

The Role of Gender Bias in Gender-based Violence

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Executive Summary

**A qualitative study
in Mumbai, India**





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It is a scourge on our global society that even today, one in three women and girls experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a crisis that extends beyond national and socio-cultural boundaries, across the globe, and across our Commonwealth member countries alike. It affects people of all ages, genders, ethnicities and economic backgrounds. It is an urgent, world-wide human rights issue.

Recognising this, national governments, international bodies such as the United Nations (UN) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), have developed strategies to end violence against women and girls (VAWG). Appropriate national and international laws are a crucial component in safeguarding women's and girls' rights. But alone, they are not enough. From the moment they are born, millions of girls are subjected to multiple forms of violence including rape, female genital mutilation (FGM), sexual exploitation and child marriage. Survivors may experience trauma, drop out of school, suffer from mental health problems, all of which also have significant social and economic costs.

In spite of the progress made over recent decades, the statistics still tell a shocking and unacceptable story, as do the harrowing individual experiences of the survivors of gender-based violence interviewed by the None in Three Research Centre for this report.

India ranked first in the list of most dangerous countries for women in 2018¹. 41% of Indian women aged 15-49 have never been to school, compared with 18% of men in the same age bracket². The gender bias underlying this inequality, and the violence it can result in, is at the heart of None in Three India's work.

Media attention in countries across the globe raises consciousness of the issue in waves, from the Me Too movement, to the reported 'hidden' pandemic behind the 2020 lockdown due to Covid-19 – a surge in domestic abuse. This is not a new phenomenon, but the growing awareness is a catalyst for action to which we must respond. All countries, all societies need to work to eradicate this pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime.

The Commonwealth Secretariat is working alongside partner organisations on measures that will help

our 54 member countries to stem the rising tide of gender-based violence, especially school related gender-based violence. Educating to actively promote a gender equal, respectful, non-violent culture with gender aware pedagogy or approaches is key. As a member of the Global Working Group to End School-Related Violence, the Secretariat aims to help practitioners and policy makers in the education sector, apply a gender lens when developing violence prevention, response approaches and safeguarding. School related gender based violence (SRGBV) affects millions of children and young people, especially girls.

The Ni3 Centre's approach, which we in the Commonwealth subscribe to, is one of prevention through high-quality, gender sensitive education. By engaging young people as adolescents, when attitudes and opinions are forming, we stand the best chance of influencing them for good. The potential for adolescents and young people to act as agents of change and achieve the social transformation necessary to end GBV is tremendous. None in Three's approach includes developing and testing immersive, pro-social computer games, themed around issues of gender-based violence, to help young players build empathy with victims, and to prevent future violence.

We welcome this research and the accompanying three reports (from None in Three in Jamaica, Uganda and the UK) and the contribution that the innovative approach could make to our work. By listening to the lived experiences of both victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence in four study countries, the global research centre has built up a solid evidence base for each of its culturally appropriate, educational video games. It will therefore provide a new resource to help end GBV including school related gender-based violence.

Through renewed commitment and concerted action, we can end domestic and gender-based violence.

Layne Robinson
Head, Social Policy Development
Commonwealth Secretariat

Message from the Commonwealth Secretariat

¹ Thomson Reuters Foundation (2018).
² Dasra. (2015).

In an order granting bail to a rape accused in June, 2020, the High Court of Karnataka remarked that it was “unbecoming of an Indian woman to sleep after being ravished, not how our women react” it said. Though the observation was expunged after protests from lawyers and activists, it reflects the deep rooted gender bias still prevalent even among the higher judiciary and the need for a continued and persistent engagement at every level to eradicate both gender-based violence and gender bias.

When Prarthana and Bhanu approached me with the None in Three project of pro-social gaming interventions among young people to reduce gender-based violence, it brought renewed hope and energy. Having litigated for women in situations of violence for over two decades and not seeing much change, such preventive intervention seems of immense value. They wanted me to reflect on my years of working with survivors of violence on how best to address the issue of gender-based violence among adolescents.

