

## A Research Brief on kNOw Fear Making Rural Public Spaces Safe for Women and Girls

### *An operational research for addressing public space sexual violence against women and girls*

#### Context

Violence against women (VAW) exists in every sphere of women's life: at the workplace, educational institutions, public places, within the community where they are residing and most commonly within their own homes. Domestic violence has been a topic of public discourse and research for a few decades, and in recent years there is some attention and investments in addressing sexual violence faced by women and girls (SVAWG) in public spaces, through laws and policies, even as implementation and budgets remain inadequate<sup>1</sup>. There is limited research on public space violence. One resource is a compilation of 40 academic and community studies focusing on street harassment globally. Though the sample sizes vary widely, and the studies appear to be more representative of cities than rural areas, these studies nevertheless indicate that street harassment is a global phenomenon that all women experience in some form.<sup>2</sup> Small scale studies from South Asia indicate that women in this region face frequent harassment in public places and in public transport.<sup>3</sup> A household survey conducted in Delhi in 2012 showed that rape is one of the daily acts of violence that women and girls are subject to in urban public spaces. The survey found that 60% of women had experienced any form of sexual violence (ranging from unwanted sexual comments and touching to sexual assault) in public spaces in the past 6 months<sup>4</sup>. Women's experiences also influence their perceptions and their fear of sexual violence<sup>5</sup>, which in turn impacts their mobility, lifestyle, and overall participation in public life. These studies, however, are mostly from urban areas.

The realities of rural areas are complex. To start with, growing urbanization and industrialization has reduced the distance and the differences between rural and urban, and traditional social protection systems are breaking down. Workforce participation of women in rural areas is much higher than in urban areas, but uniquely, there are no spatial distinctions between their workplace and the public space as they are out in the field, forests, construction sites, etc. Added to this vulnerability is the fact that their greater economic participation can also cause an increase in both intimate partner violence (IPV) and public space violence<sup>6</sup>.

In rural areas, local governance bodies called the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are responsible for ensuring social justice and equitable development, including addressing gender issues and violence,

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/documents/resources/Financing%20for%20gender%20equality\\_Sarojini%20Ganju%20Thakur%20&%20Sona%20Mitra.pdf](http://www.feministpolicyindia.org/documents/resources/Financing%20for%20gender%20equality_Sarojini%20Ganju%20Thakur%20&%20Sona%20Mitra.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics/statistics-academic-studies/>.

<sup>3</sup> Solotaroff & Pande 2014. Violence against Women and Girls: Lessons from South Asia. World Bank

<sup>4</sup> This survey was part of the baseline conducted for the Safe Cities Delhi Initiative. The summary report of finding is titled- UN Women and ICRW. 2013. Unsafe: An Epidemic of Sexual Violence in Delhi's Public Spaces: Baseline findings from Safe Cities Delhi Programme. UN Women: NY & ICRW: Washington DC.

<sup>5</sup> Macmillan et. al. 2000. 'Experiencing the Street: Harassments and Perception of Safety among Women'. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, vol-37.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-can-women-s-economic-empowerment-drive-gender-based-violence-91797>

be it through their constitutional mandates under the Panchayati Raj Act and Social Justice Committees, or through their role in development planning under the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDP)<sup>7</sup>. They are responsible for the provisioning of appropriate civic amenities and development infrastructure, all of which can enable women's sense of well-being, safety and equal access to opportunities and resources. The Gram Panchayat (GP)<sup>8</sup> is the governance institution closest to the women in the community. However, they have largely neglected their role in addressing gender and violence issues, considering sexual violence and other such 'women's issues' as 'private' matters<sup>9</sup> and remain concerned mainly about disbursement of programs and schemes<sup>10</sup>.

