



SEMINAR REPORT

April 2012



Making numbers count: The gender violence tally
16 September 2011

Seminar Report

The lack of accurate, accessible, updated and relevant data on gender violence remains a real stumbling block for the many non-profit organisations and governments that grapple with this issue. Why is it so important to have this data, to understand it and to use it properly? Given that gender and sexual violence get little attention, numbers become essential for 'flag-waving', for holding up as evidence, proof, to backup anecdotal evidence. Most of all, good data conveys the urgency of the problem in ways that nothing else can.

For these and other reasons, data on gender violence was the focus of Prajnya's first full-day research seminar. 'Making numbers count: The gender violence tally' was organised on 16 September 2011 to discuss four dimensions of data collection on gender violence: What are the available sources of data on gender violence in Tamil Nadu? Is all available data good data; indeed, what is good data? What challenges do we face in collecting data on certain specific forms of violence? How can we, through our work as activists, researchers or service providers, help gather high quality data on gender violence?



Dr Swarna Rajagopalan, Managing Trustee of Prajnya welcomed the group, noting that this was a conversation 'we have been planning for a long time'. Referring to her own research work on this issue, she spoke of how she has - and continues to - struggle to find the data she needs. Moreover, every year, as Prajnya compiles and publishes reports or shorter information initiatives, the lack of reliable data has been a real concern.



The first session focused on existing sources of data on gender violence and was chaired by Vidya Reddy of Tulir. Presenting a broad overview, Anupama Srinivasan of Prajnya shared her research paper published by the Global Consortium on Security Transformation, on 'Gender Violence as Insecurity: Research Trends in South Asia'. Anupama briefly outlined the state of research on different forms of gender violence in each of the seven South Asian countries, outlining the specific difficulties faced by each country in terms of generating and disseminating data. She drew attention to the question of responsibility, of both civil society and government. Whose task is it to fill the gaps and carry out the kind of research that is required, especially given the lack of sustained funding for research?



Service providers - those who operate helplines, shelters, short-stay homes - are among the few potential sources of data on gender violence. Dr. Prasanna Poornachandra of PCVC, a Chennai-based organisation that works on domestic violence, described this 'wealth of data' as being obviously client-based but also incident-based. She pointed out that unlike in certain other countries, national crime victimisation surveys are not carried out in India. These surveys would permit better analysis of individual incidents and facilitate more uniform data collection procedures. Dr. Prasanna observed that there is little cohesion between different service providers on this front and documentation tends to be rather adhoc. She also noted that service providers are not legally obligated to provide this data to either the police or courts.

Data from service providers can also present a completely different point of view from police records, often with respect to the same incident. Dr. Prasanna urged the creation of a comprehensive data hub that would consolidate both reported data (police and courts) and unreported data (hospitals, service providers); she however cautioned that overlapping is a distinct possibility and must be addressed in the conceptualisation of any data system.

In the absence of reliable data, media reports are an important source; they enable us to track incidents in specific locations and occasionally, to also monitor any follow-up actions. Speaking on this, Ranjitha Gunasekaran of The New Indian Express, Chennai, presented her findings from a quick survey of three English-language newspapers

over ten days (1-10 September 2011). In that period, the Deccan Chronicle published 31 stories on or related to gender violence; for 28 of these, the police were the primary source of information. A few stories also referred to court proceedings; there were only two stories for which a police report was not the primary source. In the same period, The Times of India (Chennai edition) published 21 stories and The New Indian Express 20 stories.

Ranjitha pointed out that the majority of stories remain the short, routine report mentioning that a crime has taken place. Longer investigative or in-depth stories are a relative rarity. There also tends to be an over-reliance, somewhat understandably, on what is perceived as 'authentic' data, i.e., data from police sources. She emphasised that media reports almost always only refer to crimes that have already been reported to the police and therefore cannot really be counted upon to meet the underreporting challenge. Ranjitha noted that in most cases, the individual affected by violence has no real control over whether the story is 'picked up' by the media or not.



In the discussion that followed, several issues were raised including the challenge of marrying academic data with service provider data and making the former relevant to non-academics; the lack of need-based research in academia and the need, therefore, to create more platforms (such as this seminar) where people from NGO interact with those from academia; and finally, the particular difficulties in surmounting any opposition from communities (including those directly affected by violence) to research studies on this issue.

In the first post-lunch session, Dr Swarna Rajagopalan led a brief conversation on the question of 'good data'. Participants pointed out that neither good nor bad data were absolute; it very often depended on how and where the data was used. 'Consistency' was identified as one strong characteristic of good data, as was accessibility.



The penultimate session focused on processes & challenges in data collection on specific forms of violence and was chaired by Dr. Kalpana Karunakaran of IIT Madras. Speaking first, Mr. Kathir Vincent Raj of Evidence, an organisation based in Madurai, spoke of the difficulties in collecting data on honour killings.

He noted that there exist three possible 'kinds' of honour killings in the Tamilnadu context: where the girl is murdered for 'spoiling the family name'; where the boy is murdered for marrying or running away with a girl from a different or lower caste; and where both the boy and girl in question are murdered by either family.

