

Case Study: Training on assisting domestic violence survivors in Honduras

In 2002, the [National Institute for Women](#) and the [Ministry of Security](#) in Honduras teamed up with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to design and institutionalize training for police to ensure that the [1997 Law Against Domestic Violence](#) was properly implemented; upholding women's rights and ensuring survivors have access to recourse and services. Classes on domestic and interfamily violence were incorporated into ongoing training in the three police education centres - the [Police Instruction Centre](#), the [National Police Academy](#) and the [Superior Police Education Centre](#).

Design of the training programme

The initiative was overseen by a technical committee with representatives from the three organizations, and which had regular contact with the highest levels within the organizations. The training initiative on gender equality, women's rights and domestic violence set out to reach a wide range of police officers - from new recruits to students in a law enforcement degree programme, to long-standing in-service personnel. The educational levels of the trainees varied from completion of primary school to secondary school graduates. Attitudes ranged from openness to cynicism. To succeed in transforming the police force from sceptics into allies of domestic violence survivors, the training had to be culturally sensitive, grade-level appropriate, reality-based and tailored to the context of each education centre.

A consultant was recruited based within the Police Instruction Centre in order to understand the organization and its culture during the preparation of materials. The [National Institute for Women](#) developed a core group of instructors who conducted sensitivity training and workshops at departmental command posts throughout the country to ensure that all police personnel had a similar background on the issue. The two-day training covered topics such as the difference between sex and gender; sex and reproductive health; the cause and effect of inequality; details of the [Law Against Domestic Violence](#); and how it related to police enforcement. The Institute began training the trainers, with teacher manuals, student workbooks, audiovisual equipment and other classroom tools delivered to the Police Instruction Centre in 2003 for an initial four-month training.

With the first training underway, materials and methodologies were customized for the National Police Academy curriculum. The training for the Police Instruction Centre, a non-degree programme, was composed of 20 sessions of 50-minutes each over a period of 20 days. The National Police Academy curriculum, on the other hand, needed to be more in-depth. The students in the Academy were studying to be high-ranking officers and working towards a four-year college degree. The Technical Committee decided to have 60 class hours divided into two modules; one that would last during the first two years of the Academy and the second to be conducted over the last two years. The method would reinforce issues of gender and violence against women throughout the four years of study, underscoring the urgency and importance of the issue for the future police commanders. The course was incorporated into the 2005 National Police Academy school year.

The greatest challenge was effectively reaching veteran police officers who were less receptive and set in their practices. Prior to applying for a higher rank, police officers participated in courses at the Superior Police Education Institute. These officers showed greater resistance to ideas of gender equality, women's rights and enforcement of the domestic violence law, which many saw as a family issue rather than a legal problem. To be effective in this context, the participatory approach was complemented with direct instruction by experienced trainers from the [National Institute for Women](#). In addition to the theoretical component, CD-ROMs and other supporting documents and exercises were developed for use outside the classroom. By combining the knowledge and skills of the trainers with real-life examples, the course aimed to dismantle the entrenched resistance of some veterans.

The course material was approved from the highest levels of government, including the [Ministry of Security and Police](#). This helped engage veteran officers, who were accustomed to the vertical, top-down chain of command in the police department. In many respects, the successful implementation of gender sensitivity and the enforcement of the domestic violence law could only succeed with support of higher-ranking officials. Based on reports from participants, the most positive changes occurred among the veteran police who had reluctantly participated in the training.

By the end of the initial three-and-a-half-year training, 6,529 students and active members of the police - 5,624 men and 905 women - successfully completed the modules. As a fixed part of the curriculum, roughly 1,500 men and women per year continue to receive the training.

Results and Achievements

The course on gender equality and domestic violence has evolved from a pilot to an ongoing institutionalized component in the police education centres in which every police officer throughout the country receives comprehensive training on domestic violence, gender equality, and sexual and reproductive health. The training is acknowledged to be an example of 'best practice' throughout the region.

Key achievements of the training

- The police, including chiefs and high-ranking officials, gained a better understanding of women's issues, such as sexual and reproductive health.
- Many women police officers who participated in the training reported that they recognized their own situation of abuse or that of other family members.
- Some men who participated in the training came to understand that their behaviour in their families was abusive and helped them to re-evaluate their actions and roles within the home.
- Veteran police officers reported that they gained greater understanding of domestic violence and realized that gender inequality and violence against women were not myths, but rather the reality for many women.
- Law enforcement personnel were better able to prevent and respond to domestic violence. Upon completion of the training, police gained credibility among women and others affected by domestic violence.

Wider changes to which the training contributed:

- Significant increase in the number of reported domestic violence cases, which is attributed to the result of better police enforcement and community relations rather than an increase in intra-family violence.
- Police stations added new registries for domestic and intra-family violence cases, which helped document the problem and allow for better responses.
- The [Law Against Domestic Violence](#) and the [National Policy for Women](#) are promoted and disseminated throughout the country.
- The National Institute for Women and the police established a [hotline](#) that provides information, counselling and referrals to emergency services for victims of domestic violence. Women and others affected by intra-family violence can call 114 and speak with a trained person to ask for advice or report a crime.
- A Gender Unit was created within the police structure staffed by specially trained personnel who respond to violence perpetrated against women.
- The training underscored that women are underrepresented in the police departments. In response, there is greater emphasis on recruiting women and increasing their presence at the police education centres.
- A Masters Degree in Human Safety is now administered through the [Superior Police Education Centre](#) and includes the courses on sexual and reproductive health and gender equality.
- The national police training on domestic violence and women's rights drew regional attention and became a model for other countries to adopt similar programmes, while also raising the profile of the National Institute for Women.

Lessons learned

- **Teamwork, specific agency responsibilities and support from the highest levels** laid the foundation for success. From the onset, there was direct communication between the Secretary of the National Institute for Women and high-ranking members of the [Ministry of Security](#), including the General Supervisor of the Preventive Police, the Director General of Police Education, heads of the three police education centres and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Open communication, transparency and careful planning were particularly important because the organizations had little experience working collaboratively prior to the training.
- **Training the trainers** had to be thorough, well-planned and include a rigorous selection process. Trainers came from the police education centres.
- **Commitment and political will must come from the top.** The hierarchical nature of the police force calls for the highest ranks to believe in the mission, back the training, and expect subordinates to support gender equality and carry out their duties to protect women from violence. If lower ranks are invested in enforcing the law without commitment from supervisors, the training impact will be minimized.

- While police may be one of the first responders in domestic violence cases, it is important that other agencies and institutions **provide complementary support** such as counselling, comprehensive health services (including immediate treatment and ongoing care) and education. All institutions involved in women's health and safety must communicate and coordinate activities in order to avoid duplication of services and to maximize resources.
- **The instructors and trainers must be prepared for student resistance.** The issue of domestic violence was sensitive for many participants because of entrenched social beliefs. Good communication skills and trust-building techniques, in addition to a strong curriculum that draws on theory and practice are required to break down barriers.
- **Adequate funding and streamlined procedures are required.** The limited budget allotted for the initiative proved to be difficult and required staff to work extraordinarily long hours and on weekends, without extra compensation.
- To better serve survivors as well as to provide meaningful training for police, **ongoing, timely evaluations need to be incorporated** before, during and after trainings. Feedback from trainees as well as public opinion surveys on police response can help fine-tune courses and allow law enforcement to respond more effectively to domestic violence.

See a [video](#) on the police training programme.

Source: [United Nations Population Fund, \(2008\) Programming to Address Violence Against Women: 8 case studies \(volume 2\). UNFPA. New York.](#)