### **About the study**

Given this context, the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) collaborated with a feminist organization Society for Women's Action and Training Initiative (SWATI), based in the western Indian state of Gujarat, with the attempt to bridge the research and program gaps in understanding public space violence in rural areas. The study evaluates a model of rural public space safety, ***kNOw Fear***, which mobilizes women's citizenship and youth participation towards catalyzing local governance structures – the Gram Panchayat (GP) – to prioritize and respond to violence faced by women and girls in public spaces. The study was conducted in select villages of Dasada block, Surendranagar district, Gujarat, and was supported by the International Development Research Center (IDRC). The specific objectives of the program are to:

- i. Generate evidence on perceptions of safety, the nature of sexual violence experienced by women and girls in rural public spaces areas and the impact of sexual violence on their lives,
- ii. Organize women to exercise their political agency through Mahila Gram Sabhas (MGS), and to demand action on women's public space safety from their local governance bodies (Gram Panchayats or GPs),
- iii. Engage young men and young women as partners in preventing and responding to public space violence using gender transformative approaches,
- iv. Empower women, young women and young men to use and leverage ICT to generate evidence on safety to towards creating awareness, undertaking advocacy and monitoring public space safety.
- v. Foster accountability and enhance the capacity of GPs to understand, prioritize and make plans to respond to women's safety in public spaces, and
- vi. Measure the effectiveness of the model as a means to prioritize and foster freedom from rural public space SVAWG and support evidence-based advocacy

The program intervention in Gujarat was led by SWATI while ICRW led the evaluation study. SWATI's program intervention used the following interlinked but distinct strategies.

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<sup>7</sup> Das, P., Kashyap, A., Nandi, S., Bhatla, N., & Pal, P. (2018). Potential and Possibilities – Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as a Platform for Addressing Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in India: A Synthesis Report. New Delhi: ICRW

<sup>8</sup> Smallest unit/body of local governance in India, democratically elected through voting every five years; one Gram Panchayat typically covers one or a few villages

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Review of studies in Bhatla, N. Walia, S. Khanna, T. and Verma, R. 2012. Opportunities and Challenges of Women's Political Participation in India: A Synthesis of Research Findings from Select Districts in India. UN Women & ICRW

<i>Empowering Women's Collectives</i>	<i>Engaging Gram Panchayats (GPs)</i>	<i>Enabling Young People to Advocate for Public Safety</i>
<p>Organize and build capacities of women's collectives to inform the GPs planning processes to mainstream public safety concerns through evidence generation by using tools like safety audits</p> <p>Convene women's assemblies (Mahila Sabhas) to prioritize agenda for engaging with GPs for making them gender responsive</p> <p>Support active participation in main village assembly Gram Sabha (GS) and present the demands for action</p>	<p>Train GP members, especially the Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) to ensure effective and gender responsive leadership</p> <p>Use the evidence generated to develop specific interventions for public safety and security through the government's initiative of Gram Panchayat Development Program (GPDP)</p>	<p>Make adolescent girls and young men to be more aware about issues of sexual violence in public spaces</p> <p>Train 22 peer leaders (11 male and 11 female) called Gyan Sahayaks (Infomediaries) to use their knowledge and skills to support conducting of safety audits and community awareness on public safety</p>

SWATI's direct intervention which spanned a period of 24 months from April 2017 to March 2019, took place with the following groups of stakeholders:

- ✓ 723 women (aged 20-45 years) reached through safety audits, Mahila Gram Sabhas, community meetings, campaigns, dialogues and trainings
- ✓ 672 adolescent girls (aged 15-19 years) reached through community meetings and campaigns
- ✓ 496 young men (aged 18-22 years) reached through community meetings
- ✓ Elected representatives from 11 GPs, reached through training and sensitization programs

The intervention was rolled out primarily with women and girls from marginalized communities, mostly from Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, who are the poorest and most marginalized in the community as SWATI's focus is to empower the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

### **Evaluation design**

A cross sectional quasi experimental mixed method design was used to evaluate the effect of the program. The study included 11 intervention villages and 5 comparison villages with similar socio-demographic indicators as intervention villages in Dasada block of Surendranagar District. Some indicators reflecting the profile of these villages are given in the table below.

Characteristics	Gujarat	Surendranagar	Intervention villages	Comparison villages
Female literacy	60.86	53.2	56.23	60.18
Female work participation	23.38	25.9	24.25	28.85
Percent of Scheduled Caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST) population	21.5	11.5	20.68	13.29

Two rounds cross sectional data collection were undertaken - one before the intervention started (baseline) during October-December 2016 and second after completion of the program implementation (end-line) during July-September 2019.

