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ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA

Cover Image - *Pardah.*
Location: Noida, U.P., India.

Keep the veil down, do not go outside after the sunset, do not speak up in the crowd, and be silent when someone speaks against you. You must stay inside for if you speak, you will be judged. For if you speak no one will marry you. You must come back home early to be safe. You must not drink, for people will judge you. The women have complied with it; did the society suddenly become better? Did the rate of rapes suddenly become obsolete? Did you successfully make the women safe? No, you did not. Caging her, cutting her ties from the world does not save her; it just makes her devoid of all the connections from the society. You want women to be safe? Stop keeping them behind curtains and teach them to fight back.

A special thanks to the *Faculty of Law, Jamia Millia Islamia*, since it has been the space which helped foster this idea, and to our Professors at Law School who constantly encouraged us and stood with us through thick and thin and offered unconditional support whenever needed.

Inaugural Issue

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Addressing Gender-Based Violence in South Asia

An open-source, peer-reviewed journal

The South Asian Journal of Law, Policy, and Social Research (SAJLPSR) is an open source journal published both online by SSRN and in a limited print run. This is the inaugural issue of the first edition of the journal on the theme of gender-based violence (GBV). We expect to publish a second issue on GBV in November of 2020.

Information on the journal is available publicly at http://www.rochester.edu/sba/.

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(ISSN under process)

Founders' Prologue

The South Asian region, predominantly the Indian subcontinent, has been mired in conflict ever since it gained independence from the British Empire in 1947. Multiple wars have been fought in the region between different countries over assorted issues. There have also been many internal conflicts of varying magnitudes, despite overlapping cultural and ethnic identities.

Post-independence, the three most populous countries of the region, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, have significantly diverged into different directions regarding political and economic concerns. Cultural variation is also seen in the legal systems of our countries, which were largely uniform prior to independence. However, these regions seem to be in accord regarding education and the educational crisis, with a few notable exceptions.

It was apparent that there was a gap in the means by which our region could share research across our countries regarding collective concerns. We wanted a mechanism to come together for debate, discussion, and sharing ideas and to contribute information backed by facts and sources to the world. Often, a research gap can impede progress towards dialogue. We believe that bridging the communication gap between the academicians of these countries, in partnership with legal practitioners and policy makers, through an interdisciplinary research platform, is a means to finding solutions to multiple regional issues.

Hence, we present to you a peer-reviewed, open-source, bi-annual South Asian Journal, which will not only bridge the gap between law, policy, and social science, but also transform academic research into evidence-based policy. We engage scholars and artists to partner and direct their expertise toward one theme every year, intending to reform the conventional way of presenting research, to ensure research doesn't only accumulate on library shelves—but makes it into the light of day.

We envision an academic platform which plays an active role in the process of social change; thus, each year we will choose a theme to bring an interdisciplinary academic lens to South Asia's pressing issues.

For this reason, “Gender-Based Violence in South Asia” is our first issue’s theme since this public health concern requires an interdisciplinary research approach to understand emerging dynamics and policy-impacts. We have added original work from artists to express the importance of addressing this theme. The papers being published herein cover multiple research perspectives to gender-based violence in the region, both from a multidisciplinary perspective as well as an artistic one.

Naseer Husain Jafri Umair Ahmed Andrabi

Founders, Foundation for Academia, Innovation & Thought (F.A.I.T.H.)

Editors-in-Chief Foreword

The Susan B. Anthony Center at the University of Rochester is pleased to be a part of this inaugural issue focusing on the prevention of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Asia. We want to recognize the hard of work of the authors, artists, and the editorial team in putting together an issue whose articles reflect geographic diversity and discuss the lives of women and children as they move through the life-course.

Perhaps of most interest was how many of the articles focus on prevention—and discuss ideas about how we can move forward to eradicate GBV. The studies are mostly qualitative, while some expand on the work of other studies which utilized mixed-methods approaches. We were pleasantly overwhelmed by the number of quality submissions on compelling topics which we received. As a result, we have agreed to partner on a second issue of this inaugural volume on GBV.

The F.A.I.T.H. team has a vision to bring together policy, law, and social science to change lives across sectors in South Asia. While the first volume of the journal is on GBV, following issues will address other public health concerns. The journal's commitment to open-source, peer-reviewed dissemination is commendable and could not have happened without the work of our dedicated Center team and our editors, who rolled up their sleeves and got to work to bring this new journal to life. The journal also would not have been possible without commitment and support from SSRN, an online publisher willing to partner with an emerging not-for-profit whose leaders believe that change is possible through enhanced communication and policy grounded in science.

We decided to begin the dialogue with GBV given the incredible costs to individuals and communities relative to physical and mental health, increased medical care, substance use disorders, and increased morbidity and mortality. We know the articles will lead by example and provide a road map for us to consider new ways to responding to, and prevent GBV, no matter where we call home.

Gender-based violence is a global problem, affecting every country. The ideas presented in this issue include an overview of recent legal changes related to GBV and challenges to their implementation as well as the importance of including violence prevention training and feminist counseling into non-governmental organizations that

often focus only on financial stability. Other articles focus on early education intervention to address biased gender norms and to foster prevention of GBV. Yet other articles suggest that true eradication of GBV must include a close examination of social norms and customs, including how women move through the work environment and public space. This is perhaps a task from which all communities could benefit.

F.A.I.T.H. also has a vision to expand the notion of scholarly publication by including the arts. For this issue they included a photo essay call along with the article call. By partnering with the AJK Mass Communication Research Centre, Jamia Millia Islamia, a "team science" approach helped us deliver a final product that may reach different audiences though myriad expressions of thought—both through the spoken word and the camera lens.

