

Dealing with domestic disputes/violence by women police in India: Results of a training program in Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

An evaluation is described of a training program in dealing with domestic dispute and violence cases given to 30 Tamil Nadu women police officers in 2002-2003. The training was delivered online and in the classroom. An action-research approach was adopted in studying the impact of the training. Before-and-after assessments were made of the 30 women's working knowledge of (1) dispute-resolution techniques, (2) interviewing the petitioners in family disputes, and (3) data entry and data management. Significant improvements were found in all three areas and the project illustrates the value of web-based technology for delivering police officer training. The lessons of this project have training implications not only for other police forces in India, but also for other developing countries.

Keywords: Police; Training; Women Police; Tamil Nadu; Technology; Safety;

Introduction

The primary concern of the domestic violence movement is women's safety and, accordingly, battered women are counseled to seek protection from the police and other authorities (Dobash and Dobash, 1974; Abel & Suh 1987; Buzawa and Buzawa, 1990; Johnson, 1990; Hamilton and Coates 1993; Hutchinson, et al., 1994; Moreley and Mullender, 1994; Bachman & Coker, 1995; Coulter et al., 1999; Natarajan, 2002; Fugate et al., 2005; Natarajan, 2005). However, battered women are often reluctant to follow this advice, for three main reasons: they believe the matter is private one, to be resolved within the family; they do not want their husbands or partners to be prosecuted; and they fear that reporting the matter to the police will result in more violence being inflicted on them (Felson et al. 2002). Despite this, many battered women do in fact turn first to the police when seeking protection (Saunders and Size, 1986; Koss, 2000; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Block et al., 2001; Cramer, 2005) and Maxwell et al. (2002) report that there has been a marked increase in the United States in the number of domestic violence cases handled by the police.

In many other parts of the world, however, women are still reluctant to report domestic violence to the police because they think that they will not get a proper hearing from the officers who are most often male (Bowker, 1982; Browne 1984; Kelly 1999; Klinger 1995; Hoyle and Sanders 2000; Stephans and Sinden, 2000).

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This is all the more so in traditional cultures including India, where women believe that reporting their problems to the police will do little good and harm their marital status (Natarajan, in press).

In the early 1990s, the Tamil Nadu Government (a southern Indian state) therefore decided to introduce All Women Police Units (AWPUs) to deal with crimes against women, especially dowry disputes². It was thought that the existence of these units staffed by women officers would encourage more women victims to seek police help. There are now about 188 of these units in the state, and Natarajan's (2005) study of them found that (1) victims did indeed value the opportunity to confide their problems to female officers and (2) that intervention by these officers was helpful in reducing abuse and violence. However, Natarajan (1996, 2001, 2002) found that the officers in the AWPUs were not trained professionally to resolve disputes. They also lacked training in interviewing and counselling and instead relied on what they had learned through experience. In many units, support from social workers or psychologists was very limited. These problems were compounded by the complexity of the cases and an increasing workload. Many officers found it difficult to make decisions about the best way to handle the cases and they felt that they could not give the necessary attention to women petitioning for help with their problems. A particular problem was remembering the details about cases over the lengthy period of time often required for resolving the cases.

In summary, all the above suggested the need to provide training for the officers in the AWPUs in three areas: (1) dispute resolution (2) interview techniques, and (3) data entry and data management. Meeting these needs would help the women officers to handle their cases efficiently and execute their duties effectively.

In 2002, the U.K. Home office awarded a competitive grant, "The Queen's Award for Innovation in Police Training and Development"³, to the Tamil Nadu Police for a pilot project to provide a web-based e-training program in dispute resolution (DR), interviewing and record keeping for officers in the AWPUs in Tamil Nadu. This project trained 30 officers in three selected AWPUs located in metropolitan cities. The evaluation of the pilot project described below was undertaken to help improve the content of the training and to assess whether it could be implemented more widely.