## Sample and Analysis

The baseline sample covered a total of 554 women aged 20-45 years and 522 adolescent girls aged 15-19 years and the end-line survey included 572 women aged 20-45 years and 536 adolescent girls aged 15-19 years. The details are given in the table below.

Table 1: Sample Size of Women and Girls

Sample at	Women		Adolescent Girls	
	Proposed	Achieved	Proposed	Achieved
Baseline (BL)	600 (400 from intervention & 200 from comparison villages)	554 (369 from intervention & 185 from comparison villages)	600 (400 from intervention & 200 from comparison villages)	522 (346 from intervention & 176 from comparison villages)
End-line (EL)		572 (372 from intervention & 200 from comparison villages)		536 (362 from intervention & 174 from comparison villages)

In addition, a qualitative study was undertaken to gather insights from male and female peer leaders (Gyan Sahayaks), elected representative and leaders of the women's collectives, all in intervention villages, in order to understand their experiences and perceptions around the program.

The impact of the program on selected outcome variables at the individual level such as equitable gender norms, perception about safety of public spaces, perception about safety while traveling, awareness about the laws related to public space safety and knowledge about functions of GP and participation in GP activities were assessed by regression analysis with interaction of time and type after controlling the key back ground characteristics such as caste, education and employment status of women.

## Findings

### Profile of Respondents

**Women:** Compared to baseline sample, slightly older women participated in the end-line survey. The mean age of women that participated in the end-line was 1.5 years older in intervention villages and around 1 year older in comparison villages than the baseline sample. Participation of women from SC/ST community in end-line survey from both intervention and comparison villages were lower than baseline. Education attainment of the women that participated in the end-line is lower than the women interviewed during baseline from both intervention and comparison villages. More than half of the women that participated in the study (both baseline and end-line) were not engaged in any economic activity. Majority of the women sample was 'currently married' at both intervention and comparison villages during both phases of the study.

**Adolescent Girls:** The mean age of girls that participated in the survey was around 17 years in both intervention and comparison villages during both phases of study. Like women, participation of adolescent girls from SC/ST community in the end-line survey from both intervention and comparison villages was lower than baseline. There was a slight increase in the proportion of girls having high school and above education in end-line than baseline sample in both the intervention and comparison villages. Girls' engagement in paid economic activity reduced in both intervention and comparison villages at the time of end-line. Majority of the girls were 'never married' in both the study villages at

end-line and baseline. However, the proportion of currently married adolescent girls was higher in intervention villages at both baseline and end-line than the girls from comparison villages.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents – table to be formatted

	Women				Adolescent Girls			
	Intervention		Comparison		Intervention		Comparison	
	BL	EL	BL	EL	BL	EL	BL	EL
<b>Mean Age</b>	31.2	32.7	31.3	32.1	17	17	17.1	16.9
<b>Caste</b>								
SC/ST	27.9	21.9	27	14.7	34.1	24.4	26.7	16.0
OBC	56.6	61.7	54.6	67.9	56.1	66.4	64.8	74.9
Other	15.4	16.4	18.4	17.4	9.8	9.2	8.5	9.2
<b>Education</b>								
Up to Elementary (up to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade)	55.0	82.0	52.4	77.7	50.6	43.9	47.2	41.4
High school and Above	45.0	18.0	47.6	22.3	49.4	56.1	52.8	58.6
<b>Employment</b>								
Employed	44.4	36.8	44.9	35.6	28.0	13.0	29.6	15.5
Unemployed	55.6	63.2	55.1	64.4	42.8	53.9	48.9	61.5
Student					29.2	33.2	21.6	23.0
<b>Marital Status</b>								
Never Married	4.6	3.8	3.8	4.2	85.5	89.0	85.8	89.7
Currently Married	93.5	93.3	94.1	92.9	14.5	2.8	13.6	4.6
Other	1.9	3.0	2.2	3.0	0.0	8.3	0.6	5.7

\*BL- Baseline; EL – End-line

### Impact of kNOw Fear Program

The impact of the program is measured at individual level and community level. At the individual level, the program intended to show positive impact on – equitable gender attitude, enhanced perception about safety in public spaces, and improved mobility among women and girls. The program also aimed at increasing awareness about the GP functions and participation of GP activities among women. At the community level, the program intended to sensitize GP members on the issues related to safety of women and girls in public spaces, generate greater responsiveness from GPs for safety issues, prioritize these in their governance system and address related concerns proactively.