We look forward to meeting authors and photographers for the next issue.

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Unpacking the Role of Women's Collectives in Addressing Intimate Partner Violence in South Asia

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Abstract

This study by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) aims to understand the role of women's collectives in South Asia in addressing intimate partner violence (IPV). Women's collectives in South Asia operate primarily as microcredit groups called Self-Help Groups (SHGs), often with mandates for social development and empowerment, in addition to poverty alleviation. This study involved a literature review of IPV programs in women's collectives in South Asia, analysis of IPV interventions in government SHG programs in India, and interviews with key stakeholders and female members of SHG programs and collectives in India. The results show that women's collectives that incorporate feminist training are a safe space for women seeking help. They also show that intentionally addressing IPV is key to enhancing the outcomes of women's economic participation. Women's collectives also play a role in making IPV a public concern and in enhancing women's impact on local governance. This paper concludes by proposing recommendations for strategies to address IPV within SHG/collectives-based initiatives.

Introduction

Women's collectives in South Asia play an important role in 'development' efforts supported through government and non-governmental initiatives. They operate primarily as microcredit groups called Self-Help Groups (SHGs), often with mandates for social development and empowerment, in addition to poverty alleviation. Targeted interventions for addressing intimate partner violence (IPV) through large-scale SHG programs exist, but progress is slow and sustainability uncertain (Vindhya, Kashyap, Bhatla, Nandi, & Pal, 2018; Parthasarathy et al., 2018). Feminists have critiqued how SHGs become 'buffers' for state failure in addressing violence and development (Nandi, 2010). They have also highlighted the severe toll that increasing hours and intensity of work had on women's sleep, leisure, and food (Chant & Sweetman, 2012).

Within an overall context of weak institutions and limited accountability, a recent study on addressing IPV conducted by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW*)* from 2016-2018 points to programs in South Asia that have operated on scale and over time to address IPV (Pande, Nanda, Bopanna, & Kashyap, 2017). This study involved a literature review of IPV programs in women's collectives in South Asia, analysis of IPV interventions in government SHG programs in India, and interviews with key stakeholders and female members of SHG programs and collectives in India.

It found more comprehensive approaches to addressing IPV in women's collectives where there has been stronger articulation and recognition of the interconnections between IPV and women's participation in public life, be it for economic engagement, employment as health workers, or participation in local governance. The study concludes that women's collectives can be responsive platforms for survivors of IPV in rural areas to get support through targeted strategies. We find that women's groups which provide a safe platform and collective strength which is further leveraged through feminist training and with handholding from women's rights organizations can help in recognition and voicing of violence and in connecting survivors to institutional services, even if the primary reason for organizing was to improve livelihoods alone (Pande et al., 2017). Programs are differentiated by whether they envisaged systemic responsiveness to IPV or whether they were ad hoc and how the agenda was sustained over time.

Women's Collectives and IPV

One in three married women in India has experienced IPV at least once in their lifetime (WHO, 2013). The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 was intended to protect women from violence in domestic relationships, alongside provisions in the Indian Penal Code that criminalize acts of 'cruelty' by husbands and other members of the marital family. While data from the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) does report cases of IPV—presumably the 'tip of the iceberg'—other sources of data show that 78.6% of women who experienced IPV never reported to anybody, that only 9.1% spoke about the experience to someone, that only 12.3% sought help from any source, while 52% of women themselves justify wife-beating in certain circumstances (National Family Health Survey, 2017). Moreover, there has been very little research on pathways women take at the community level to address IPV.

Through the decades, women's collectives in South Asia have taken on different forms and purposes. Starting with functional savings and credit-based collectives in the mid-1970s to more transformative organizations of poor women that tackled issues of women's rights and gender equality, the SHG and their mobilization have been a popular strategy in both government and non-governmental programs (Dand & Nandi, 2012). Global examples of such collectives are Combahee River Collective of South Carolina, a group of radical black feminists, one of the most important organizations to develop out of the anti-racist and women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s (Taylor, 2019), collectives of women preserving forests in the Chipko Movement in India in 1973 (Jain, 1984), and the Self Employment Women's Association (SEWA), which was launched in the state of Gujarat, India, by female garment workers who first met in a park to discuss their working conditions and eventually organized into a trade union in 1972 (Narayan, Patel, Schafft, & Rademacher, 2000). These collectives have always been an intrinsic aspect of feminist solidarity building and they pre-dated the microfinance movement (Dand & Nandi, 2012).

In feminist mobilization, the term 'collective' is used to refer to an informal group of women, which does not have a hierarchical structure, which draws from relational power ('power with') and which functions based on the principles of democracy; the collective is a place where women can seek resolution and openly discuss issues that affect them without fear of social retribution (Sweetman, 2013). In South Asia, the women's collective has found a place in several large-scale programs for

women's empowerment run by government and non-governmental organizations, such as the Mahila Samakhya Programme which was grounded in principles of education for women and grassroots movement-building (Mahila Samakhya Programme, n.d.).The Mahila Samakhya Programme promoted conscientization, reflection, and action in collectives and was a unique model of organizing as it was not based on microcredit-based mobilization unlike most other programs in women's collectives.