Intense discussion took us through experiences of extreme violence faced by women I represent in Court, to our own everyday experiences. Gender-based violence (GBV) is normalised in all of our lives and the lenses to recognise it fogged by internalised gender bias and gender constructs. To address such violence, one has to see and recognise the overt and covert gender bias that construct women to become targets of violence. Hence, the focus of their study, which is to be the foundation for the game, of addressing GBV through everyday gender bias is very valuable and would prove enormously effective. Since the early ‘80s, women’s movements in India have sought legislative and judicial intervention to deal with GBV. Over the last few decades several legislations and legal changes have been brought in, including criminalising domestic violence, expanding the definition of rape, introduction of sexual harassment, voyeurism and disrobing of a woman as criminal offences etc. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 and Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, were enacted to protect women’s rights in situations of violence and harassment. However, one continues to see not just regressive and sexist attitudes and behaviour, but a reluctance to recognise structural oppression and violence against women.

In addition, over the last few years there has been a concerted effort to create a myth that women are misusing these laws, which has resulted in the Supreme Court of India and High Courts endorsing this view and diluting the laws. However, analysing the reports of the National Family Health Survey and the National Crime Record Bureau does not substantiate the claim of misuse. The present study conducted by Ni3 also shows that women not only face violence, but are also reluctant to approach authorities in such situations. Their research reveals that mere availability of legal remedy is not sufficient for women to access the law.

The 2020 coronavirus pandemic and consequent lockdown has once again shown that women are still not safe in their homes. While there seems to be more of a discussion on GBV, there is still a lack of adequate response by State and society. Working from home has also exposed the continued widely held belief in traditional gender roles within family and the increased burden on women of all classes. There can be no better time for preventive interventions such as the Ni3 initiative.

The findings of their research reinforce the need to positively influence adolescents to not only understand, but recognise gender bias in our everyday life. Having interviewed women, men and young adults, the study reveals how they perceive discrimination and violence. How institutions such as marriage and family perpetuate inequality and violence for their survival and at the cost of women. This study, based on lived experiences, provides a solid foundation to aid in developing a robust design to help young adults imagine a more equal and just society.

As observed in the study, many times children of survivors of violence play an important role in the decisions they make. Working with children to teach them to recognise and understand not just violence but every day bias that results in such violence, would go a long way in moving towards a GBV free society.

It is efforts such as this, which is built on lived realities of both survivors and perpetrators of violence and aimed at transforming the next generation, that has the potential to be a game changer in tackling and reducing gender-based violence.

Advocate Veena Gowda
International Advisory Group, None in Three

Foreword

We wish to place on record our appreciation and thanks to United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) for funding the **None in Three India Project** through the **Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)**. We are thankful to the University of Huddersfield, who very gracefully hosted us at their beautiful campus during our visit and training in December 2017 and April 2018. Our initial thoughts and ideas found shape under the able guidance of Advocate **Ms.Veena Gowda** at Mumbai. Our paradigm changed after we met her, and we found a clear direction to work towards. We continue to receive great support from Professor Adele Jones - Centre Director and Principal Investigator, the Administrative and Operations team of Roslyn Cumming and Vikki Hart; they have been the epitome of patience. The remaining Work Package Leaders and their respective team members have been magnanimous in their support in making this publication possible. Professor Song Wu, Helen Smailes, Hayley Royston, Ramy Hammady, John Pearson, Natasha Robinson, Adam Cowell and Alexis Sarmiento helped us to get better understanding of how the game would work towards changing attitudes of young children in India. Professor Daniel Boduszek and Dr. Dominic Willmott were pivotal in helping us understand the significance of the psychosocial surveys and how to get it done efficiently. Professor Paul Miller, Dr. Priti Chopra and Dr. Eshani Beddewela were great support in helping us draft our pitch to the governmental agencies and to corporates in Mumbai, India. Dr. Agata Debowska helped us consolidate insights into the legal framework and other relevant laws pertaining to Gender-based Violence in India. The communication team comprising of Dr. Anna Powell, Dr. Rina Arya, Ryan Greene and Zaneta Edey have been instrumental in helping make the India team visible on Social Media.

We were also fortunate to receive cross-cultural inputs from our colleagues Gillian Kirkman from the UK team, Dr. Eric Awich Ochen and

Esther Nanfuka from the Uganda team and Dr. Christine Fray and Karyl Powell-Booth from the Jamaica team. These inputs were very helpful in better contextualising our study on Gender-based Violence in India.

