

BODHYAM

A Gender Responsive Policing Initiative of the State of Kerala

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Abstract

The need for a Gender-Responsive Police intervention can easily be understood by the increase in violence committed against women and sexual minorities based on their gender. It is in this scenario that the need for "Bodhyam" was perceived. As a result, the Government of Kerala has accorded sanction to KSWDC to undertake the Gender Sensitization Training Programme to the Police officials up to Sub Inspector rank in all the 523 stations of the State as a Gender Responsive Policing intervention. The foremost objective of "Bodhyam" is to make the police personnel gender-sensitive and empathetic. Bodhyam" also aims at strengthening the bond between the police force and "Mithra" helpline to provide a safer environment for women of the State. For conducting "Bodhyam" effectively, the 20 Police districts have been divided into two halves. For the districts from Kasaragod to Thrissur, training will be conducted at Kerala Police Academy (KEPA), Thrissur while for those from Ernakulam to Trivandrum it will be conducted at Police Training College (PTC), Trivandrum, simultaneously. Three police officers (two male and a female) will represent each police districts in a batch. Government of India in 2012, following the Nirbhaya incident, has initiated a 24X7 toll-free women helpline (181) all over India. In Kerala, it was established as "Mithra 181" in 2017 which is being monitored and managed by the KSWDC. Analysis of the call data shows the increasing prevalence of violence against women, transgenders, and children in Kerala. "Mithra's" network connects not only Police stations but also shelter homes, One Stop Centres, hospitals, and Kudumbasree. Assessing the situation in Kerala, 60% of the Police officials are found cooperative, while 20% cooperates after some pressure is exerted, whereas the rest 20% show sheer apathy. Studies point out that women and transgender are generally living with the resultant trauma and fear of probable repetition of victimization. Gender sensitisation among police officials is critical to bring equal and safe access to justice for women and transgender. Thus it is best elucidated in the improvement of the treatment meted out to women and sexual minorities and more importantly the grasp of procedures to be followed while handling cases. From the feedback received so far, "Bodhyam" shows a promising path ahead in moulding a Gender Responsive Police force in the State.

Keywords: *Bodhyam, Gender Responsive Policing intervention, Mithra 181 WHL*

The Kerala State Women's Development Corporation Ltd. (KSWDC), as the name suggests, was incorporated for the overall development of the women of Kerala

State. It was established on 22nd February, 1988. KSWDC focuses mainly on empowering women economically and socially, thereby bringing them to the forefront of the society. KSWDC gives special attention to women from marginalized and downtrodden sections of society in order to assist them in overcoming the gratuitous hurdles that further hamper their growth and development.

KSWDC carries out loan disbursement programmes for women entrepreneurs, finishing school to attune young girls with corporate work scenarios, and Gender Awareness Programmes to augment awareness on existing gender inequalities and its hindrance in women's development. "Bodhyam" is KSWDC's latest initiative in addressing Gender Based Violence by focusing on the indispensable role Police Force holds in preventing and tackling it. "Bodhyam" is conceived as a Gender Responsive Policing intervention. The need for a GRP intervention can easily be understood by the increase in violence committed against women and sexual minorities on the basis of their gender.

Violence on the basis of gender has always been a colossal concern for law enforcement agencies across the world. Gender is often a misconstrued concept. The terms gender and sex are sometimes mistaken to mean the same thing when in reality, sex is the biological construct and gender, the social construct. When biologically, there are female and male sexes, on the basis of gender, there are men, women, and the LGBTQIA. The gravity of violence on basis of gender is unfathomable. It can range from teasing, bullying, rape, assault, sexual offences, physical and emotional violence to outright oppression and discrimination on the basis of gender.

United Nations Declaration (1993) states Gender Based Violence (GBV) as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". GBV is an umbrella term that refers to any harm caused to any individual based on their gender role. GBV can be successfully tackled only when gender equality is achieved which is a utopian dream. While any woman is at risk of GBV, owing to her gender, the degree of vulnerability is not similar across women. Among women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, refugee women, and women of difference in sexual orientation or transgender are more vulnerable. Even men with different sexual orientation are also found to be equally vulnerable.