Literature also points to the co-option of the more transformative collective by the push for microfinance-based groups, especially post the 1990s with economic reform and financial liberalization in India and South Asia (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Since that time, the focus of the 'collective' has been on microfinance-related activities and collectives have been defined in government policy as a 'small informal group of 10-20 individuals who are homogenous with respect to social and economic background and come together voluntarily for promoting savings habit among members and for a common cause to raise and manage resources for the benefit of group members' (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, n.d.). In India, national banks such as the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, along with other governmental and non-governmental actors, mobilised SHGs to address economic distress and to provide rural credit. In India, the government also realised the potential of women's collectives to challenge the status quo and therefore there was increased state activism to harness the power of these collectives to meet some of their development targets. In the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), the Indian government introduced the SHG model 'as a core strategy to achieve empowerment' with the objective to 'organize women into self-help groups and thus mark the beginning of a major process of empowering women' (Jakimow & Kilby, 2006). International donors like the World Bank also realised the potential of SHGs and started to work both with the government as well as feminist non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Self Help Groups are mostly comprised of women; the argument behind Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) targeting women is that women are a good credit risk, are less likely to misuse loans, and are more likely to share the benefits with others in their household, especially their children (Garikipati, 2008; Swain &Wallentin, 2009). However, it is also argued that women's increasing role in the household economy will lead to their empowerment (Hunt & Kasynathan, 2010). Feminists believe that there is inherent power generated within these groups as they provide a forum for dialogue and

discussion (therefore contributing to the capacity of members to understand and find solutions to their problems) as well as a means to transform individual weaknesses into collective strength, thus enhancing the bargaining power of the group vis-a-vis power structures.

One of the indicators of empowerment of women is the reduction of violence against women, especially IPV, the most common form of violence against women. An intimate partnership is a close personal relationship characterized by emotional connectedness, regular contact, presence of a physical and/or sexual relationship, and familiarity and knowledge about each other's life. The measurement of IPV focuses on assessing women's lifetime exposure to physical or sexual violence, or both, by an intimate partner. This has been defined as the proportion of 'ever-partnered women' (women who have ever had an intimate partner) who reported having experienced one or more acts of physical, sexual, economic, or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner at any point in their lives. Current prevalence is usually measured as the proportion of 'ever-partnered women' reporting that at least one act of physical or sexual violence, or both, took place during the 12 months prior to the date information is collected (WHO, 2013). However, violence against women is not prioritized in the agenda of SHGs; one study said only 11% SHGs had discussed issues of violence in their group meetings (Dwivedi, 2007).

This paper aims at understanding how women's collectives, which are predominantly SHGs in South Asia, address IPV. It highlights the journeys and experiences of some of the models that have used SHGs to address IPV and presents the opinion of SHG members and other women regarding the space of SHGs addressing the issue.

Methodology

This paper is based on the findings of a study conducted by the ICRW, Asia, on addressing IPV through community level platforms over a period of two years (2016-2018). Although the broader research reviewed platforms of Panchayati Raj Institutions (local governance) and public health resources in addition to SHGs to address the issue of IPV, this particular paper is based on the findings of the SHG platform alone. The findings are based on the following data sources: (i) a secondary literature review of existing programs that use the platform of SHGs to address IPV in South Asia; (ii) model documentation of IPV interventions in large scale government SHG programs from two

southern states in India, namely Indira Kranthi Patham in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, and the Kudumbasree Mission in the state of Kerala; and (iii) primary research with key stakeholders and women members of SHGs and collectives in these two programs, as well as in two districts of the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, namely, Pratapgarh and Varanasi. The summary of the various data sources is provided in the following figure.

Figure 1: Sources of Data

Secondary literature review (South Asia level review)	Secondary and primary research for model documentation (In erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Kerala)	Primary data collection (in Uttar Pradesh)
Unpacking the role of SHGs and women's collectives in addressing IPV in South Asia		

Methods

For the secondary literature review and model documentation, we accessed various kinds of literature, which included published peer reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters, unpublished working papers, university theses, government reports, and donor and other organizational reports, including final project reports as well as more informal progress and monitoring reports. We conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with relevant government officials and female members from Indira Kranthi Pratham and the Kudumbashree Mission to understand the functioning of the large scale SHG models in the country and their responsiveness to IPV. It was approved by the ICRW's Institutional Review Board. In this paper, we have illustrated the evidence emerging from all these perspectives, especially the women's own perspectives and experience in accessing relevant services.

For the model documentation in Kerala, we selected two districts to study program implementation; these were Kollam and Kozhikode. Both districts record some of the highest rates of crimes against women in the state, and both are old districts with program coverage, with intensive focus and specific initiatives relating to crimes against women, with mixed results. These districts are in different parts of the state and represent spatial and demographic diversities.

For the model documentation of Indira Kranthi Pratham, we identified four districts (two each in the bifurcated states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana) as 'high'

and 'low' performing by their staff. The criteria of labelling them as 'high' and 'low' performing included the age of the district in terms of implementation of the program, number of IPV cases received and 'resolved', and nature of documentation of the cases. The 'high performing' districts in Telangana and AP were Sangareddy (in erstwhile Medak) and Krishna respectively, while the 'low-performing' districts were Wanaparthy (in former Mahbubnagar) and Nellore respectively. The names of the districts were suggested by the staff of the organisation who played a key role in the implementation of the social agenda from its inception.

