

Curing INDIA'S
RAPE EPIDEMIC:
The Education
Option

Executive Summary

India's rape epidemic has recently come into full and grotesque view. Over 24,000 women are raped annually¹, and the real total is likely over 200,000, given that the vast majority of attacks go unreported. Rape is rampant, and the fastest growing serious crime, with an increase of 875% in the last four decades.²

The government has thus far established the Verma Committee to recommend reforms to criminal law and the Mehra Commission to investigate the recent gang rape of a 23 year old woman in Delhi, but these laudable initiatives are unlikely to cure the rape epidemic. A more profound and comprehensive strategy is needed.

Experts on gender-based violence agree that it thrives in a culture of misogyny. Prevailing cultural attitudes among offenders and their peer groups, law enforcement and other authorities, and communities and victims' families play a central role in enabling and permitting rape and many other crimes against women to be carried out so frequently and with impunity.

There is extensive evidence that mass public education programs can have a significant impact on popular cultural attitudes and behaviour. This report profiles several examples in which education has proven its potency. These include:

- Between 2009 and 2011, a ramped-up public education campaign played an essential role in India's eradication of polio.
- India's Bell Bajao campaign achieved dramatic increases in awareness of laws and discussion on domestic violence, as well as women's willingness to seek legal help.
- The government of California reduced cigarette sales by over 230 million packs in just two years with a massive public education campaign.

These examples and many others show that where there is the will, resources and competence to do the job well, public education can be a game-changer for social problems that often prove resistant to other methods. This report recommends that the Indian government commit to launching an unprecedented campaign that leads the world in efforts to combat destructive attitudes towards women, to be put in place by the three-month anniversary of the Delhi rape attack (March 2012). Over one million people have already urged Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to make this the legacy of his last 18 months in office.³

Four Steps to a Game-Changing Public Education Campaign

1. Put your money where your morals are. Judging by the costs of other successful efforts, the campaign will require an investment of at least 50 rupees (\$1 US) per year for every Indian citizen to have a significant impact – though much of this cost could be brought down through partnerships with private media.

2. Commit the time, don't cut corners. A full-scale media and outreach barrage should last at least four years, while education programmes in schools and other grassroots education efforts should be permanently instituted.

3. Establish a new body with the talent and authority to make this happen. Prime Minister Singh should establish a body with real authority, and comprised of the best brains from media, sport, entertainment and civil society.

4. Monitor, evaluate and change. Establish goals and targets for the reduction of sexual assault, so that progress is watched and carefully monitored.

Instead of sitting below Bangladesh and Pakistan in the Gender Inequality Index (at 129 out of 146 nations), India should be leading from the front and working to heal what has become one of the biggest fault lines in Indian society.⁴ There may never be a better chance to fight for an end to sexual violence and complete gender equality in India.

Four Steps to End the War on Women

Challenging the impunity around rape is crucial. But while India must improve criminal laws and law enforcement, this is not enough to stem the crisis. It is estimated that as many as 90% of rape cases go unreported, putting the actual number of attacks in India well above 200,000 per year or more.⁵ Facing such a crisis of underreporting, prevention must be part of the solution – with the fire treated at source rather than in the courts. While journalists and politicians talk tough on jail terms and punishment, the most effective and direct way to deal with this cancer is a mass public education campaign.

In a survey conducted by the Hindustan Times shortly after the Delhi gang rape, 92% of male respondents said some or all of their friends had harassed women in public spaces, and despite the gruesome rape the capital had just witnessed, 65% of the male respondents said the problem of sexual harassment was exaggerated.⁶