### The effect of kNOw Fear Program

#### Impact of kNOw fear program on women

Areas of Impact at the individual level	
Gender Equitable Attitude	Positive weak impact on gender equitable attitude
Perception About Safe transport while traveling in and around the village	Significant improvement in perception of safety while traveling by private buses

Increase in knowledge about laws related to public space safety	Significant increase in the proportion of women aware about the law to address SVAWG
Awareness About GP and its functions	Significant improvement in the awareness of functions of Gram Panchayat
	Positive weak impact on awareness about Gram Sabha
Existence of response Mechanism in the community	Significant increase in the proportion of women reporting existence of response mechanism to address the safety issues of women and girls in the village

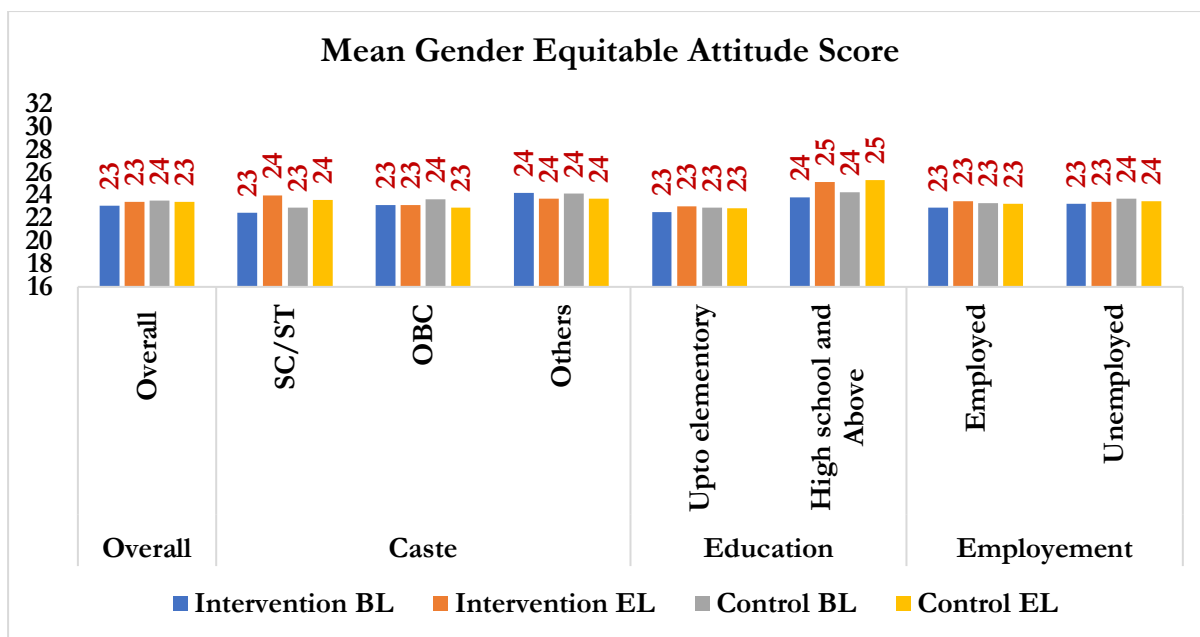
**The kNOw fear program has positive impact on adolescent girls on:**

Areas of Impact	
Existence of response mechanism in the community	Positive weak impact on existence of response mechanism to address the safety issues of women and girls in the village

**Gender Equitable Attitude**

The attitude of respondents towards gender roles, rights of women and girls to public spaces, and SVAWG were measured by using a 4-point Likert scale tested in an earlier study. From the 26-item scale using the factor analysis, 15 statements were clustered into to measure the gender attitudes of women. The responses were recategorize to two points by clubbing strongly agree/agree and disagree/strongly disagree. The response indicating support for inequality on a statement received a score of 1, while support for equality received a score of 2. For example, on the statement “boys/men should be given more privilege than girls/women” a response that ‘agrees’ with the statement shows inequality and is given a score of 1 and a response that ‘disagrees’ with the statement shows equality and is given a score of 2.