For the primary research in Uttar Pradesh, a short, qualitative, exploratory study was conducted to understand how IPV is experienced by the women and addressed by the immediate platform of the SHG available to them. This included in-depth interviews (IDIs), KIIs, and FGDs. We conducted the research in two rural districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh, namely Pratapgarh and Varanasi. We selected the sites based on the presence of a local NGO that was able to serve as an organization for referrals on domestic and IPV. We partnered with the NGOs based on their extensive technical expertise on gender and IPV, as well as experience of working with women on these issues. Willingness to collaborate with ICRW to facilitate the research was another factor in selection of partner NGOs. The two local NGO partners in two districts of Uttar Pradesh were Mahila Samakhya (MS) in Pratapgarh and Mahila Swarozgar Yojana (MSS) in Varanasi. Initial reconnaissance visits to both the sites were conducted. Since IPV is a sensitive topic, ICRW conducted a five-day training for members of both the local NGOs. The training was meant to develop a better understanding of the research objectives and tools and to build capacity to facilitate, conduct, and help translate the interactions in the field. During in-depth interviews, the presence of local women offered a sense of familiarity and comfort for survivors of IPV. None of the participants were paid.

As mentioned, the study methods used were IDIs, FGDs and KIIs. In Pratapgarh, eight IDIs were conducted with survivors and seven FGDs and six KIIs were conducted. In Benaras, ten IDIs, five FGDs and five KIIs were conducted. In both sites, IDIs were conducted with survivors of IPV. The aim of the IDIs was to capture women's experiences of violence and their experiences of dealing with it, more specifically on the nature of recourses sought, opinions on the experience of seeking recourse, and the challenges faced in the process. For IDIs with women who have experienced IPV, the inclusion criteria were adult women who were 18 years and older; who had experienced

IPV regardless of whether they had sought any redress; who fell in the category of 'ever married' (either currently married or married at some point in their lives); and who were known to the local NGO. The women were also selected to represent a range of different class and caste groups and needed to be residing in the district where the research was conducted.

The aim of the FGDs in Uttar Pradesh was to explore the attitudes and knowledge of women in SHGs on their experiences of IPV and to understand the role that SHGs can and have played in response to issues like IPV. The inclusion criteria for SHGs were functional SHGs comprising of 8-10 participants in each group, regardless of exposure to various levels of feminist trainings, residing in the selected districts. We selected the SHGs based on their availability after an initial approval that was obtained by the local NGOs. KII participants were SHG members who participated in the FGD who had personally handled cases of IPV and / or had important perspectives they were unable to discuss at length in a FGD forum. The KIIs were conducted to elicit more detailed information on the issues raised at the FGD.

The NGOs facilitated the recruitment process of participants for the IDIs and FGDs. We obtained informed consent to interview and audio record all interviews and FGDs. We asked participants during the informed consent process if they agreed to audio recording. Focus Group Discussions were audio recorded only if all participants in the FGD gave group consent to recording. Recruitment of KIIs with some members was conducted post-FGD. During the course of the FGD, ICRW researchers identified members who had more information to share but were not comfortable expressing themselves in front of the entire group. Once the FGD was completed, ICRW staff approached each identified member privately and requested they participate in an in-person interview, explaining the purpose. All IDIs and KIIs were conducted in a private place as per the choice and convenience of the interviewee. We conducted the interviews either in respondents' homes or the NGO center as per convenience. During the interview, it was ensured that there was no one present in the interview space other the interviewer and the notetaker. The FGDs were also held in a closed space where the possibility of bystanders was eliminated.

We did not record names or personal identifiers at the time of data collection. All interviews and FGD handwritten notes and recordings were transcribed and translated by the ICRW research team. We analysed the data from KIIs, IDIs, and FGDs

using the software AtlasTi. The ICRW team developed a coding tree based on the key research questions, the key objectives of the different types of data collected, and reading of a select number of transcripts of each of the data type. All the data was then qualitatively analysed.

Findings

Collectives Are a Safe Space for Seeking Help

The literature review, model documentation, and primary research have highlighted that women survivors of IPV do approach SHGs seeking help. They are either referred through neighbours who are members of SHGs or they themselves belong to some SHG. Findings of IDIs in Uttar Pradesh found that most IPV cases are known to SHG members. Self help groups are not only approached to seek redressal in relation to the violence women face at home, but also for claims and entitlements such as ration cards, employment schemes, and so on, that form an important part of building resilience and resources. Secondary literature also illustrates that SHGs, being located in the immediate community of the women, are spaces where women generally open up regarding issues like IPV, diminishing their sense of isolation (Swain & Wallentin, 2009). Self help groups can provide a space for collective resistance to IPV and this collective strength can enhance bargaining power to recognise the issue (Hashemi, Schuler, & Riley, 1996). In a context where only 1 in 10 women report violence, collectives are a powerful platform through which women are bringing voice and visibility to their experiences of violence.

Feminist Training and Accompaniment Encourage Articulation of and Response to IPV

Another important finding for SHGs in addressing the issue of IPV, highlighted across literature and also found in the field, is the importance of feminist training. Our primary research documents that training and capacity building from a feminist lens, conducted across large-scale programs, such as the Mahila Samakhya, have played critical roles in strengthening collectives' responses to violence. These have also been seen in programs such as the Indira Kranti Patham in the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh (Vindhya, Kashyap, Bhatla, Nandi, & Pal, 2018). For instance, the transformative approaches by which women learn through critical dialogues and experience sharing, reflecting on their own assumptions, beliefs, or frames of reference,

helped to build a shared understanding that IPV is a rights violation and not 'destiny' or 'prerogative of the husband'.