We are fortunate that the management of **ISDI** considered our team capable of handling the responsibility of such an onerous task. Mr. Abhijit Patil helped us with resourceful tips on who to contact in the Department of Sports and Education Maharashtra,in reaching the former Hon Minister of Education Mr. Vinod Tawde -without his timely help, our progress would have been delayed. The office of the former Officer on Special Duty, Ms.Prachi Sathe opened the doors of the Government for us. Other members of the Government team who showed faith in our work and believed in our approach were Ms. Marieola Fernandes and Mr. Siddhesh Sarma.

We have created and nurtured unique relationships along the way with some great teams such as Ms. Suhasini Rao, Mr. Jaideep Chowdhary, Mr. Paras Sharma and Ms. Shamal from The Alternative Story, Mr. Vijay Johar from Prayas³, Ms. Catherine Fernandes and her army of volunteers from Triune Consultancy Services⁴ without whose help the data collection would not have been possible.

Our deepest gratitude to Dr. Indu Shahani and Mr. Siddharth Shahani for having invested their collective faith in our ability to take this project ahead and to the resulting publication.

Lastly, our study would be incomplete without the help and perseverance of our Design Hub specialist Sunayna Waghmare, Junior Research Assistant Ishani Kulkarni, student volunteers Mehak Gupta and Karmistha Krishna who helped visualise the most important aspects of the report.

Thank you all, especially the **Ni3 India team**, for this study would not have been possible without your collective support, energy and tireless work.

Acknowledgements

³ Field Action project run by Tata Institute of Social Sciences focusing on social work intervention in the Criminal Justice System

⁴ Market Research firm based in Mumbai

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has been defined by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as:

Gender-based violence, which occurs in every country, territory and region of the world, is ***a violation of basic rights*** that also prevents women from exercising their other social, economic and political rights.

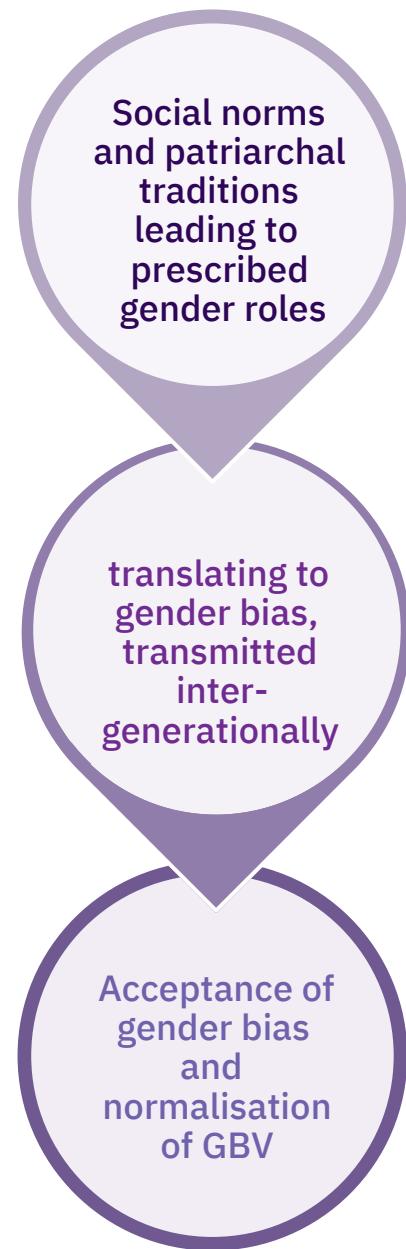
Globally, ***35 percent of women*** have experienced physical and/or sexual violence.⁵

Executive Summary

However, ***gender-based violence is neither inevitable nor acceptable.***

A Report of the None in Three Research Centre,
ISDI School of Design and Innovation (ISDI), Mumbai

India research focus



|| A visual representation of India's country focus 'gender bias as an enabler of GBV'

Violence, Gender bias, & Transmission



|| Visual representation by Ishani Kulkarni of how prescribed gender roles lead to justification and further acceptance of violence

Global statistics show that, one in three (World Health Organization, 2013) women and girls have faced some form of GBV in their lifetime. The research in this report is based on the idea that the only acceptable statistic is none in three (Ni3), and represents part of our efforts to make this idea a reality. Ni3 is now a global, transdisciplinary research centre, focused on understanding the roots of GBV in different contexts, and on using this knowledge to develop early, prosocial gaming interventions to reduce GBV across four countries: Jamaica, Uganda, India and the UK. Each country team has their own focus area; for India this is the links between gender bias and GBV. This topic was decided after consultation with lawyers and social activists who emphasised how gender roles, leading to gender bias, have become a primary driver of GBV in India. The India project was initiated by the Design School, ISDI School of Design and Innovation, Mumbai, and is now based within an independent consultancy organisation - 'IDEALISTS' which works in collaboration with the University of Huddersfield, UK

This report draws on qualitative data collected from men and women in Mumbai to investigate the relationship between gender bias and GBV.