**Women:** Overall, there is no significant change observed in the mean gender equitable score of women in both intervention and comparison villages from baseline to end-line. However, after controlling the key background characteristics, the intervention shows a weak positive impact on the gender attitude of women in the intervention villages (significant at 10%). Though bivariate analysis shows there is a shift in the mean equitable gender attitude score among SC/ST women from intervention villages, the change was not statistically significant.



**Adolescent Girls:** Overall, the intervention does not show significant impact on the gender equitable attitudes of girls, the mean gender equitable attitude score was around 26 in both intervention and comparison villages at both phases of the study. Though there is a slight increase in the mean gender equitable score among the SC/ST girls from intervention villages at the time of end-line (from 25.9 at BL to 27.6 at EL), but it was not statistically significant.

Although the quantitative findings do not show any significant impact, the qualitative insights show that adolescent girls who were trained as Gyan Sahayaks articulate strong gender equitable perspectives.

“If one girl is harassed on her way to school and drops out for some reason, then it gets talked about in the village community and all the girls are forced to drop out of school. Sometimes she is also married off so that she does not get a bad name. But we know now that harassment is not the girl’s fault; and that nothing should stop us from pursuing our education.”

~ Gyan Sahayak (female)

The girls also began to have perspectives that the onus of violence and harassment should not be on them; rather, it was the responsibility also of the boys.

“Boys should not look at us with the ‘wrong gaze’. They need to start looking at us with respect, and without the intention to violate us.”

~ Gyan Sahayak (female)

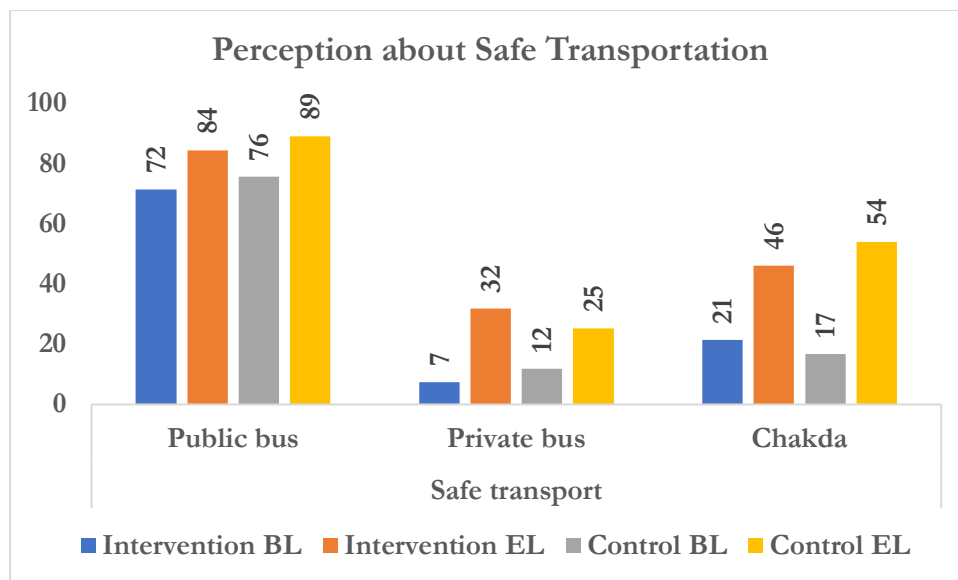
Intensive program engagement with the Gyan Sahayaks could be a factor in strengthening these attitudes and gender perspectives among the girls.