> Even in primary fieldwork it has been found that the male sense of entitlement and the pervasive patriarchal understanding of gendered roles among women seemed to direct behaviour and roles within marriages. Women were commonly heard citing their husbands' beliefs that the men were the head of the family and therefore the sole decision makers. Twenty-five-year-old Sama (name changed) shared the following: 'He says that it is his family and he can do whatever he desires. It is no one's business. That is why out of fear no one thinks or says anything for me.' A 40-year-old respondent who had borne much physical and economic violence shared this: 'He thinks that if I hit my woman, she will respect me, and she will be under my control because she has been given to me.' This patriarchal understanding of gendered roles prevailed even within members of SHGs as they are part of the society as well. They shared the expressions '*aurattoh pao kijuttihotihai*' (a woman is the shoe under one's feet) and '*patibhagwaanhotahai*' (the husband is god) to prove how established the discourse is.

The following quote is from an untrained SHG member on her perspective and attitudes towards the resolution of IPV:

> Whether it is to do with the mother-in-law or father-in-law or husband, we tell the woman to serve the mother-in-law so that she will like her. If the husband is short tempered we tell the woman to ensure that she does things to make him happy. Our aim is to show women how to keep the family together and not break homes.

SHG respondents in Benares stated that sending one's violent husband to jail is wrong. Some of them argued that besides men's alcohol addiction, IPV is also caused by 'bad women' who do not obey their husbands. The narrative of the bad / good woman was prominent among SHG members who were not exposed to rigorous training.

On the other hand, SHG women trained under the program of Mahila Samakhya expressed the following:

> There was a woman staying near my house. Her husband used to beat her up a lot and would drink alcohol too. Today that person has improved because we made him understand. Now they don't have fights in their house any longer.

When asked about the SHG involvement in IPV-related cases, most SHG members thought that survivors feel more comfortable talking to women at SHGs. They initially offer feminist counselling, then offer the woman ration (food) and monetary help, if need be, before they take other action:

> All the women will get together and if your husband is troubling you…we will take him to the police station and file a case against him.…If the police punish him, that is fine. Otherwise at the women's court of Mahila Samakhya, we will have a discussion there.

The also expressed that they can create more awareness about IPV and women's rights among members of their own group, and if possible, other women that they interact with.

> We used to stay in the house and we didn't know how to step out. Now since we are a part of the organization we are able to cross the threshold of our house….We can also gather information and make other women aware… we don't have to maintain purdah anymore… after becoming a part of the organization we have educated our daughters.

Gender trainings have been incorporated into the large scale SHG programs to address violence in India.

IPV and Women's Economic Empowerment Have a Relationship

Mixed results are seen in the relationship between economic income and reduction in violence. Members of SHGs earn credit and income. Microcredit provided through the SHGs is seen as a means to mitigate violence by providing economic resources to women, enabling them to undertake various other economic activities (Nawaz, 2019). From the primary research, in some interviews women's strategic needs such as decision-making power was positively associated with the of availability of microcredit, with some women expressing how microfinance borrowers had more money to spend and therefore had a greater say in the decision-making process involved in spending that money. Self help group members discussed how microfinance improved their participation in decisions on children's education, decisions on contraceptives, decisions on buying personal items, and decisions on visiting relatives. Some women also discussed reduction in IPV after joining SHGs. One woman shared that she had raised almost a loan of almost INR 50,000 during the marriage of her second

daughter and that she has to repay the loan at 2% interest rate; i.e., 2 INR for every 100 INR.

However, many other women (especially women from SHGs not exposed to gender trainings) discussed how they had no control over the decision on spending the credit. Male members generally control and decide on the money and sometimes also invest in activities for men. One woman also expressed how the husband got the money and considered the loans as an income source for himself but has now started showing respect to her.

Dowry is a cultural practice in India where there is transfer of a parental gift in the form of money or property to be sent along with the bride to the groom or his family. It is listed as a common cause of IPV in the primary research. Women expressed how they are forced to take loans by the husband to transfer gifts to his family. It was found that the husband then took control over the loan and used most of the money in drinking liquor. Then under the influence of alcohol, the men would resort to violence against their wives.

Recent research indicates that in some case the prevalence of IPV increases with women's access to economic empowerment opportunities (Pande et al., 2017; John & Gammage, 2017). Some consider it a so-called 'backlash' against women asserting their autonomy and agency, and it is one of the unintended consequences of programming for women's economic empowerment that has no consideration for IPV and other forms of violence against women in its design and implementation.

However, from the model documentation of large-scale programs that build upon the SHG or women's collectives platform for addressing IPV, it is evident that where facilitated, the groups enable women's access to land rights, housing, employment, pensions, social protection, and other entitlements that build their bargaining power, and is therefore an important strategy that creates resilience and empowerment that contributes to violence prevention and response.

What emerges clearly is that economic empowerment and IPV have a complex relationship that is neither linear nor causal, but that could have implications for each other. Even when SHGs might have a positive impact on economic empowerment, there could be no effect on overall change in partner's attitude at all. We found that partners' attitudes are deeply influenced by gender norms rooted in the society. Some of the gender norms analysed in which men feel justified in being abusive towards their wives

include: women's mobility not being restricted, sex not being offered, meals not being ready, reheated rice being served from the morning, women forgetting work like sewing a button or washing a shirt, women not being responsive quickly enough when asked to do something, women being neglectful in caring for the children, women talking back when reprimanded, women leaving home without permission, women failing to obey the in-laws, women giving birth to girl children, women incurring expenses on health or other needs, and women not meeting dowry requirements.