We spoke to a total of 89 participants: in-depth interviews with 42 women and 7 focus-group discussions with 47 men.

Participants were drawn from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, to ensure a wide range of perspectives on GBV were captured. Our research questions focused on participants' understandings and experiences of gender bias across sexual, domestic, economic and institutional spaces.

Fieldwork was carried out between October and November 2018, with the following groups:

1. Women with a history of domestic violence or who were currently facing it;
2. Men belonging to lower-middle to middle income groups and a wide age range of 18-60 years, who had witnessed violence or had themselves been violent;
3. Young men who had spent time in juvenile observation homes for committing crimes related to women.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed with the assistance of NVivo® qualitative data analysis software (version 12). Our research findings highlighted four key themes that account for some of the links between gender bias and GBV in India, each of which has several sub-themes. The overarching themes are: 1. violence, gender bias and its transmission; 2. marriage, family and embeddedness of gender roles; 3. invalidation of women's experiences throughout their life cycles; and 4. how women respond to and resist bias and violence. Together, these themes and subthemes capture the key aspects of GBV, gender bias and the connections between them in India. Throughout these themes, we found that GBV was underpinned by a complex system of gender biases, expressed in a variety of institutions and everyday social practices. For example, when families limit girls' education from a young age relative to boys, women are often held back from accessing the same economic opportunities as men, and lack of economic autonomy is one reason women remain in violent relationships. Additionally, while efforts have been made to legislate against some gender-biased traditions, such as dowry, these traditions continue to be widely practiced in covert ways. Our research participants' stories revealed how pervasive such gender biases were in India, and showed the many ways in which such biases all too often translate into GBV. However, and despite the pervasiveness of biases against women, we found encouraging instances of GBV being resisted or challenged by our participants. From the lessons we learned from their stories, we were able to develop 37 specific action points, under nine categories, which we suggest can be used to reduce GBV in India.

Primary Research Questions

for Men and Youth

1. How do men recognise and understand gender bias?
2. What are the different ways men define GBV?
3. According to men, what factors (e.g. age, culture, poverty, social group, pregnancy, marriage) lead to increasing GBV?
4. Do men see the interconnectedness of gender bias and GBV?
5. Do men see normative family structures as propagating gender bias and GBV?
6. What according to women are the factors that will help reduce gender bias and GBV?
7. What is the role of other family members in maintaining/supporting anti-female bias?
8. What are the effects of violence on other family members including children?
9. How do women define womanhood, and their specific roles?
10. How do women understand the division of public and private spheres? What are the instances of their defying/challenging this binary?
11. What strengths, resilience and strategies do women draw on in managing/reducing/preventing gender bias?

for Women

1. How do women recognise gender bias?
2. What are the different ways women define gender-based violence (GBV)? What are the different kinds of violence that women face?

3. What factors (e.g. age, culture, poverty, social group, pregnancy, marriage) lead to greater gender bias and greater GBV?
4. Do women perceive the interconnectedness of gender bias and GBV?
5. Do women see normative family structures as propagating gender bias and GBV?
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9. How do women define womanhood, and their specific roles?
10. How do women understand the division of public and private spheres? What are the instances of their defying/challenging this binary?
11. What strengths, resilience and strategies do women draw on in managing/reducing/preventing gender bias?
12. How do women manage/prevent/escape violence?
13. How do women define support? Are there people (community members, friends, family members) who can help women in difficult situations?
14. Are NGOs or women's groups helping women in difficult situations?
15. How have government schemes, laws, and policies helped women facing bias and violence?

Developing Themes & Action Points

Re - imagination of gender roles

Our study showed how gender roles affected women and men over time, often placing women at a disadvantage, or in risky situations. Most women and men suggested masculinity and femininity to be binary categories. Unfortunately, this perception underpinned gendered double standards, through which men and boys are given preference over women and girls. The following action points are designed to empower women to find fulfilling roles for themselves from a young age.