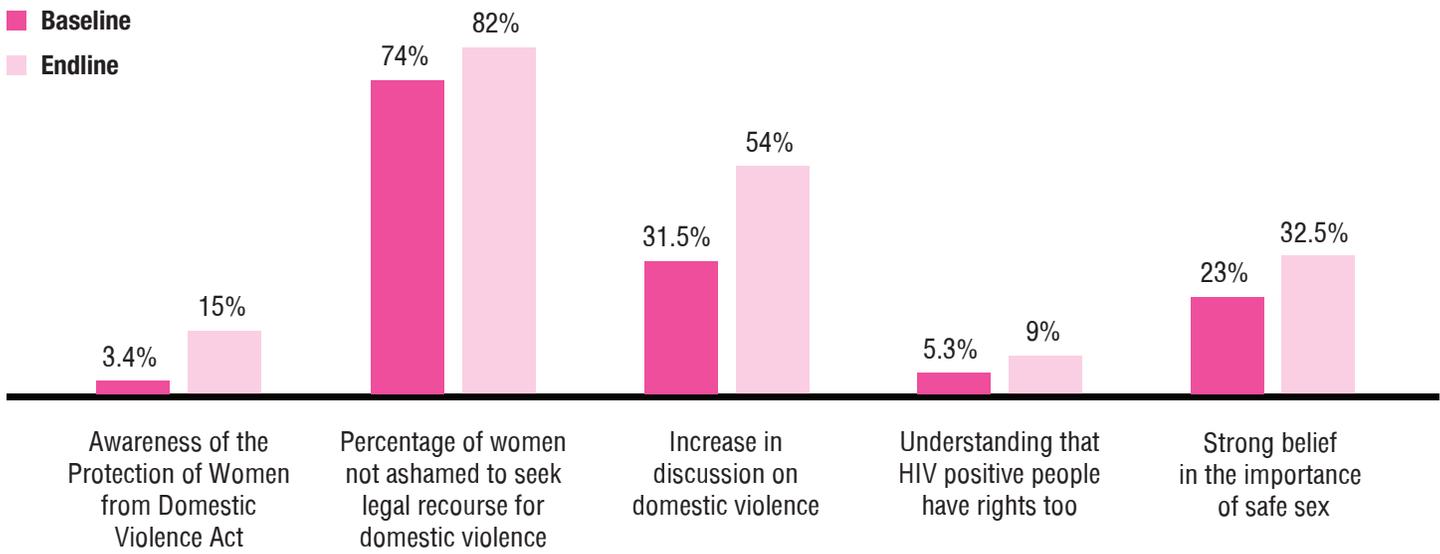
These statistics show how prevalent these attitudes have become. Only by launching campaigns that shift mindsets and change the overall environment can new behavioural norms be created. Such a campaign could stop citizens from committing acts of sexual violence themselves, stop them tolerating this behaviour in others, make them more likely to intervene when they encounter it and support such interventions by others. Ordinary citizens are already coming together online⁷ to pledge what they will do to change their individual behaviour, but widespread cultural change requires a concerted and society-wide effort, led and funded by the government. Only such a commitment can scale the individual commitments and momentum to the level of a nationwide shift.

Mass public education and advertising campaigns have been statistically proven to overcome social barriers and change entrenched beliefs that many deemed unchangeable.

Case Study: The Bell Bajao Campaign

India has had a number of success stories showing it has the potential to run a massive campaign that will decrease the prevalence of misogyny and patriarchy that is fueling violence against women in large parts of India. The well known “Bell Bajao” (Ring the Bell) campaign helped to make domestic violence “society’s problem” instead of a “private problem.” The campaign, run by Breakthrough, an international human rights organisation, with strong government support and leadership, successfully reduced domestic violence against women by involving the community and showing them they had the power to stop domestic violence through very simple actions. People learned to listen out for domestic violence and then ring the bell of the house in question to intervene, by doing something as simple as asking to borrow some rice.⁸ The campaign reached over 240 million people in five years using both old and new media, and more than 75,000 women’s rights advocates were trained.⁹ This investment had a huge dividend on those exposed to the campaign, leading to a jump in the number of women willing to seek legal recourse for domestic violence and an overall increase in the awareness of the laws that protect them. The following chart illustrates the shifting attitudes:

Impact of media campaign in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh



The campaign significantly improved awareness and attitudes toward key issues on violence against women

The Bell Bajao campaign would have failed without significant government investment and support, including nearly \$5 million from the Ministry of Women and Child Development towards buying advertising space and PR promotion.¹⁰ These resources allowed the campaign to be seen across TV, radio, print and online, including mentions on soap operas and the popular TV game show Kaun Banega Crorepati. Crucially, it made domestic violence everybody's business to resolve.