Overview of the Evaluation

Many project evaluations are undertaken by researchers not directly involved in the project. This lends objectivity to the evaluation, but it also means that the evaluator cannot contribute to the development of the project as it progresses. For the present project, the "action-research" model, pioneered more than 50 years ago in the

² According to Natarajan's study (2005) on domestic violence cases reported in Tamil Nadu, of the 10,508 cases reported in three years (1999-2001) in three all women police stations at Chennai (The State Capital), 20% of the cases reported to police were primarily related to dowry disputes. Most of the other cases seem to be involving minor disputes among family members and only few cases involved serious criminal investigation.

³ The Queens Award for Innovation in Police Training and Development is a competition designed to reward innovation in the field of training and development for all those working in police services throughout the Commonwealth. The award is made every two years. In 2002, proposals were invited from serving members of police forces (including the special constabulary and civilian support staff) and police authority members and staff in the UK and other Commonwealth countries, for projects to be implemented either nationally or locally

United States by Kurt Lewin, guided the evaluation (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988; Whyte, 1991; Zuber-Skerrit 1991; Wadsworth 1997). The project consultant (the author) was also the evaluator. A difficulty with this dual role was that the author was known to some of the officers because she has been conducting studies of women police in Tamil Nadu for the past fifteen years. These officers sometimes turned to her with complaints and requests for advice that they could not make to their superiors. In other words, she was not treated always as a disinterested observer. On the other hand, her dual role took advantage of the author's social science background at every step of the project, not merely at its conclusion. Action research does not see this direct involvement as a 'contaminating' process that 'biases' the scientific effort, but rather as essential to obtaining the engaged understanding that can help guide the development of the project (Whyte, 1991). This was indeed the purpose of the present evaluation. It was intended to help improve the content of the training and its delivery preparatory to implementing the program widely.

The training began in December 2002 and ended in September 2003; the evaluation started with pre-testing in December and ended in August 2003. The evaluation plan consisted of two parts: (1) process evaluation (Was the project implemented properly?), and (2) impact evaluation (Did it achieve its objectives). Since pilot programs require careful recording of both qualitative and quantitative data relating to the processes and impact made, data were collected using a variety of methods:

1. Interviews with the women officer trainees and petitioners.
 2. Observations of women officers handling cases
 3. Test scores, hours spent in the use of computers in learning and in entering data.
 4. Reviews of contact sheets, training modules and the classroom sessions provided by external sources, including faculty from university social work departments and lawyers who provided training in interviewing and DR techniques.
 5. Observation of the utility of the database created for entering the interview data
- Whatever method was used, the anonymity was carefully guarded of stations, women officers, petitioners and counter petitioners.
6. Interviews with the petitioners and counter petitioners

Objectives

The overall goal of the project was to provide training to officers in the AWPU to obtain professional and technical skills needed to render their services effectively and efficiently in dealing with domestic violence/dispute cases. The specific aims of the pilot project were as follows:

Aim 1 Provide basic training, on-line, in dispute resolution techniques to women police officer in dealing with domestic disputes and domestic violence cases. On-line training would reduce important obstacles to undergoing training, such as anxiety about commuting to the training college and worries about being out of their depth and unsupported by peers when at the college.

Aim 2 Provide basic training in interviewing of women victims of domestic violence. This may help to reduce the constant criticisms made by the public of the handling of domestic issues by the police.

Aim 3 Develop data-management software for documentation of all petitions and to provide training for women police in data entry and data management. The creation of such a database would serve as an example of how to improve the reporting of crime data at large.

The Project Trainees

Ten women police officers from each of the three stations mentioned above were selected for this training (for bureaucratic reasons, a random selection could not be made.) Most of the officers, especially the senior ones, had a good working knowledge of English. Fifty percent of the women officers had a Masters degree, 20% had a Bachelors degree and 30% held a high school diploma. Twenty percent of the officers were Inspectors and Sub-Inspectors and the rest were police head constables and constables. Their age range was from 25-48 years (mean 37.9 years) and their experience in the police force ranged from 4- 26 years (mean 17 years).