Action points

1. There is a need for government, government-funded public education programmes and third sector organisations to promote and build awareness of gender bias within society, specifically addressing double standards.
2. These programmes should educate men and women about the need to develop opportunities for women in economy and society.
3. In schools, girls and boys should be taught to speak up against negative bias and double standards. School programmes could build girls' self-esteem and autonomy by offering the same opportunities as boys in areas such as sciences and sports training.
4. Training for teachers should incorporate awareness of the adverse effects of double standards on the lives of young girls.
5. Classrooms should have an equitable environment with no tolerance of violence or discrimination.

Abuse has different manifestations and meanings

Our data demonstrated that women from different locations experience different types of abuse. Additionally, violence and abuse were understood differently by men and women. We found this to be a result of the way rights are interpreted and understood. It is important to understand men's perspectives on violence and harassment, and to help men understand why women's right to a life free from violence is an important goal.

Action points

1. Further research is needed on what makes men resist the idea of equity.
2. All forms of abuse against women need to be identified and categorised to show their prevalence.
3. In programmes that promote interaction between genders, it is important that efforts are made to counter the belief that women's empowerment would mean women becoming more powerful than men. The perception of misuse of women-centric law is a common complaint raised by men. Research is needed into ways to get men 'on board' with laws to protect and promote women's rights.
4. NGO programmes should focus on building public awareness of the more covert kinds of violence occurring in women's lives that remain unknown to many.

Transmission of negative gender bias through institutions

We noticed throughout our study that certain institutions were negatively affecting the daily lives of women as well as men. These institutions were helpful in addressing some forms of GBV, yet often we saw them spread negative biases. Exploring how biased beliefs can be prevented from passing from person to person and through systems is critical to our understanding of GBV. Family, marriage and the State need to be looked at critically to understand their positive and negative roles in women's lives.