Step One:

Put your money where your morals are

Effective public education campaigns require a significant investment, but are cheap if we look at the cost per person. When run well, they are also extremely good value for money. The polio eradication campaign, for example – which is discussed further below – cost the government only \$225 million annually.¹¹ When you consider that India previously had nearly 24,000 victims of polio a year,¹² that works out to just over \$9 for every life saved.

To make a real impact in India on nationwide attitudes towards women, a public education campaign will require an investment of at least 50 rupees – or \$1 – per person, per year. The bulk of the funding must come from the government, but much of the cost is airtime and media space, and the government should look to partner with private companies to resource and deliver this.

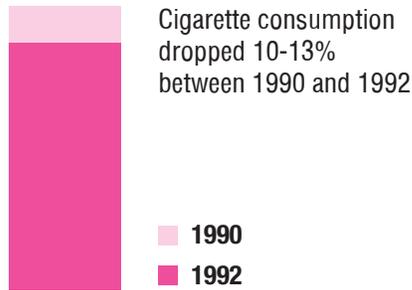
Case Study:

Slaying the smoking Goliath in the United States

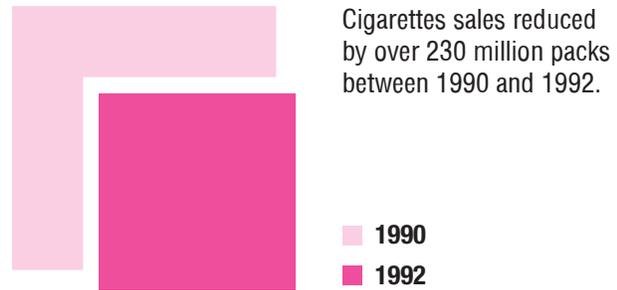
Well-funded mass education campaigns have proven to be powerful tools for preventing people from starting to smoke in the US, and for reshaping social norms related to smoking. The government of California was able to reduce cigarette sales by over 230 million packs in just two years by investing heavily in a large public education campaign.¹³ Impact assessments showed that the more young people saw anti-smoking ads, the lower their likelihood of smoking.¹⁴ Research now recommends that US states spend between \$1.30 and \$3.90 per citizen per year on anti-smoking mass media campaigns to

achieve these impressive results.¹⁵ Yet this cost pales in comparison to the savings that this investment can bring: each year in the US, diseases caused by cigarette smoking result in \$96 billion in health care costs, much of which is paid by taxpayers.¹⁶

Cigarette consumption



Cigarette sales



Education campaign successfully lowered the rate of smoking and even stopped young people from ever taking up the habit

Step Two:

Commit the time, don't cut corners

Another vital key to success is committing to the long term, with deep and lasting attitudinal change on violence against women requiring that campaign messages are repeated as regularly and creatively as possible. The government should approach this as a permanent project, with a full-scale media and outreach barrage lasting at least four years. School-based education and grassroots community outreach should be ongoing, as should a moderate level of funding and production of TV and radio broadcast messages.

This requirement is tied to basic principles of effective messaging that apply across the spectrum of education, advertising and political campaigning, known as the "Rule of 7". Put simply, an audience must hear a message seven times before it can be acted upon. Repeated, long-term messaging is especially crucial when seeking to change fundamental beliefs, and to form proper attitudes in young people.¹⁷

Case Study:

How India won a long-term battle against a killer

India's eradication of polio is one of the greatest success stories in the history of health and medicine. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, many leading experts believed that the disease could not be overcome, in part due to the significant fear and distrust of vaccines in the target population. But a mass education campaign over the course of twenty years brought astounding success, overcoming these fears and allowing mass vaccinations. The effort suffered numerous setbacks, when the disease would rise again just as it seemed the programme was on the verge of widespread success. The government persevered with leadership and constant funding, and the results followed. In the campaign's final push starting in 2009, when India still accounted for over half the world's polio cases,¹⁸ two years of intensified public education to overcome fear and perform widespread vaccinations reduced polio in India in 2011¹⁹ to one single reported case.