The Project Staff

The Project Director⁴, played the key role in organizing the project, including: selecting the trainees and the stations; bringing them to the headquarters for orientation and classroom training; supervising the training activities; arranging transportation and accommodation for the training staff and consultant; supervising the development of the database and computerized training for officers. The Director of the Tamil Nadu Police Academy⁵ was responsible for supervising the entire project from its inception to completion.

The project consultant⁶, who has conducted research on women police for more than 15 years, was responsible for the design and implement the project including developing the course syllabus and materials, the database and the project web site.

The training team consisted of members of the PCVC – Crime Prevention for Victim Care, a non-profit organization in Chennai, staffed by psychologists and criminologists is responsible for preparing materials for the course in dispute resolution, interviewing and data base management. This team worked closely with the project director, consultant and the Information Technology (IT) team in undertaking the entire training operation. The team monitored the chat forum and constantly provided help by visiting the project sites.

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⁵ Ms. Letika Saran, I.P.S, Additional Director General of Police, is one of the two senior most women in the Tamil Nadu police force.

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Process evaluation

Since this was a pilot program, it was important to study the process of programme delivery for future implementation, including whether the training program was delivered properly; whether the training addressed the trainees' needs; and the nature of the problems encountered during delivery of the training. The topics addressed correspond to the aims of the project areas.

Aim 1: Provision of basic online training in dispute resolution techniques

The use of information technology was integral to the project and the IT team and PCVC team worked closely to prepare the electronic course materials. These materials consisted of the following six modules:

1. Introduction to domestic/family violence
2. Introduction to DR techniques
3. Basics of negotiation
4. Basics of mediation
5. Basics of arbitration
6. Counselling approach to interviewing

Module 1: An introduction to domestic violence was needed as a prelude section for understanding the dynamics of domestic violence in India and elsewhere. Though some women officers have considerable experience in handling severe violence cases, most have little theoretical knowledge of domestic violence. Greater depth of theoretical knowledge was needed in order to better serve the families who seek the help of police, and also to know when to act in order to prevent serious incidents of domestic violence. The covers the following topics:

1. Meaning of private and public violence
2. Differences between domestic disputes and violence
3. Impact of domestic violence
4. Nature and type types of family/domestic violence
5. Behaviour patterns of abusers
6. Characteristics of women victims of domestic violence

Modules 2- 5. The purpose of these modules was to provide information about various forms of disputes and the importance of alternate dispute resolution (ADR) methods in dealing with family-related disputes. The modules deal in detail with theoretical concepts, the styles and methods of ADR, and major issues arising in the use of ADR techniques.

Resolving disputes between related individuals is usually a difficult task because family relations encompass a range of issues, which affect directly or indirectly every member of the family unit. In general, problems are related to the formation of marriage relationships, marriage dissolution, custody of children, termination of parental rights, domestic violence, adoptions, foster care, family privacy and problems of adolescences etc. Resolving family disputes requires patience, understanding of the root causes of the problem and knowledge of the individuals involved. Understanding the theoretical concepts of ADR with special

reference to dealing with family disputes for women police is crucial to enhance the skills of women police in handling the family dispute cases effectively.

Most family disputes brought to the AWPUs are resolved through negotiation, the primary conflict resolution device, underlying all other non-binding ADR processes. When the petitioner and the co petitioner are brought together to the station to resolve the issues, the officer in charge can allow them to talk in a separate room and ask them to come up with a solution that is amicable to both. This will make the parties talk privately in the premises of an authority. Particularly in smaller towns, this process works well. It is quick, inexpensive, private and less complicated than many other dispute resolution processes.

Mediation on the other hand involves a third party, who tries to focus on the “interests” that could help bring the disputants together. For example, in a family dispute between a husband and wife, if both parties have an interest in the welfare of the children it is possible to focus on the children as means for finding a solution. If mediation fails, the next step for resolving the dispute is the formal court system. Since most people will try to avoid going to the court, mediation is often successful. It is not advisable to use either of negotiation or mediation in situations: where one side has power over the other; where one party feels intimidated and frightened; or when one party has been physically harmed and faces the risk of future abuse and physical harm. Attempting to use negotiation or mediation in these situations could expose the weaker party to serious risk of harm.