### Perceptions About Safety in public spaces and Safe transport

**Women:** A slightly higher increase in the proportion of women perceived the public spaces are safe for them even if they go out after dark in intervention villages at the end-line. At the end-line around 44 percent women from intervention reported they are not at all fearful about public space safety if

they have to go out after dark compared to only 15 percent at the time of baseline. The corresponding figure for comparison villages were 40 and 17 percent respectively, but the change is not statistically significant at the intervention villages.

Providing safe transport facility to women and girls were one of the key components of the project. In many intervention villages women demanded for safe bus services and advocated with the GPs who in turn negotiated special bus services for adolescent girls to attend school. Though there is an increase in the proportion of women that perceive safety while traveling by all modes of transport, there is a significant positive impact seen in their perception of safety in private buses.



**Adolescent Girls:** Slightly higher proportion of adolescent girls from intervention villages reported they feel extremely safe while going out in public spaces, while the change was not statistically significant after controlling the background characteristics. At end-line, the proportion of girls that perceived they are extremely safe if they go out in and around their village in day time was increased by around 40 percent point in intervention villages from the base value of 25; and the corresponding increase in comparison villages was around 36 percent point from the base value of 26. Around one third of the girls from intervention villages perceived it is extremely safe to go out after dark compared to around 14 percent at the time of baseline while the corresponding figures were around 25 percent and 11 percent respectively in comparison villages.

From the qualitative study we find that girls are articulating public space violence as a violation of their right to safety and mobility, while in the baseline we find that they considered it as a part of everyday life and not as a violation of their rights. During the baseline and formative phase, girls had articulated that they consider public spaces typically as men’s space which women accessed only when ‘required’. Now they are also more confident in articulating their aspirations and wishes for mobility and education.

*“We are more aware and confident. We know that it is ok for us to have dreams, to continue our education, to wear what we want, and not accept it when boys harass us.”*

*~ Gyan Sahayak (female)*

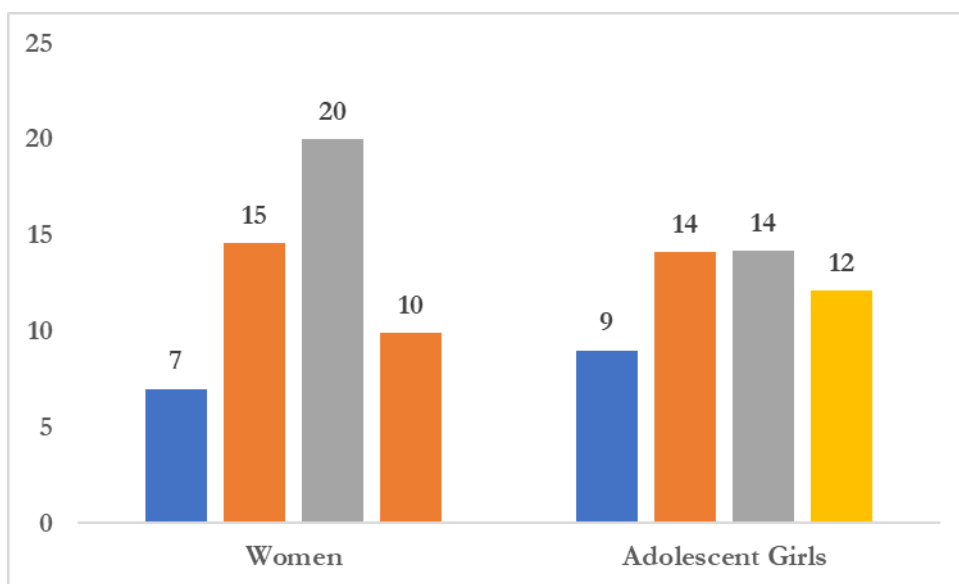
**Awareness about Public Space Safety and Existence of Response mechanism**



**Women:** Significantly higher proportion of women from intervention villages were aware about the law to address SVAWG in public places. There is a 5 percent point increase from 8 percent to 13 percent in the proportion of women who are aware about the laws to address SVAWG in public spaces from intervention villages at end-line, as compared to a 3 percent point reduction in women from comparison villages, from 13 percent to 10 percent.