Collectives Can Help Make IPV a Public Concern

Despite a legal framework that recognises, defines, and provides a redressal process to domestic violence, one major challenge for SHGs in addressing the issue of IPV is in making IPV a public issue in a sociocultural context which considers it *'gharkibaat'* or 'a domestic matter.' Interview respondents as well as focus group participants underlined that violence and its implications (particularly abandonment) are seen as shameful and stigmatizing for the women. Issues related to a marriage are understood as private or family concerns, and so when these reach the public domain, it is thought to bring disgrace to the family. When married women are forced to return to their natal families because of violence, it compromises their so-called 'honour.' Women are made to feel ashamed at not being able to hold their marriage together; the gossip and ridicule it generates adds to the shame.

Members of SHGs also expressed that sometimes they find it hard to intervene until violence is reported by either of the partners because IPV is considered a couple's private matter. 'Even if they say something, the couple says that it is a fight between the two of them, why are they interfering?…That is why even if someone wants to say something, they keep quiet.…'

The following statement by an SHG member proves why these groups are sometimes wary of intervening and the hostilities they can face:

> …if a husband and wife have a fight and she comes out of the house, then a lot of people say that maybe she is of a bad character that is why her husband has beat her up...If we as SHG want to provide support to the woman, he (her husband) threatens us… Who will take up such a risk? We back out… We give people a chair to sit. We ask them how they are doing. Whatever their problem is, we inquire about it. But if we go to anyone's doorstep no one bothers to even talk to us even though we are standing at their door.

Therefore, SHGs reported requiring support from other community level bodies like local government for their own protection and also to address the issue.

Intentional and Not Just Incidental Measures Are Required to Address IPV

Apart from all these strategies, at the policy and system level, a dedicated gender architecture which includes earmarked resources, institutional space, mechanisms, and bodies to address the issue of IPV has also worked in many large scale SHG programs. Examples are: Nari Adalat (Women's Court) within Mahila Samakhya, which act as an alternate dispute resolution platform in the absence of suitable means for access to justice. In Kudumbashree, a Gender Corner has been set up as a space to confidentially register complaints and receive support at the Panchayat level; Gender Focal Person at the district level and short stay homes called Snehitha provide shelter and counselling (Parthasarathy, et al., 2018). In Indira Kranthi Pratham, elected members from the SHGs form the structure of Social Action Committees and Community Managed Family Counselling Centers to resolve IPV issues through psychosocial support and mediation, monetary compensations, legal and police aid, advocacy, and awareness-raising (Vindhya, Kashyap, Bhatla, Nandi, & Pal, 2018). This is what we have termed as 'systemic responsiveness' of structures and platforms to the issue of IPV. Please see Figure 2 defining the framework for 'systemic responsiveness', and how large-scale programs have contributed to addressing IPV through the platform of women's collectives.

Figure 2 : A framework for 'systemic responsiveness'

- Rooted in human rights norms and standards
- A matter of public policy, governance and/or collective concern
- Intentional, not incidental in design

Elements of 'addressing IPV':

- Recognition and voicing of the issue
- Mediation/alternate dispute resolution
- Facilitating linkages with institutions and services for prevention of and response to IPV
- Creation of an enabling environment, including political will

Conclusion

Self help groups and women's collectives have used different routes to address the issue of IPV. The ICRW evidence suggests that programs have used the route of education for feminist transformation (such as Mahila Samakhya in India), decentralized governance for development planning through local level governance (such as

Kudumbashree), and poverty alleviation (such as that adopted by programs such as Indira Kranthi Pratham in India); see Table 1 below (adapted from ICRW, 2018).

Table 1: Comparison of women's collectives, feminism, and IPV

	Indira Kranthi Pratham	**Kudumbasree**	**Mahila Samakhya**
Origin and Purpose	Poverty alleviation	Decentralised governance for development planning	Education for feminist transformation
Is addressing Violence Against Women a stated mandate?	Not a mandate but evolves organically	Not a mandate but evolves organically and becomes institutionalised	Is a mandate
Is addressing IPV an expected outcome of the program?	Somewhat; it is an ameliorative vision	Somewhat; it is an ameliorative vision	Yes; there is a vision for transformative change
Who shapes the agenda for gender equality and women's rights?	Individually driven	Individually driven but also embedded in government structures	Agenda-setting and directions provided by gender experts, women's rights organizations, and collectives organized at the grassroots

Key strategies to address violence	Feminist training to grassroots leaders as counsellors/paralegals	Learning and reflection, linkage with existing government schemes and legitimization from local governance body	Learning, reflection and action on rights, alternate dispute resolution
When did they start working on violence?	4-5 years into the program	11 years after the program started	From inception
Sustainability	Not sustainable because of not being institutionalised	Sustainable through state support	Program has not been sustained but the change has been sustained

Programs for women's collectives have either used a direct route through trainings and continuous engagement on the issue directly or used an indirect route of providing credit to women with an assumption that this automatically increases women's status within the household, and that access to financial assets either equates with, or directly leads to, empowerment and a decrease in violence against women, which is an indicator of empowerment as well.