Module 6 consists of an introduction to the counselling approach to interviewing. It covers:

- rationale and objectives of counselling
- major ingredients of counselling
- theoretical approaches to counselling and helping
- methods of counselling and helping
- basic counselling skills
- counselling tasks and necessary conditions for counselling
- ethical issues
- characteristics of a counsellor

Understanding the basics of counseling can provide police officers with the tools for dealing effectively with women petitioners in emotional distress. The counselling approach helps petitioners and counter petitioners express their thoughts and feelings and resolve their disputes amicably. It also helps women police to identify the cases where professional counselling is required. Though the immediate goal of counseling is to provide relief and a safe environment for the petitioner, the long range goal is to enable her to cope with the difficult problems that may grow out of minor disputes and to assist her in decision making about her own life.

A home page was created along with a text box for login and module buttons. Chat room, e-mail and forums for communication were also developed to facilitate communication with and among trainees in order to share trainees’ experiences in handling domestic dispute cases. Passwords for each of the trainees were arranged. Modules were prepared in English first and then were translated into Tamil, which

took a considerable amount of time. Trainees were asked to read the material for each of the modules that were posted on the website within two weeks. An orientation of the project purposes was given at the Police Training College before they plunged into the project.

Aim 2: Training in interviewing skills

Module 6 on the counselling approach to interviewing petitioners was posted after a short, weeklong intensive lecture series in August 2003 on counselling and DR techniques. This was the last session in the training program. The trainees were brought to the headquarters for this lecture series, which was delivered by experts in counselling and dispute resolution. These lectures involved hands-on analysis, role-playing and many interactive sessions. This greatly helped the police officers to understand the mechanics of interviewing, particularly the use of body language. It also allowed many of the women police to discuss their concerns about their conflicting roles in the police force, and many lively debates occurred during the sessions.

Aim 3: Database management

The purpose of a computerized database is to keep electronic records and to generate information for statistical reports for supervisors and for policy purposes. The database, referred to as the “contact sheet”, included fields for the petitioner’s background, the nature and duration of disputes/violence, the place and parties involved in violence. This was a much more detailed questionnaire than ones then in use in the AWPUs.

If the case involved any form of physical/sexual violence, the officer in charge was required to make a risk assessment in order to direct the petitioner for proper care. A danger score sheet, which helped calculate the risk of injury or death, was included for this purpose. This was intended to help officers to record the seriousness of the case that they are dealing with, but, more importantly, it was designed to help them make speedy decisions to help petitioners whose lives are at risk.

The trainee officers’ input in modifying the data fields provided insight into the practical problems of asking some questions. Further, the project director was very knowledgeable about criminal case processing which helped considerably in designing and revising the database.

The IT team and the PCVC team visited the training sites periodically to give training to the women police in data entry in their own premises. Some had to be given training in typing in Tamil. Some were able to type the information simultaneously while interviewing the petitioners. Others typed the information after the interview with the petitioner. Some practiced data entry by taking a handwritten petition and then filling in the fields in the database. Overall, the women police were able to learn the data entry process quickly and were able to provide feedback about its shortcomings.

Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation was designed to assess whether the training made an impact in three areas of the police women officers’ knowledge and skills:

1. Theoretical knowledge and application of dispute resolution techniques
2. Interviewing and counselling skills
3. Data management and data entry.

It was decided that a simple evaluative design, involving a one group pre-post comparison, would be an appropriate method for evaluating this pilot project (Campbell and Stanely 1963). It was judged inappropriate and potentially divisive to make comparisons between the three sites.