Significantly high proportion of women from intervention reported the existence of response mechanism at the GP level to address the public space safety issues of women and girls. Whereas, it shows a decline in comparison villages (from 20 to 10 percent). Majority of them who reported existence of response mechanism felt Village Head or ‘Sarpanch’ and the GP are the major points of contact to report to the safety issues.

**Adolescent girls:** The proportion of adolescent girls that reported existence of response mechanism to address the public space safety increased significantly in intervention villages. Like women, they articulate that Sarpanch and GP are the major point persons for response to violence.



Qualitative insights indicate that the girls with whom intensive program engagement took place, namely, the Gyan Sahayaks, not only have better knowledge and awareness about public safety and security, but they have also developed an understanding of the tools available to them such as the strength of organization and of the law in the fight for their rights.

*“I feel strong and confident now because I have with me the power of *sanstha* (organization), *jagrukta* (awareness) and *kanoon* (law).”*

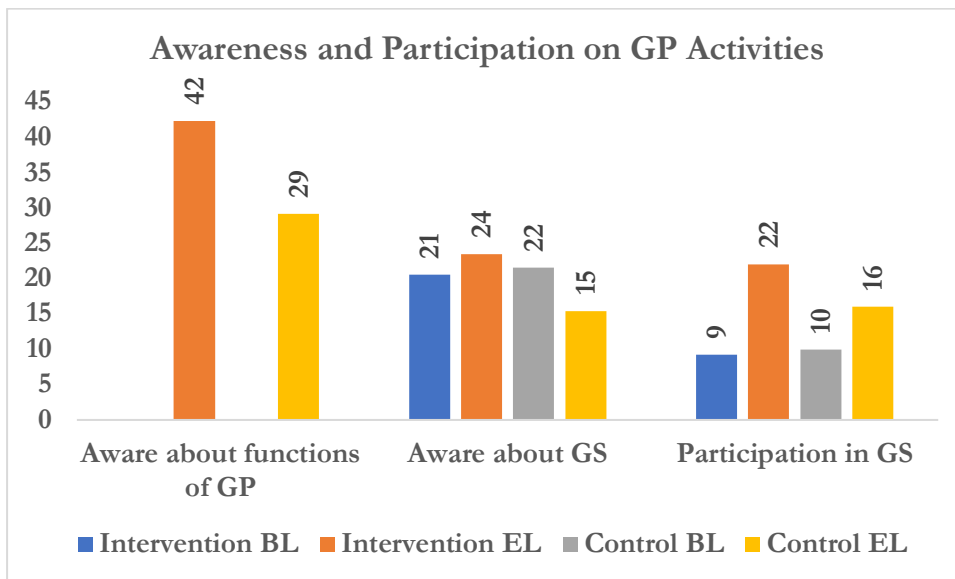
*~ Gyan Sahayak (female)*

Moreover, with the conversation with the boys it is evident that the growing awareness about response mechanisms is accompanied by reduced fear among girls. Says one male Gyan Sahayak,

*“The girls are no longer fearful about going out. We boys also know we are being watched and that if we harass anyone we will be called out.”*

#### **Awareness about GP functions and Participation in GP Activities**

**Women:** Intervention on women focused on empowering them through Mahila Gram Sabha and demand public space safety in Gram Sabha Meetings and engage with Gram Panchayat (GP) members to ensure the public space safety. Women’s awareness about the functions of Gram Panchayat (GP) is significantly high in intervention villages (42 percent) than their counterparts in comparison villages (29 percent). Though the project focused on generating the awareness about the accountability of GPs to ensure public space safety, the same has not reflected in the evaluation as there was no recognition of ensuring public space safety as GP’s function and majority of the women reported village administration and providing safe drinking water are the main functions of GP. The program also shows positive impact on the awareness about Gram Sabha. Though there is an increase in the participation of women from intervention villages in Gram Sabha meeting it was not statistically significant.