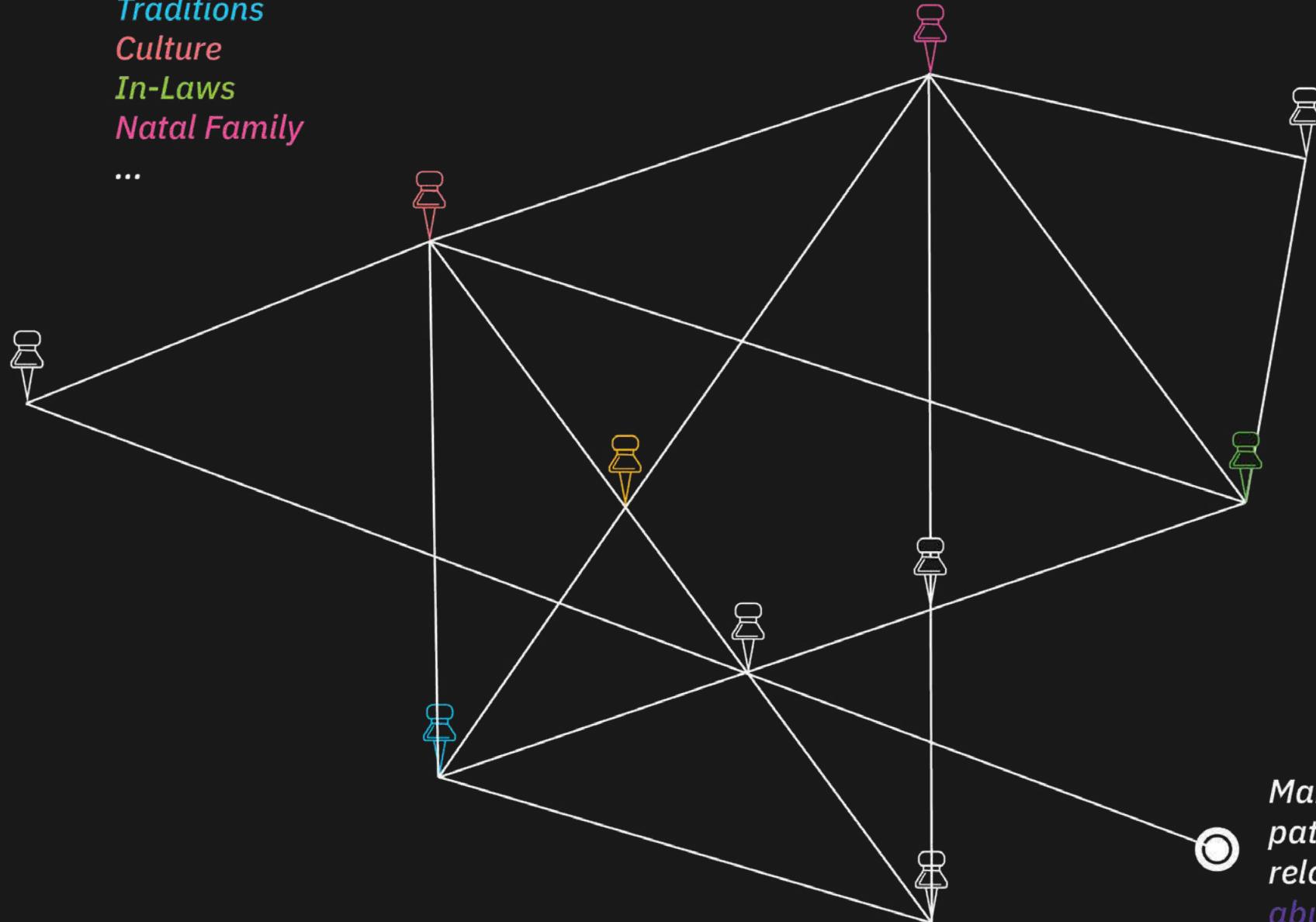
Action points

1. It is important that education is provided to service providers throughout government and community-based institutions about the ways in which gender bias can affect service delivery, and how negative impacts on women can be reduced.
2. Incentives and support could be offered for singlehood or to help unmarried women access opportunities that would benefit their living conditions. For this the Government could liaise with movements like Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan (ENSS)⁶ to better understand the complications of marriage.
3. As well as strengthening anti-dowry or child marriage laws, governments need to recognise the grassroots nature of these practices. Grassroots understanding of gender-biased traditions can inform law and policy changes.
4. A shift in attitude towards women's rights by State agencies, from a protectionist to a rights-based approach should be encouraged.

⁶ This is a movement which collectivised "single" women (including never married, divorced, separated) to demand separate rights and privileges for themselves. The movement began in Rajasthan and has found support in Himachal Pradesh, North Bengal and Sikkim. ENSS builds leadership among single women and addresses social marginalisation associated with singlehood.

*Marriage
Traditions
Culture
In-Laws
Natal Family*

...



|| Sunayna Waghmare's depiction of Indian women's intricate married lives,
resulting in migration, intimate and spatial violence

Marriage, Family & Gender Roles

*Making women comply with
patriarchal traditions like marital
relocation is form of abuse -
abuse of her right to space &
choice of habitat*

Developing Themes & Action Points

Violent relationships do not always have simple solutions

The prevalence of violence in intimate relationships has several causes, one of which is gender inequality. However, the reasons why women remain in violent relationships are complex. Utmost importance should be given to understanding problems with nuance and listening to women without judgement. It is essential that women are given the help that they want, at the time when they need it most.

Action points

1. Governments liaising with NGOs can offer women who do not wish to leave the sites of violence alternative or temporary arrangements.
2. There is a need to approach GBV in more culture and context specific ways by policymakers. Community-centred approach is necessary for grassroot changes.
3. Widespread screening processes for women who are at risk of abuse should be encouraged in clinical settings, so that clinicians can offer the help that is needed at the right time.
4. Government policies that give only protection from or punishment for complicated manifestations of GBV - such as dowry, forced marriages, early marriages - need to be supplemented by wider cultural changes and activism from researchers, women's groups, and NGOs. Changing perspectives on the ground about the negative impacts of patriarchal traditions is essential for both government and non-government agencies to address. Interventions based on evidence from communities will help with this.

Women's lives are controlled in covert ways

Women are controlled in different ways, which are often hidden from view. Respondents told us extensively about the subtle ways in which they had faced abuse and neglect. From their narratives we found that women's agency was disregarded regularly. However, women themselves sometimes held beliefs that supported these covert forms of control and violence. The various ways women's lives were controlled emerged from, and were justified (in the eyes of those involved) by the very simple yet unfounded belief carried by many of our respondents: that women are "weaker" than men.