Aim 1: Basic knowledge of dispute resolution techniques

Pre- tests included a written test and an interview by the project consultant with each of the trainees. These interviews revealed that the trainees had very little professional training in handling domestic dispute cases. Due to their excessive work load, they tended to deal with the cases without proper preparation. They also handled them impatiently, without giving enough consideration to the emotional state of the petitioner. This lack of professionalism has subjected the AWPU's to much criticism.

The interviews with the trainees also revealed that they had very little knowledge of the use of computers in the workplace. Only 10 % had used computers for emailing and only 40% knew that they could communicate with people anywhere through chat rooms. None of them had communicated before with other officers in other units. None of them had ever entered into an extended discussion of professional issue with other officers or shared their ideas and expertise with one another. None of the officers had heard about dispute resolution techniques as a way of dealing with domestic disputes. A majority (80%) of the officers felt that it would be waste of time learning data entry. Though all the trainees were sceptical about such training, they were ready to participate in the training due to their feelings of privilege in being chosen for the project.

The post-tests consisted of written tests for each of the module lessons and an oral exam.

Written tests

After receiving the on-line and classroom training in dispute resolution and in interviewing, the trainees were given written tests for each of the six modules taught in the training program.

Test scores tended to increase, but not significantly, with each module tested (Table 1).

Table 1: Written test scores for the 30 trainees (percent correct)

	Module 1	Module 2	Module 3	Module 4	Modul e5	Modul e6	Final
Average scores	71	65	70	78	77	76	73
Range	44-94	44-94	36-96	46-96	47-96	47-96	43-93

Bivariate analysis revealed a relationship (significant at .06 level) between the test scores and the rank of the officers, which means the higher the rank, the better the scores. This is entirely to be expected. Other factors such as age, number of years in service and education had no relationship with test scores.

Oral exam

Because the interviewing of petitioners needs oral/communication skills, an informal oral exam was undertaken, which consisted of the following questions:

- 1. What is dispute resolution and in what situations might you use dispute resolution techniques?*
- 2. What are negotiation, mediation and arbitration? Illustrate your answers with examples.*
- 3. What is counselling? In which kinds of cases would you employ counselling techniques and in which kinds would you not? Which kinds of cases would you refer for professional counselling?*
- 4. If violence is involved in the case/petition, would you use dispute resolution? If yes, give reasons and if not give reasons.*
- 5. State five major impacts of the use of dispute resolution techniques in domestic disputes and domestic violence cases.*
- 6. As a police officer, what would be your approach to dealing with petitions of domestic disputes and domestic violence? Please describe the steps you would follow.*

Many of the trainees were better at expressing themselves orally than in writing. This was because they had become out-of-touch with written exams and educational materials (80% had been in service for more than 10 years). About half of the officers answered all the questions very well. It was encouraging to find that some of the young police constables were able to provide excellent thoughtful answers for question 5. For example, one of the officers said:

“First of all, the training itself has let me and other officers gauge the magnitude of the dispute between the petitioner and the counter petitioners and it has helped us to use appropriate DR techniques in solving the disputes, in many cases in a short period of time. Facilitating a dialogue between petitioner and counter petitioner in a separate room on their own, without the women police intervening, helps them to negotiate, to come to some terms and solve their own problems. Some couples and their family members need some authority to help close the communication gap between them. When one party is adversarial, I was able to analyse the dialogue between the parties and was able to lay out the best alternate to negotiated agreement (BATNA). Before this training I just order them what to do. But after the training, I do my homework in identifying many options that both parties can choose to settle their disputes. This makes me feel that I am not imposing my ideas on them and I see some satisfaction between the parties that they were not told what to do. Further, the dispute resolution techniques help in identifying any small quarrels between the couples which could escalate to serious violence.”