Step Three:

Establish a new body with the talent and authority to make this happen

In order for this campaign to have a profound impact on attitudes towards women, the design and inclusion of key actors are critical to make it a success.

A) Get one ministry to lead: The government should create a central body under the authority of a single ministry tasked with the campaign's administration. At present, no single ministry has taken a clear lead in this area, and this body would enhance accountability by being responsible for delivering results. This body could form and coordinate a taskforce of senior staff from the ministries of human resources, women and child development, information and broadcasting, culture, social justice and empowerment, law and justice, and health and family welfare.

B) Go to the grassroots: Civil society actors with track records of success must be involved to help develop the campaign's content and extend its reach across the country. Bell Bajao's network of 75,000 women advocates is an example of the type of mobilisation that is needed within communities.

C) Place mass media and advertising experts at its heart: The media must be invited to support and back this initiative, with executive editors offering their creative resources to hone the message and airspace to broadcast it. The messaging and advertising concepts should be carefully developed and tested by the best minds in advertising, PR and promotion, to ensure that the message is effective and travels into the homes of every Indian.

D) Use the two vehicles Indians love most – Cricket and Bollywood: the Indian Premier League (IPL) and Bollywood provide a huge platform for change. The outpouring of support from leading lights in these fields since the Delhi gang rape show they are ready and willing to lend support.

Case Study:

Using cricketers to set an example in Australia

Public education campaigns are often far more effective when the messages comes from people that the public already looks up to and respects. In sports-mad Australia, an evaluation of a statewide campaign in New South Wales found that high-profile athletes speaking out against violence against women helped shift attitudes significantly.²⁰ The campaign was commissioned by the Attorney General's Department and featured ads and appearances on TV, print, radio and on posters distributed around the state. Using the athletes' voices enabled the campaign to effectively reform young men's attitudes and behaviour on issues of power, gender and responsibility by challenging cultural scripts about masculinity, as well as greatly enhancing the visibility of the campaign.

There are already people in India ready to lead. As Gautam Gambhir, a well known Indian cricket star, said on Twitter: "The flame is burning and burning bright for the victimised girl. She will only RIP when we don't Rest In Peace. Get up, stand up and let us all be wings of change."

Step Four:

Monitor and evaluate to ensure to a successful mass education campaign

Committing to run a mass public education campaign is just the first step. A key component in winning the fight to change attitudes towards women and girls is to rigorously test the impact of the message and the channels to ensure they are effective, and to keep improving the campaign based on the results.

No campaign should begin without being fully tested first, and the government should work with leading public and private agencies with a track record of achieving behaviour change in this process.

Case Study:

Increasing condom use in the fight against AIDS

In response to evidence that the high prevalence of HIV among female sex workers in four southern states was contributing substantially to the spread of HIV in India, the government's National AIDS Control Organization devised a strategy for reaching out and educating these women and, especially, their male clients.²¹ This initiative, referred to here as the "Consistent Condom Use programme" was supported by the Avahan India Aids Initiative and Population Services International, with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The goal was to increase condom use by the male clients. It ran for four years in the six Indian states with the country's highest prevalence of HIV. The campaign reached approximately 700,000 men every month. The Gates Foundation provided a total of \$338 million in funding for Avahan's HIV campaign and outreach work in the six states, or more than \$1 for each of the roughly 300 million inhabitants of the target states.²²