Women and transgender are more vulnerable because of many social, cultural and economic factors. Their vulnerability is further intensified by the lack of access to justice and security. (Donovan, Barnes & Nixon, 2014). Studies point out that women and transgender are generally living with the resultant trauma and fear of probable repetition of victimization. Worldwide, 35% of women have been through either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013) and a whopping 66% of transgender have experienced sexual assault or abuse (Office for Victims of Crime [OVC], 2014). As the statistics point to the high rate of crimes committed against these sections, it can be deduced that they require frequent services for justice and security including policing services.

Police officials play a vital role in safeguarding women and transgender's legal rights as human rights. Police officials are the entry point of contact in the criminal justice system. It is perceived that higher officials are generally more sensitive towards gender issues compared to their subordinates. This can be because of two reasons; the primary reason being the disparity in their educational qualification. Secondly, it is the police officials at lower ranks that often interact with people and thereby at the receiving end of public criticism and media scrutiny which in turn pushes them into a defensive mode (Centre for Social Research, 2018).

The core mandate for the police remains managing crime to make safer societies. While community-policing is an accepted part and parcel of modern, service-oriented policing, preventing gender-based violence in order to secure gender rights has not been an integral component. In addition to that, the police officials often do not realise the importance of being sensitive towards gender as in most cases women and transgender seek police help as a last resort, and the unintended insensitivity towards gender might be an invisible hindrance in their seeking help. Differential law enforcement, indifferent police response and fear of police thus become a hindrance for women and sexual minorities from accessing justice. In many situations, gender insensitivity among police officials can lead to grave apathy causing denial of justice and also repetition of gender based violence. In some rare cases, the police officials themselves have been culprits of gender based violence.

The patriarchy ingrained in our society is many a time the villain. The police officials, irrespective of gender are very much part of this patriarchal system that they unknowingly hold within themselves deeply patriarchal thoughts and beliefs. The

stereotypes held by the police about sexual violence/harassment and domestic violence indicates the general attitude of police towards women and transgender. The patriarchy victimises women and transgender, thus marginalising them to the point of exploitation. It should also be noted the unfortunate opinion many a male police personnel holds regarding the role of women colleagues, in turn reflects the attitude they holds generally towards women, thereby pointing to the lack of awareness or, misconstruction about the concept of gender. The cult of masculinity prevailing in the police organizations also forbids a change in the attitude and behaviour of male police personnel towards women (Bhagyalakshmi & Prasannakumari, 2013). It is this mind-set that needs to be broken down and made into a tabula rasa.

Gender sensitizing can thus be termed as altering the perspective towards gender and instilling empathy into the views that one holds about different genders. Gender-Responsive Policing (GRP) is defined as “an organizational strategy which employs mechanisms to enhance the feeling of safety, satisfaction and confidence among women by providing them with better access to justice and security and by ensuring effective, transparent and reliable ‘policing’ services” (UK Department for International Development [DFID], 2015). Gender sensitisation among police officials is critical to bring equal and safe access to justice for women and transgender. Training of police personnel is the most common GRP intervention. Training caters to creating awareness and sensitization on GBV, training on receiving, investigating and prosecuting cases, training on supporting victims, related policies and laws, human rights, attitudes and beliefs, etc. (Nair et. al., 2017).

In India, apart from Kerala, the States of Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Meghalaya have so far provided gender sensitisation training for Police officials. The Gender Sensitization and People-friendly Police Project (GSPP) to Address Violence against Women is a joint partnership between Karnataka State Police and UNICEF (Hyderabad), started in 2001. Over 3000 police personnel have been trained as part of the project. Since 2003, in-service police personnel were trained which then shifted focus to police training schools and academies in 2005. After 10 years of its implementation, 25% of the officials of a 75,000 force capacity have been trained. The course covers gender relations, GBV, related laws, trafficking in women and children, the role of the police, HIV/AIDS, public perception, and counselling (Rao et. al, 2008). In Uttarakhand and UP, the training is conducted by the National Commission for Women.

Government of India in 2012, following the Nirbhaya incident has initiated a 24X7 toll free women helpline (181) all over India. In Kerala, it was established as "Mithra 181" in 2017 which is being handled by the KSWDC. Analysis of the call data shows the increasing prevalence of violence against women, transgender, and children in Kerala. "Mithra's" network connects not only Police stations but also shelter homes, One Stop Centres, hospitals, and Kudumbasree. However, an unfortunate circumstance that has been noted is that when "Mithra" contacts regional police stations seeking help tackling gender violence issues, the response received is not oftentimes positive. Incidents have also been reported of the inaction of Police Officials in cases where visible injustice was committed. Assessing the situation in Kerala, 60% of the Police officials are found cooperative, while 20% cooperates after some pressure is exerted, whereas the rest 20% show sheer apathy.