Another officer said:

“DR techniques have had a major impact on us. First of all, we analyse each case with a problem solving approach. Second, it saves time in going over the issues again and again. Third, I am able to handle other cases while leaving the petitioner and the counter petitioner to talk to each other. Fourth, there is a great satisfaction between the couple that they have come to some agreement. Usually when the woman petitioner files a complaint in the station, the counter petitioners feels that the women police are supportive to the women and their decisions are biased. But the use of DR techniques makes the counter petitioners feel confident about the neutrality and fairness at the station. Fifth, knowledge of DR techniques makes me feel confident in approaching the case, and it also helps the parties to be confident that cases will be solved professionally at the police station. Furthermore, the training has had a great impact in solving my own family problems”

These statements, and those made by other officers give some indication of how much they had learned both online and in the classroom sessions. The major conclusion was that the trainees had understood the use of dispute resolution skills and were able to explain the use of appropriate DR techniques in solving the domestic disputes.

Assessment of classroom sessions and e-learning

Many women officers who were fluent in Tamil and not in English were found to have not initiated any discussion in the web site forum. Consequently, it was decided to undertake an informal observation of these officers during the classroom sessions at headquarters. During these sessions, many of the trainees expressed concern about undertaking counselling as a major part of their work. This was partly because the instructors who were brought to lecture on counselling repeatedly emphasized that women police should become counsellors in dealing with victims. On the last day of the classroom lecture session, therefore, an overview lecture was provided covering women police around the world, their law enforcement roles and their roles in handling domestic violence cases. Together with a demonstration applying their theoretical knowledge by using a template (created by the consultant), this lecture helped the officers to understand the multiple roles that they must play in dealing with petitioners. In this context, they were able to appreciate the need for their counselling skills. The trainees were also helped by this session to understand the importance of networking with NGOs, counsellors, physicians, religious institutions, psychiatrists and psychologists to provide the best service possible to women victims of violence. One outcome of these discussions was the production of a condensed guide in using dispute resolution techniques with domestic violence and dispute cases (Natarajan, in Press).

The trainees became more accustomed to using computers in the course of the project. The training had provided an opportunity to improve their communication skills, which the higher-ranking officers in particular took advantage of. A total of 432 chats were recorded, most of which were telephone chats rather than written messages. Only a very few trainees initiated a discussion in the form, though some used the forum to contact the training team. Until the middle of the training period, little effort was made to encourage the officers to use the forum. Some of those fluent in English, particularly the higher-ranking officers, participated freely in the forum.

Efforts were later made to ensure that each trainee participated in the forum at least once. As a result, there were many more entries in the forum later in the period than earlier (a total of 307 entries as of September 17, 2003). An analysis of the forum discussions indicates that the higher-ranking officers struggle with the conflicts faced by changing value systems in a traditional society.

The time spent on the learning modules needs special mention. Though the trainees had been given special permission by their superiors to participate in the project, they did not spend many hours in learning. The first three modules were on the web page for more than six months, but the number of hours spent on average by each trainee was 13 hours for reading the three modules, which was considered very inadequate. A deficiency of the web-learning scheme was that the modules were posted without proper written instructions to the officers and without study guides. The officers were left on their own to read the materials and answer the questions in the test administered to them. The lower test scores on first three modules is the reflection of this fact. The other three modules were given in a classroom setting by instructors who were able to give fuller explanations, with appropriate examples, to help trainees understand the concepts better. This is reflected in their improved test scores for the last three modules (see Table 1). But one ought to understand that this was the first time these officers have been evaluated, other than for their promotion tests.

Aim 2: Basic skills in interviewing and counselling

In December 2002, at the beginning of the training program, the consultant visited the three units and observed the officers dealing with domestic dispute and violence cases. Particular problems that were noted were as follows:

1. Petitioners and counter petitioners commonly waited around for hours in the station without being called or noticed by the women police.
2. Officers were not aware of the time spent on each of the cases.
3. Cases were referred to counsellors before the officers had understood the nature of dispute/problem.
4. Petitioners and counter petitioners were treated in an authoritarian, sometimes harsh manner.