However, the qualitative findings do indicate greater engagement of women in GP activities. One of the key strategies to empower women’s collectives was to convene Mahila Gram Sabhas (MGS), a platform for women to discuss their issues and collectively raise it in the Gram Sabha meeting. Through the qualitative study it was found that women engaged much more with the governance platforms for safety in public spaces by demanding basic infrastructure in relation to sanitation, water, and bathing ‘ghaats’ near the ponds, which are linked to their safe mobility and dignity in public. The SWATI intervention had supported safety audits, Mahila Gram Sabhas and taking resolutions to the GPs in order to make this happen.

Young men who received training as Gyan Sahayaks, perceived themselves as ‘agents of change’ to help take the demands emerging from safety audits and community meetings to the Sarpanch and GP meetings.

*We hold meetings in the village with our peers. We have understood how important it is to involve the Panchayats. They have an important role to play in providing street lighting, clearing bushes and providing private bathing spaces for women through development funds. We prepare resolutions from our group meetings and collectively take it to the Panchayats to act upon.*

*~ Gyan Sahayak (male)*

### Gender responsiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

Some wider community level results are seen in the intervention areas, as a result of the project. Resources were leveraged in some GPs from their existing funds and programs such as the GPDP for the creation of gender-responsive infrastructure for ensuring public safety and dignity for women, in addition to seed grants that were provided to them by SWATI under the project. This went into the creation of bathing 'ghaats', clearing of bushes, street lighting, clearing of sewage lines to ensure safe water supply, and other infrastructure development activities that made public spaces more enabling for women and girls. Conversation with GP members also showed a shift in their perspectives about role of GPs in public safety which they did not consider to be their responsibility at the beginning of the project. Now it seemed that some of them had started initiating actions on demands raised by women.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

*When we first started coming for trainings, our families did not allow us. We had to fight to get here, and despite the backlash, we now fight for other girls. We go to their homes and explain to their fathers and mothers how it is ok for girls to also be educated and to dream for a better life.*

*~ Gyan Sahayak (female)*

As we find from the evaluation, a program like kNOw Fear has the potential to shift attitudes, create awareness and ensure some accountability from governance institutions by advocating for inclusion of safety and security issues within the GP's development mandate. We do see much deeper changes in the perspectives and actions of different stakeholders – e.g. peer leaders (both male and female) – with whom intensive engagement has been undertaken. At the same time, we also see broader community level shifts on perceptions, knowledge and participation among women, within the framework of this two-year program intervention, especially through institutionalized platforms like the Mahila Gram Sabha and regular community interactions. This was strengthened by strategies such as sensitization of and engagement with GP leaders and supporting them in creating development plans and infrastructure based on evidence and demands generated by the community through safety audits.

As far as young men are concerned, the program intervention was not rolled out as was planned, considering that there is high migration for education and employment in this age group of men. Even with the peer leaders' group, there were several dropouts over the period of two years. This affected some aspects of community engagement with young men in the intervention villages. Nevertheless, the program managed to achieve positive attitudinal shifts among some of the young male peer leaders (Gyan Sahayaks). The perception of one of them regarding the achievement of the program illustrates the potential this kind of program can have in incrementally transforming gender norms in the community.

*In my village, the biggest success story has been that for the first time, young women are now allowed to leave the village on their own for work. Many of them are employed in the nearby companies.*

*~ Gyan Sahayak (male)*

With adolescent girls, at the individual level with Gyan Sahayaks, the program touched some levers that helped achieve greater awareness, knowledge and gender equitable attitudes, contributing to a better understanding and articulation of gender and violence issues. On a wider scale, the program could only manage a few intermediate outcomes. One of the possible explanations is that there was no platform like the Mahila Gram Sabhas for women, which could help convene the girls more systematically and regularly.

The kNOw Fear program is the first of its kind being implemented in rural areas for addressing safety of women and girls, and engaging governance institutions on violence issues. The learning suggests that deep-rooted adverse gender norms, complicated by social, political and economic dynamics of rural communities, including caste and ethnic diversities, are not easily transformed in a short two-year period. The empirical evidences from the kNOw Fear study point to the fact that greater, more intensive inputs and intervention in a focused manner would be required to sustain the change process that has been initiated.