As a result, in most cases, as Kathir noted, families either were afraid to or did not want to file a case with the police, since they were often themselves responsible for the violence. He recalled that in recent times, only one case, in Thanjavur, has actually made it to the courts. Kathir raised several pertinent questions: which individuals are we to consider sources of primary data for honour killings? What about the question of risk to life for the researcher? He concluded by pointing out that in most cases, organisations such as Evidence reacted to honour killings by initiating fact-finding missions, as distinct from research interventions.

Inspector Pandiyan of the Tamil Nadu State Crime Records Bureau then offered a detailed overview of the data compiled and made available in the SCRB's annual report, Crime Review Tamil Nadu.



Speaking next on female foeticide and infanticide, Ms. Dhanalakshmi of CASSA referred to the vital statistics on this issue: data on births and deaths as recorded by the government and hospitals, including those in the private sector. According to 'official' reports, as Dhanalakshmi observed, there are no violations at any scan centres; however NGO experiences suggest otherwise. Translating this knowledge, often anecdotal, into robust data is the real challenge for organisations. In addition, it is near-impossible to find out about abortions carried out at home.



In the final presentation of the session, Mr. Karthik Ekambaram of AVTAR spoke on data collection issues specific to sexual harassment at the workplace. Given that very few companies heed the Vishakha guidelines, there exists no official record of incidents of workplace sexual harassment, even when reported. Karthik referred to the many reasons why women often do not report incidents of harassment, fearing consequences that may negatively affect their careers. He pointed out that it is mandatory to create a perception that it is good business practice for companies to record, report and share data on sexual harassment.

The seminar ended with a brief discussion on roles and responsibilities in data collection, facilitated by Ms. Sheila Jayaprakash. The seminar was held on 16 September 2011 at Harrisons Hotel, Chennai. A programme as well as participant list is appended.



Seminar Programme

- 9:30 a.m. - 10:30 a.m. **Welcome**
- Problem Statement
- Keynote address by Mr. Ashish Bhengra IPS,
Director, State Crime Records Bureau, Tamil Nadu (cancelled)
- 10:30 am - 12:30pm **Data on gender violence: what's out there?**
- Speakers*
- Ms. Anupama Srinivasan, Prajnya
- Dr. Prasanna Poornachandra, PCVC
- Ms. Ranjitha Gunasekaran, The New Indian Express
- Session Chair:* Ms. Vidya Reddy, Tulir
- 12:30pm - 1:30pm **Lunch**
- 1:30pm - 2:30pm **Setting Standards: Data v/s Good data**
- Discussion moderated by Dr. Swarna Rajagopalan, Prajnya
- 2:30pm - 4:30pm **Processes & Challenges in data collection on specific forms of violence**
- Speakers*
- Mr. Kathir Vincent Raj, Evidence, *on honour killings*
- Ms. Dhanalakshmi M, Campaign against Sex Selective Abortion (CASSA), *on pre-natal sex selection and infanticide*
- Dr. Saundarya Rajesh & Mr. Karthik Ekambaram, AVTAR, *on workplace sexual harassment*
- Ms. Anupriya Ghosh, Jagori, *on street sexual harassment*
- Session Chair:* Dr Kalpana Karunakaran, IIT Madras
- 4:30pm - 5:15pm **Roles and responsibilities in data collection**
- Discussion led by Ms. Sheila Jayaprakash
- 5:15pm - 5:30pm **Closing comments**

Seminar Participants

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| Sheila Jayaprakash | Advocate |
| Kathir Vincent | Evidence, Madurai |
| Vidya Reddy | Tulir-CPHCSA, Chennai |
| Nancy Thomas | Tulir-CPHCSA, Chennai |
| Prasanna Poornachandra | PCVC |
| K. Kalpana | IIT Madras |
| Ranjitha Gunasekaran | The New Indian Express |
| Jayanthi Murali | Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission |
| Karthik Ekambaram | Flexi-careers India |
| G. Pandiyan | Inspector of Police, SCRB, Chennai |
| Arpitha Jacob | Ph.D. candidate, University of California, Berkeley |
| Anand Philip | Health care professional |
| A Suguna | Pennurimai Iyakkam |
| Aparna Singh | Women's Web |
| R. Leelavathi | Pennurimai Iyakkam |
| M. Dhanalakshmi | SIRD, Madurai and CASSA |
| Priyamvadha | University of Madras |
| Benita Mariam | Professor, Stella Maris College |
| Supraja T.A. | IFMR |
| Vidya P. | Mint |
| Sriranjini Sivasubramaniam | Professor, Ethiraj College |
| Archana Venkatesh | Foundation for Rural Recovery and Development |
| Hemant Shivakumar | LAMP Fellow |
| Sarika Dewan | Student |
| Charlotte Kuphal | Student |
| Mathew George | University of Madras |
| Richard | University of Madras |
| E. Nandhini | Ethiraj College |
| S. Maheswari | Ethiraj College |
| K. Matheswari | Ethiraj College |
| Swarnalatha C. | Ethiraj College |
| Anupama Srinivasan | Programme Director, Gender Violence Research and Information Taskforce at Prajnya |
| Subhashini Selvanathan | Administrator, Prajnya |
| Swarna Rajagopalan | Managing Trustee, Prajnya |