Action points

1. Government or NGO interventions that distinguish between men and women solely on a biological basis need supplementing with a social constructionist understanding of GBV. Such an emphasis could help people understand how gender roles are prescribed, and can be re-imagined. This would be useful in achieving gender equality and challenging biological essentialist ideas that confine men and women to narrow, pre-defined roles.
2. Schools can promote gender egalitarian practices among students by offering the same learning opportunities to boys and girls. In curricula, students should be taught about GBV and how to prevent transmission of violence, by including such information in textbooks.
3. There is a need for more family centred interventions by NGOs to address specific issues such as problematic or abusive relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.
4. Governments should collaborate with NGOs to develop parenting programmes that promote the safety and wellbeing of mothers and children, taking a rights-based approach.

Discovering the role children play in help-seeking and help-giving

In our study, for women who were also mothers, children had a profound effect on their lives and sometimes on their decision-making. Motherhood could be both liberating and restraining for women. Children could be beacons of hope to women who faced abuse regularly, or they might become reasons for women to remain in abusive situations. It is important to see the place children occupy within a family, whether and how they can help women in situations of abuse.

Action points

1. From an early age, girls should be educated to understand that childbirth is not an inevitable eventuality, that choosing whether to have children is their fundamental right.
2. More research to be undertaken on empathy in children towards survivors of abuse, teaching them to respond to difficult situations at home and outside.
3. Governments need to implement schemes for expecting mothers, who do not have family support to start a life with just their child(ren).
4. Both NGOs and Government Organisations should be targeting interconnectedness of Violence Against Women (VAW) and Violence Against Children (VAC) to look for joint solutions to imminent problems.



Invalidating Women's Experiences

|| What are the various ways women feel invalidated?

We found women are isolated and confined within their gender roles throughout their lives.

Education, Knowledge, Awareness and Wellbeing are still luxuries that our women respondents have not been able to afford.

Visual representation by Ishani Kulkarni

**Education
Knowledge
Awareness
Well-being**

Developing Themes & Action Points

Un-silencing women's narratives

Kept away from the public sphere, many of our respondents were sharing their life stories for the first time by participating in our study, since women's lived experiences do not gain easy access to public discourse. We see an urgent need to share women's narratives to show how, from a young age, women are kept dependent on families so that in older age they are left without support and in risky living conditions. It is crucial that women have financial independence to live a secure life.

Action points

1. Central governments should incentivise education by way of funding for young women who wish to pursue higher studies and are unable to do so because of lack of funding.
2. Offices should make workplaces safe by implementing anti-GBV policies and closing the gender pay gap. Women's participation in the workforce should be encouraged by both private and public sector companies.
3. Banks can make information more freely available to women who wish to start their own businesses (sometimes from inside their homes).
4. Governments need to have special provisions for older women who do not have family support, like having functional and liveable spaces for the elderly.
5. Schools should encourage young girls to learn about earning and saving, investing in land and housing, so that later in their lives they are not restricted and dependent only on their families.
6. Sharing of stories by women in the media, about the abuse they have faced and the obstacles they have overcome, to counter the normalised narrative of GBV.

Formal systems' responses need to change

Dissatisfaction with systems was a recurring issue in our study; women did not feel comfortable reaching out to authorities. Very few women chose to take a formal stand against the abuse they faced even though they knew where to find support. State run services like the police often either scared women or gave them bad advice. Women said NGOs were unhelpful at times, and taking legal help was impossible as it would taint their family name. That said, women did expect better support from the Government, tailored to their specific needs.

Action points

1. Implementation level monitoring of government and NGO schemes should be carried out.
2. Help should be given to women to ensure they understand what schemes would benefit them most. This may be done with help of government employees working in banks, post offices, or any holding any other post.
3. NGOs need to model their interventions in accordance with the needs of the survivor, understanding women have different lives and complications.
4. Interventions for domestic disputes should be used to help train community leaders to mediate in cases of disputes.

Gender-based interventions focusing equally on men and women

During our data collection we realised that men and women saw themselves as very different from each other. Preventing GBV will not be possible if men are not aware of women's situation, and supportive of their demands for violence prevention. Demanding equal rights and no discrimination towards women should also include men's voices. Instead of men being silent observers or perpetrators, men and women together should be able to converse and find solutions.

Action points

1. NGOs addressing GBV should encourage open conversation between genders, inviting both men and women to take part in interventions to reduce GBV.
2. NGOs and government agencies should focus on interventions specifically targeting the bystander attitude, in public as well as private spaces.
3. Community-centric interventions should be given more importance to inculcate bystander responsibility. Research on family-specific programmes to change the bystander apathy within families could help prevent abuse.

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