few examples of coordinated voluntary and government efforts, such as counseling cells located within police stations. Effective networking to build a coordinated public response can result in an expansion of the range of services and a better utilization of existing resources.
- ▶ **Increase Outreach to Rural Areas:** Coverage of services and programs needs to be expanded to rural areas. Apart from interventions such as *lok adalats* and *parivarik mahila lok adalats*, grievance redressal mechanisms for women facing domestic violence in rural areas are few or simply absent. In addition, All Women Police Stations are primarily located in urban areas. The voluntary sector has attempted interventions in rural areas successfully but their efforts are hampered by the non-availability or limited access to referral, health, and police services.
- ▶ **Strengthen Follow-Up and Monitoring:** Few service providers consistently monitor clients or maintain long-term records. Both the state and non-governmental sectors need to develop and prioritize follow-up and tracking mechanisms. Building and managing a systematic database is critical to regularly assessing and improving the impact of services.



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