As with all studies, there are limitations to our work. By design, qualitative studies often have a small number of participants to allow for in-depth understandings. Despite our triangulation of data among participants (women, providers, leaders) and our geographic diversity over regions, we recognize that this study is the beginning of a larger, longitudinal study which is needed to assess how collectives can facilitate IPV prevention and response systems. However, even with these limitations, our study provides insights that can be helpful for communities seeking to reduce IPV. Study findings are summarized below, which can inform future policy and program on collectives and IPV.[1]

[1] Based on the synthesis of secondary literature review of evaluated/documented programs in South Asia, a background paper on the history and trajectory of women's collectives addressing IPV in India, primary

- ***Addressing IPV became a legitimate public concern through a stated mandate:*** In each of the pathways and particularly from the model documentation of Kudumbasree (Parthasarathy, et al., 2018) and Velugu (Vindhya, Kashyap, Bhatla, Nandi, & Pal, 2018), we find that the work on IPV began with a stated collective mandate for addressing the issue. The time point to address IPV came at different junctures in organizations' journeys, but without a stated mandate, there were no investments or strategies in addressing IPV. These strategies, investments, and mechanisms were rolled out over 10-20 years and were part of long-term government programs.
- ***Trained collectives play an important role in recognition of IPV*:** Training and capacity building across large-scale programs, such as the Mahila Samakhya, have played critical roles in strengthening collectives' responses to violence. For instance, the transformative approaches by which women learn through critical dialogues and experience sharing—reflecting on their own assumptions, beliefs or frames of reference—helped to build a shared understanding that IPV is a rights violation and not 'destiny' or 'prerogative of the husband'.
- ***Addressing IPV is key to enhancing outcomes of women's economic participation:*** Whether the programs began with the objective of addressing IPV, the pathways show that IPV programs that collaborate with women's collectives have made IPV an important part of the collectives' agendas. The model documentation of Velugu demonstrates that the program on IPV began as a response to an overwhelming demand from women entering the livelihoods program to address their concerns of opportunity and mobility that were being restricted due to IPV.
- ***Collectives help make violence, including IPV, a public concern:*** Women's collectives have played an important role in helping to break the culture of silence around domestic violence, especially IPV. They have been successful in facilitating public acknowledgement of the issue across a range of stakeholders. For instance, under the Velugu program, members of the women's collectives were successful in making issues of violence an articulated focus of the poverty alleviation program

review of government programs like Kudumbasree in Kerala, Velugu in Andhra Pradesh, Shaurya Dal in Madhya Pradesh and MahilaSamakhya in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh in India, as well as formative work with women survivors and platform representatives conducted in Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

for which programmatic investments were subsequently made (Vindhya et al, 2018).

- ***Collectives can be the space for 'alternate dispute resolution':*** Feminist women's collectives across the country have dealt with IPV through mediation and counselling, including through government programs such as the Mahila Samakhya, which supported women's courts called *Nari Adalat*[2] as well as the Social Action Committees of Velugu program. Women in these groups receive specific training on issues of violence, legal frameworks, and mediation based on a human rights framework to enable them to arbitrate cases of IPV. Rights-based feminist counselling has been an important function of collectives, especially in the context intrinsic limitations and biases within patriarchal institutions such as the police, legal and judiciary systems, and Panchayats.
- ***Panchayati Raj Institutions(PRIs) can be more responsive to IPV through pressure from collectives:*** Collectives play a role in sensitizing and ensuring gender-responsive engagement of PRIs on the question of IPV. For instance, in Dahod, in Panchiyasal village (ANANDI, 2016), a small tribal village, the women's collectives and their leaders often engage *panchayat* leaders and other governance bodies in the alternate dispute resolution mechanism. The women's collectives often draft resolutions in the presence of the *panchayat* members and community elders to ensure their accountability towards the decision taken. Such conceptual and functional embedding within the Panchayati Raj system and participatory local development planning is a critical enabler for addressing violence at the grassroots level.
- ***Women's leadership in governance can help IPV to become PRI and government agenda:*** The experience of Kudumbasree illustrated that when women's collective members entered the formal spaces of politics and governance, the presence of a large number of elected women representatives was an opportunity to make violence against women a priority issue on the panchayat's agenda. The

[2] The MahilaSamakhya women's collectives had developed a self-organized mechanism at the block or cluster level to address violence against women. These were called Nyay Samitis (Justice Committees) /NariAdalats (Women's Courts) where there were specialized skills and facilitation for conflict resolution, accompanying survivors of violence for redressal, providing legal aid etc. and most importantly,follow-up withsurvivors to ascertain that theywerefree from violence.

institutionalization of gender responsive interventions in Kudumbasree is seen exactly at this point in its history, where these women entered public office as elected leaders (Parthasarathy, et al., 2018).

- ***Collectives can facilitate access to services and entitlements for prevention of and response to IPV:*** With training, information and knowledge about schemes, services, and laws, collectives have managed to help women receive entitlements through a range of mechanisms. The Kudumbasree collective, for example, illustrates how collectives have facilitated linkages with Snehitha Centers, Jagrutha Centers, and Gender Self-Learning Program; and allowed collectives to engage from a position of power to access a range of quality services and entitlements (Parasathay et al., 2018). More mature collectives can also help strengthen the quality and outcomes of existing services and entitlements by monitoring them. This is a mutually advantageous situation for the collectives and their members, as well as for the government, which often struggles to reach the 'last mile'.
- ***Feminist training can encourage women's collectives to address IPV:*** The push for training and capacity-building, recognition and voicing of IPV as a concern, facilitating institutional linkages, and creating an enabling environment for addressing IPV came about due to the work of women's rights organizations and gender equality advocates. Their constant presence as advisors, trainers, and leaders in the programs enhanced the responsiveness to violence issues.
- ***Gaps remain in investments for women's collectives and relevant institutional mechanisms for addressing IPV:*** While governments have mobilized large sections of women, the commitment to support them with appropriate resources remains a critical gap. For instance, though Kudumbashree is envisaged to play an important role in gender-responsive planning and budgeting, there has been progressive reduction in both allocation and utilization of funds earmarked under successive plans. Further, following the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in 2014, the Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP) was also bifurcated into Andhra SERP and Telangana SERP. In both states, the governments diluted the program funding and the gender and development agenda of the previous years, and IPV interventions have suffered.