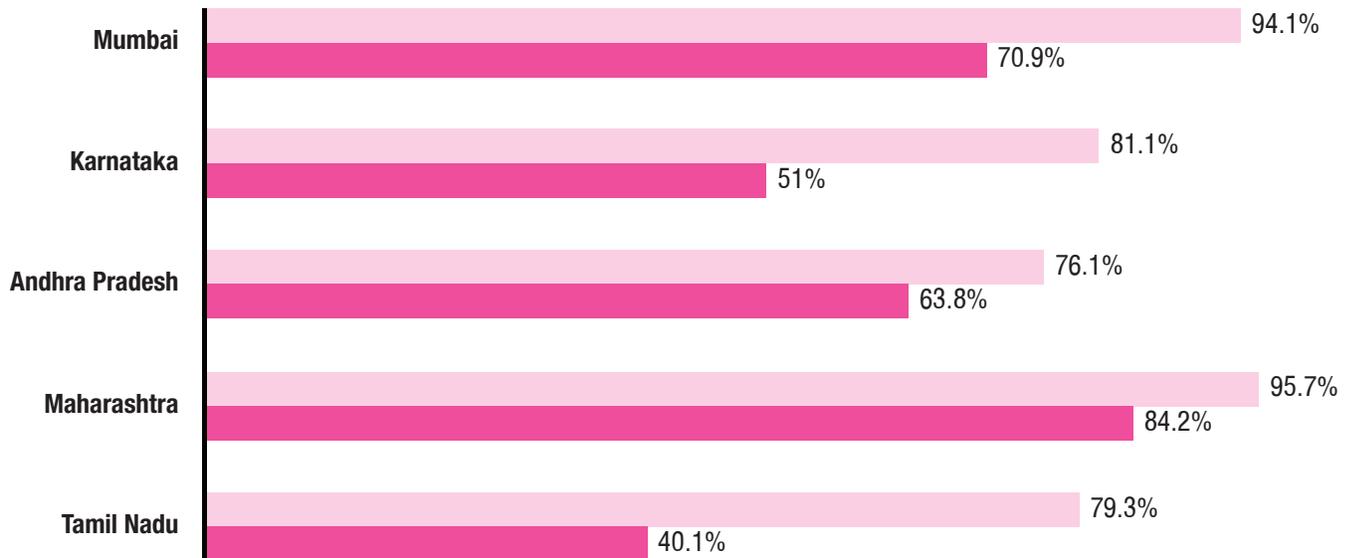
Careful evaluation showed that the programme led to significant levels of behaviour change and was successful in all target states. However, the varying degree of success by state, illustrated below, shows the importance of constant monitoring and evaluation to see which strategies and forms of outreach have the greatest impact, and to share those lessons throughout all areas where the campaign is being conducted.

The campaign's impact evaluation also looked at which communication channels were most effective, producing invaluable lessons for future campaigns. For example, there was a clear correlation between exposure to multiple channels and higher levels of consistent condom use, with those who both watched street theatre and spoke to programme staff showing higher rates of condom use compared to those who were only exposed to one of these channels.²³

Consistent condom use

■ November 2008 (after exposure to the initiative)

■ April 2006



Education and outreach increased condom use in all test areas

Conclusion

Only a government-led mass education campaign will create an India safe for women. The pervasiveness of negative attitudes towards women that underlie the terrible problem of widespread sexual assault and rape in India cannot be reduced by stricter laws and tougher enforcement alone – these do not challenge the root cause of the problem. A mass nationwide education campaign that understands the social causes of this violence, tackles misogynistic views head-on, and teaches Indian youth the value of all girls and women in Indian society is the key to reducing the epidemic of sexual violence.

To end the war on women, the government must now prioritise this policy. Only by taking the lead to champion and resource this campaign can the Indian government ensure it reaches the country's schools, fills the nation's airwaves, and ultimately results in a deep-seated shift in social attitudes towards violence against women. We have never seen so many people out in the streets for women's rights. There has never been such an extraordinary moment of opportunity, or such an overwhelming public mandate for bold action. If not now, when?

Endnotes

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