In August 2003, after the officers completed the classroom training, she visited each unit for two days and, assisted by a PCVC team member, observed trainees dealing with their cases. Many changes were noted:

1. Trainees were more welcoming to petitioners and counter petitioners
2. They showed more empathy to women petitioners and made greater efforts to make them feel confident
3. They were able to use their judgment in choosing the particular DR technique suitable for a particular case
4. They did not give assurances to petitioners that they would resolve the case in their favour.
5. They had learned to ration their time for each case and were better able cut long sessions spent in mediation. They also more frequently dealt politely with counter petitioners.

6. Many of the officers memorized the steps in dealing with cases from the guidelines that they were given in the classroom session.
7. Many thought that they could see a change in themselves after training. Almost all officers said they had learned to become more patient and control their anger. Women police officers now take a fifteen-minute break when they come back from outdoor duties, before they interview a petitioner.
8. After training, more officers were able to accept that they did not always treat victims and counter-petitioners properly. However, some officers were still rude and unsophisticated in their dealings with both groups.

During the site visits at the three units, a total of 27 petition inquiries were observed. These petitioners were interviewed by the consultant and her assistant and asked whether the women police had been helpful in listening to their complaint. Both they and counter-petitioners said that they were treated in a cordial manner, which made them feel more comfortable in explaining their problem. Both groups also praised the counselling approach of the officers and the professional way of handling their disputes. Petitioners that visited the police station a second time reported, because the police were handling the situation sensitively, their spouses were not angry with them for taking a private matter to police. The petitioners were confident that when they come to the units they would get their problems solved. In many instances, petitioners travel to these particular units because they have heard about their success in resolving disputes.

Aim 3: Database management

Three different approaches were adopted in each unit to train the officers in data entry:

1. In Unit 1, the women police typed the data into the computer while interviewing. On average, it took 45 minutes to enter data pertaining to petitioner alone. This had both advantages and disadvantages. Many of the petitioners freely provided information because they were proud that what they said was being stored on the computer. Because the officers were adept with technology, the petitioners believed that the officers would help solve their problems. On the other hand, the women police were concentrating on data entry rather than paying attention to the petitioners.
2. In Unit 2, data was entered after the women police completed the interviews with the petitioners. This took double the amount of time and the officers needed to remember the interview and enter the data in the corresponding fields in the database. Data entry alone took an average of 55 minutes.
3. In Unit 3, officers entered data from the written petitions and then filled out missing data on the second visit. This took an average of 60 minutes to enter data.

Whatever method is used, approximately an hour should be allocated for data entry. Since the petitioner's attitude toward the women officers was positive when the officers recorded the data while interviewing, this method might be adopted as the standard one, with some changes. Since officers are not equally quite interested in entering data, those who like to this and are quick can be utilized for data entry. They

can record the data while the other officer interviews the petitioner. This would help both officers and would help improve the image of women police among the public.

While officers saw the data entry as time consuming, they acknowledged that this was due to their lack of practice. They also were pleased to generate reports from the database in a timely fashion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This training project is the first on-line training in India, developed specifically for the constabulary. It is one of the first times that women police have been paid favourable attention in Tamil Nadu. The training program is a pioneering, innovative effort to use technology in training that has opened up possible avenues for other courses that might be taught on-line for officers. Despite the many difficulties of undertaking the project in a developing country, it is an important step forward in designing gender specific training programs for police personnel. The women police were able to understand dispute resolution techniques and were able to employ them in an appropriate fashion. In particular, they learned when to use them and when not; they learned the importance of dealing sympathetically yet objectively with petitioners and counter-petitioners; and they significantly developed their database management skills.

