The Problem: Growing up, one of us witnessed a beloved caretaker return for work every day covered in bruises. Despite being disregarded by her husband and in-laws, she withstood the mistreatment. “The community will judge my character and shame my family”; “people always blame the woman” or “he feeds my children, so I must adjust,” she would reason, refusing to accept help. Her story was no different from millions of women in India. At first glance, the rigid cultural perceptions of how women should behave hold them back from escaping abusive relationships. While legal remedies are essential for providing short-term relief, they fail to break the cycle of violence. This missing link stems from the lack of involvement of men in understanding the root causes of domestic violence (DV), thereby delivering lopsided and inefficient solutions. Intergenerational transmission of gender attitudes makes men feel entitled or even obliged, to dominate women as a way to “prove their manhood”. Research indicates an intricate correlation between violence and masculine norms which compels men to resort to crime, in a desperate effort to retain power. As recipients and observers of violence, children conveniently internalise harmful constructions of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, being excluded from seemingly “sensitive and age-inappropriate” discussions on DV, they are bereft of the opportunity and space to understand and contribute to gender equality. For a more holistic approach to mitigate DV, the gender norms surrounding both women and men need to be acknowledged, uprooted and reimagined.

The Context: Regarded as one of India’s most orthodox states, Haryana witnessed a whopping 45% increase in instances of cruelty against women from 2019 to 2020. Constrained by a patriarchal mindset, 1 in 4 Indian women face domestic violence. Within the first three months of the pandemic-induced lockdown, India recorded a 10-year peak in the number of DV cases. In the wake of this disquieting trend, we have decided to focus on Haryana’s Badanpur village. Insufficient dowry, the birth of a girl child, and disturbance in family relations are among the leading reasons for DV in this region. The gravity of the situation has grasped the attention of international players including UNESCO and the World Bank. Despite launching successful projects on women empowerment, the trust deficit between the community and the international organisations has prevented meaningful progress on the sensitive and deeply embedded challenge of DV. This gap is evidenced by the fact that in Badanpur, only 5% of victims report domestic violence. Moreover, owing to the threat of societal backlash and self-imposition of gender norms, 54% of female respondents claim that it is justifiable for families to beat women under circumstances where she is perceived to be disrespectful and remiss in her household duties. These findings point towards the need for more localised efforts based on the foundation of greater trust, thus creating a safe space that is owned by the community to discuss violence through their lived experiences. The presence of international actors allows us to build our project on existing levels of awareness while partnerships with local NGOs that share a good rapport with the community will help us work towards our long-term objective of denormalising domestic violence in Haryana.

Overview: Our pilot project is designed to sensitise the community of Badanpur about different aspects of DV. Multiple programs for women and girls by different NGOs deliver tools and services for empowerment, information, and independence, with a vision to transform gender stereotypes but without adequate involvement of men and boys. We believe that changing norms requires a multi-level systems approach, the first step of which is to actively include all stakeholders. Accordingly, our interactive workshops aim to create a space that provides a platform to both females and males of all ages to acknowledge, understand and question the subtle internalised patriarchal notions of gender inequality, power, and violence.

Project details: We have narrowed the scope of our pilot to 100 households and one government school from grades 8 to 12. To achieve our objectives, we have created a tentative workshop schedule (see below), after conversation with various grassroots organisations in Haryana. Our project consists of a four-component workshop series spanning 2 months, after one month of intensive research and curriculum development. These are categorised into - (i) education: aims to disseminate information and stir conversation on stigmatised and underexplored concepts (ii) discussion: creates a space for men and women to engage in conversation, introspect and reflect individually and collectively, (iii) personal story sharing: invites violence survivors to bring inspirational experiences, thus motivating action, and (iv) exercises: simulates settings which offer the locals a participatory experience to identify patterns of violence and respond in real-life episodes of DV. This workshop will conclude with a week of resource awareness to motivate all members to overcome socially imposed instructions on gender performance. Hence, our intervention diversifies the discussion beyond women’s lack of autonomy to exploring and expunging the deeper causes behind it.
### Project Timeline and Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 1- May 15</td>
<td>Conducting initial survey visit to Jind</td>
<td>To build trust with the community, gather local tales and mobilise people for participation.</td>
<td>The research will be carried out by the team members, Parnika Jhunjhunwala and Simran Singh</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 16- June 7</td>
<td>Finalising workshop curriculum</td>
<td>Localise content based on survey findings; convert folklore into pictorial stories for children.</td>
<td>Curriculum development supported by Dr Isabel Pike (IHEID), followed by a review by Breakthrough. Children’s story illustrations by volunteers from Srishti Institute of Art, Design &amp; Technology, Bangalore</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 8- August 3</td>
<td>Executing Weekly Workshop sessions</td>
<td>Project delivery</td>
<td>Ms. Sunita Dharialw from Haryana Women’s Welfare Federation has agreed to accompany us to conduct meetings with the local government and moderate sessions. Mr. Kumar Mukesh, SAMBHAV has confirmed its assistance in delivery of workshops employing artistic and theatrical components.</td>
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**Sustainability:** We realise that norms cannot be uprooted in 3 months, but we see this project having long-term outcomes because the platform offered by our workshops will have ripple effects, paving way to peaceful conversations that will be passed from one generation to the next. It will help us create those spaces within the community where gender does not have to be blindly performed but is re-evaluated. The additional focus on men and children ensures that all stakeholders realise from the very beginning that in the fight against gender violence, they too have things at stake – healthy upbringing, relationships, and emotional wellbeing. Such awareness will allow them to become active instruments of change and peace. Lastly, COVID-19 has brought to light the “shadow pandemic” and the surge in DV, necessitating projects on peace within the household. We believe that peace comes from the discomfort of being aware, both of ourselves and the society, to always question existing norms, creating the space for self-growth and living without fear. Depending on the success of this pilot, we aim to scale the project in other orthodox states of India, spreading the message of equality and peace.
Endnotes