In conclusion, collectives can play an important role in addressing IPV among the women and communities where they are mobilised. A range of factors, such as

having stated mandates, adequate financing, feminist training and accompaniment, and supporting women through institutional linkages with wider social and economic benefits, contribute towards ensuring the reduction of IPV and the empowerment of women.

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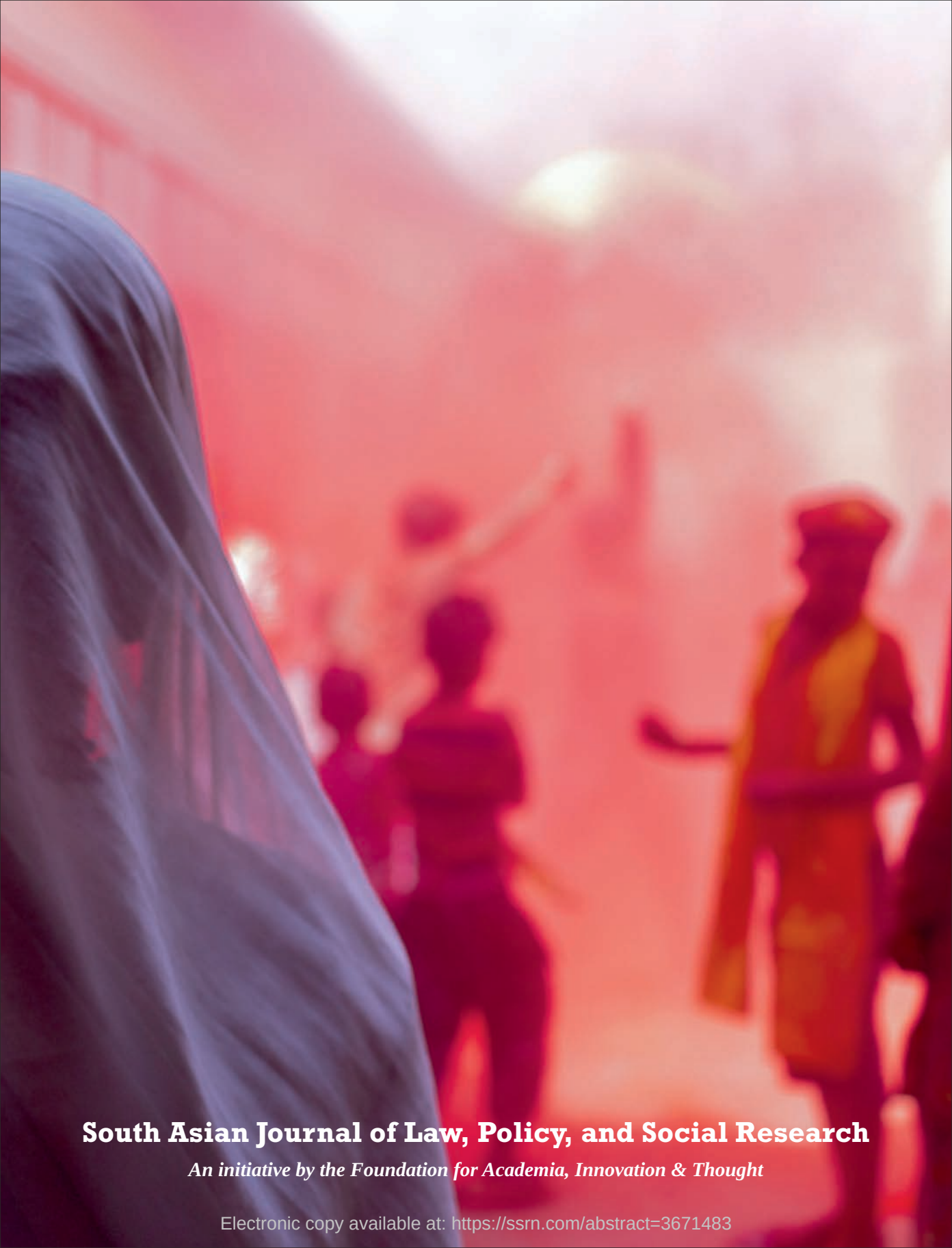
A Widow's Wail
Location: Tosa Maidan, Budgam, Kashmir

86 year old Zooni (Name Changed), lost her husband to an unexploded shell which was triggered unexpectedly when he was grazing his cattle in Tosa Maidan in Kashmir. Having no access to any public spaces or regular employment on account of her gender and age, Zooni struggles to eke out a living.

Back Cover Image - *A Pale Holi*
Location: Vrindavan, Mathura, India

Vrindavan, a city of widows, where Lata (name changed) lives isolated from the colors of the society. She looks on as other widows paint themselves in color which symbolizes a break from an age old tradition which forbids a widow from wearing a colored saree. She lingers on the thought of her life before she was widowed and the times she has had to manage after her husband passed away; it has been a struggle to survive but she manages on very little. Life for many widows in India is still disheartening as they are shunned by communities and abandoned by families. The women are often ostracized by society due to various superstitions– it is said even the shadow of a widow can wreak havoc and bring bad luck. Lack of education and income forces them to beg and many turn to prostitution for survival. Forced to leave their homes, these widows find solace in each other's company in cramped shelters.



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