Until now, only lawyers and judges in the Criminal Justice System have made formal use of dispute resolution techniques. Though the use of dispute resolution is controversial in dealing with domestic violence (Rifkin, 1989; Thoennes & Pearson, 1995), Natarajan's (2005) review found that mediation can help promote dialogue when people are in conflict and can produce higher compliance rates with the agreements reached than litigation (Kressel & Pruitt, 1989; Gerencser & Kelly, 1994; Perry, 1994; Umbreit, 1995; Picard, 1998). This study has suggested that greater use of dispute resolution by women police in dealing with domestic disputes could reduce domestic violence. Small quarrels and minor misunderstandings that might otherwise would lead to big fights and conflicts in families, especially in joint family systems that are quite prevalent in India, might be avoided. This is particularly the case with family matters, which are sensitive in nature and which require special and immediate attention. The use of dispute resolution techniques by police who are the gatekeepers of the criminal justice system would not only prevent repeat victimization, but also help reduce overcrowding in the family court system. This is an important conclusion in the light of the growing doubts about mandatory arrest of offenders in cases of domestic violence (Sherman & Berk, 1984; Dunford et al., 1989; Zoomer, 1989; Sherman, et al., 1991; Sherman, 1992; Mignon and Holmes, 1994; Zorza, 1994; Garner et al., 1995; Hirschel, 1992; Hoyle & Sanders, 2000) and the search for innovative ways for police to deal with domestic violence (White et al 2005).

Media coverage has led to interest in the project among other states in India. Many police officials from around the country have visited the AWPUS involved in the project, and have learned about the functioning of the units and the use of the database in recording. These visits could result in the project being replicated elsewhere in India – and perhaps in other parts of the world. Research in England in the 1980s found that police officers were reluctant to help domestic violence victims (Evason, 1982; Homer et al., 1984; Edwards, 1989), though it appears from more

recent reports (Morley and Mullender 1994; Grace, 1995; Bridgeman and Hobbs 1998; Plotnikoff and Woolfson, 1998; Hanmer et al., 1999; Kelly et al., 1999; Hoyle and Sanders, 2000) that police departments have made much progress in dealing with domestic violence cases. Nevertheless, on-line training in dispute resolution could even be useful in other developed countries.

The most important recommendation is that the training investment in the 30 officers needs to be preserved by allowing them to continue with dispute resolution work through maintaining the web site and encouraging the officers to keep in contact with the PCVC and the project consultant.

The remaining recommendations concern the extension of this project to other districts in Tamil Nadu.

Concerning women officers and the training needs:

- The reading materials for the course need to be revised and more study guides need to be prepared.
- In order to strengthen interview skills both classroom and computerized training are necessary
- The coordinators should closely monitor and initiate discussions regarding dispute resolution techniques in the forums.
- The selection of women police officers for such training needs attention. Women officers with positive attitudes and an aptitude for learning need to be identified and selected.
- Those among the 30 women trained who showed most aptitude for learning ought to be used in training other women officers.

Concerning senior police officers, especially male officers:

- There is need for improved understanding of the important role of women officers in dealing with domestic disputes and domestic violence.
- Gender sensitisation programmes need re-examining.

Concerning broader policing policy:

- Domestic violence should be treated as a serious crime rather than a private matter. Dealing with domestic violence should be seen as a major function of the women police.
- Women police officers need to be recognized for their meritorious work in handling domestic violence cases and greater allowance needs to be made for the large number of hours taken by women police officers in dealing with domestic matters.
- Women police officers who have good interviewing and interpersonal skills need to be permanently allocated to handling petitions relating to domestic violence.
- Women police need to be recognized as law enforcement officers rather than counsellors.

- Research should be undertaken to identify the need for new training programmes. All new training programs should be rigorously evaluated through research.

Though India is one of the leading nations in developing technology, computer use by police has lagged. Some city police departments have access to computer, but rural areas still have little or no access to computers in the stations. Crime records are manually coded and there are variations between departments in record keeping. This is as true of the AWPUs as anywhere else in the Tamil Nadu Police Force. A standardized recording system is very important for state level understanding of crime patterns, trends, which would help in allocating resources to tackle the crime problems.

Needless to say, this innovative technology-based course and database management has demonstrated the value of technology for the police in Tamil Nadu. Seed money through the Queens Award has been most helpful in showing the uses of technology in recording crime. The Queens Award also brought favourable attention to women police which they need if they are to progress. However, without the dedicated, congenial and expert members of the group, and without the support by the Tamil Nadu police and the Government, this project would not have been possible.

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