It is in this scenario that the need for "Bodhyam" was perceived. As a result, the Government of Kerala has accorded sanction to KSWDC to undertake the Gender Sensitization Training Programme to the Police officials up to Sub Inspector rank in all the 523 stations of the State as a Gender Responsive Policing intervention. The foremost objective of "Bodhyam" is to make the police personnel gender sensitive and empathetic. "Bodhyam" also aims at strengthening the bond between police force and "Mithra" helpline in order to provide a safer environment for women of the State.

For conducting "Bodhyam" effectively, the 20 Police districts have been divided into two halves. For the districts from Kasaragod to Thrissur, training will be conducted at Kerala Police Academy (KEPA), Thrissur while for those from Ernakulam to Trivandrum it will be conducted at Police Training College (PTC), Trivandrum, simultaneously. Three police officers (two male and a female) will represent each police districts in a batch.

In order to prepare the training manual, two consultative workshops were conducted on 8th December, 2017 and 29th June, 2019, respectively with in which eminent academicians, senior police officials and activists were consultants. The training manual has been prepared by referring NCW, Karnataka State Police Training Manual and Meghalaya State Police Training Manual. Course covers Gender Studies, Law, Psychology, Soft skills, Sociology, physiology and psychology of transgender and their issues, HIV/AIDS, related issues, cybercrimes, and redefined role of police. A Handbook is also prepared for the use of the police officers. Help was sought from subject experts and top Police officials in preparing the modules. The module on

transgender was specifically added, considering the Kerala State's Transgender Policy 2015 (Kerala is the first state in the country to introduce such a policy) and the many schemes formulated for their well being. The session on transgender is taken by a transgender her/himself so as to initiate real-time discussion on the hardships and violence they undergo, and for the Police officials to have a primary understanding on the biological, psychological, emotional and social aspects of being a person of sexual minorities. This is aimed at making the personnel more empathetic towards the issues faced by the transgender people.

Resource persons for conducting the training were selected through open notification in newspapers / website and referral from experts in the fields of Gender, Law, Psychology, Policing and Training. Orientation program for Resource Person's on training manual was done in four batches after which 60 trainers have been empanelled. The project was piloted at KEPA from 7-10th August, 2019 in two batches of newly recruited SI trainees and feedback from participants, faculty and superior officers who functioned as observers were taken. The training manual has been refined accordingly.

"Bodhyam" was officially inaugurated on 4th September, 2019 at Police Training College (PTC), Trivandrum by Smt. K K. Shailaja, Honourable Minister for Health, Social Justice, and Women and Child Development. After the inauguration, "Bodhyam" has completed a total of nine batches of four day residential training covering 270 participants till date. Pre-test and post-test are conducted in each batch, the results of which are analysed. The difference in scores point to the improvement in their sensitivity towards gender issues.

Effectiveness of the program shall be assessed in different levels. The first one will be done online after six months from training. The second one will be after one year in which feedback will be taken from the incumbent who underwent training as well as from his/her superior officer who was in charge of the incumbent for the one year post training period. Based on the findings of the feedback, Follow Up Sensitization/ Refresher Program of Bodhyam shall thus be designed and implemented. Apart from this a ToT is also in the pipeline for the purpose of covering the entire force at the earliest.

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Glossary

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| 1. AIDS | - | Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome |
| 2. DFID | - | Department for International Development |
| 3. GBV | - | Gender Based Violence |
| 4. GRP | - | Gender Responsive Policing |
| 5. GSPP | - | Gender Sensitization and People-friendly Police Project |
| 6. HIV | - | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| 7. KEPA | - | Kerala Police Academy |
| 8. KSWDC | - | Kerala State Women's Development Corporation |
| 9. LGBTQIA | - | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual |
| 10. NCW | - | National Commission for Women |
| 11. OVC | - | Office for Victims of Crime |
| 12. PTC | - | Police Training College |
| 13. UNICEF | - | United Nations Children's Fund |
| 14. WHO | - | World Health Organisation |