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Getting to Action on Issues of Gender Equality in China: From Participatory Training to Government Officials’ Participating in Change Behavior

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ABSTRACT: Although the central government of China published the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests in 1992 and refined it in 2005, gender equality is still an issue on which the local governments have taken little action because of a lack of operational and technical guidance in legal practices. This paper focuses on analysis of effectiveness of participatory trainings of governmental officials aimed at increasing skill levels in using a gender perspective to intervene in domestic violence situations and mediate non-violent family conflicts. The evaluation results suggest the trainings received highly positive feedback from participants across the country, and across professional fields.

KEYWORDS: China, Effectiveness, Gender equality, Government official, Mediation, Participatory training.

1. INTRODUCTION

Even though central government of China professes to value gender issues and even published the Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests in 1992 and refined it in 2005, gender equality is still an issue on which the central government has taken little action. This lack of action among officials in China’s governmental system stems from a lack of operational and technical guidance in legal practices. The most obvious manifestation of this is the way domestic violence cases are processed. On one hand, China applies a Civil Law system; there was no anti domestic violence law before March 2016 that could give judges standards to judge domestic violence cases, therefore the criminal proceedings involving similar domestic violence situations could get very different judgments and sentencing decisions depending on whether the judges have a gender perspective or not. On the other hand, domestic violence intervention had not been counted into judicial governmental officers’ key performance indicators before March 2016, thus legal governmental officers lack motivation to respond to domestic violence victims’ calls for help, especially those officials ascribed to a Chinese traditional view, which positions domestic violence as an internal affair of a family that should not require intervention by public power. The common practice to deal with domestic violence cases by legal officials was to help temporarily mediate the relationship between the parties involved without violence risk assessment, and then only when those legal officials got a chance to take time from their busy schedules.

The National People's Congress of the People’s Republic of China approved the People’s Mediation Law in August 2010, which has been enforced since January 1, 2011. By this law, mediation became judicial officials’ duty when people asked for it. Taking that
moment as an opportunity, China’s Anti-Domestic Violence Network and other women’s rights organizations successfully encouraged governmental and quasi-governmental officials to attend participatory trainings on conflicts mediation concepts and skills, which were embedded in gender equality contexts and domestic violence prevention concepts. Those trainings helped related governmental officials learn knowledge and skills to distinguish domestic violence and non-violent conflicts, and have better judgment to decide what can be mediated and what cannot.

The participatory trainings mentioned in this paper were designed as parts of multiple programs’ activities hosted by the Anti-Domestic Violence Network (ADVN) from 2011 to 2014. ADVN was set up in 2000 and was “the first—and remains the largest—anti-domestic violence organization in China” (Qin, 15 May 2012). ADVN partnered with governmental agencies, quasi-governmental organizations, academic institutions and civil organizations to promote institutional change for gender equality.

2. TRAINING METHODS

These participatory trainings contrasted sharply with traditional training methods used within the local governments for front-line legal officials. Whereas traditional methods consist mainly of a lecture format, the participatory trainings developed for teaching mediation skills devoted at least 70 percent of the training time to participatory activities. These participatory activities include brainstorm activities, small group discussions, role plays and scenario plays, case analyses, learning games and exercises, skills practices, and team presentations as well as mini-lectures that were no longer than twenty minutes for each one. Each participatory training lasted two to three days.

![Picture 1. Training outline, which was put on classroom wall and visible during the whole training process.](image-url)
Picture 2. Participants role playing a conflict mediation case.

Picture 3. Participants presenting their analysis of a conflict case.

Picture 4. Participants engaging in a learning game to experience the power of working collaboratively. This game was advocating for governmental officials from different agencies to open up the cases transfer channels between each other in order to provide appropriate public services to their clients based on whether domestic violence had happened or not.
Participants in the trainings included police officers, teachers of police schools, judges, judicial mediators, legal scholars, lawyers, and cadres of women’s federations in different administrative levels, as well as executive graduate students of Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Psychology, a public academy mainly funded by central government of China. From April 2011 to May 2014, more than six hundred and forty participants from twelve provinces of the Mainland China received the participatory trainings.

3. EVALUATION METHODS

This study focuses on an analysis of the various evaluation methods used to gauge participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the training. Triangulation, consisting of questionnaire surveys, energy charts and participatory evaluation, was used to achieve this purpose.

Questionnaire surveys were filled out by participants before and/or after the trainings to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate participants’ general satisfaction with the trainings, opinion change on gender issues and confidence to apply the skills learned from the trainings.

The energy chart was drawn by coach to track participants’ energy during different training sections (See Picture 5 below). By reading the energy chart, facilitators could know which sections had high participation and which ones had low participation. It is a tool to help facilitators analyze training effectiveness and adjust training rhythm.

Participatory evaluation usually consists of two parts. The first part is called “One Person One Sentence”. At the end of every training, facilitators invited all participants to stand up, holding hands one by one in a circle, so that everyone could see other people’s faces. Every participant had an opportunity to speak his/her comments on the training no matter his/her position level, gender, or whether he/she was active in the training or not. Even though facilitators already gave special notice on encouraging those introverted and/or junior level
participants to express their opinions during the training, “One Person One Sentence” was considered a good chance after the training to empower participants while evaluating the training effectiveness. In the second part of participatory evaluation process, the training was generally broken down into six or seven sections. Every participant got opportunity to anonymously express his/her general judgment about the training by drawing evaluation pictures (see Pictures 6 and 7 below).

4. RESULTS

The analysis of these various means of gathering information suggests the participatory trainings received very positive feedback from participants across the country, and across
professional fields. For example, 89.3% of participants indicated they were “very satisfied” with the trainings, and 10.3% of participants indicated they were “satisfied” with the trainings.

Moreover, analysis of participants’ evaluations suggest this type of participatory training triggered participants’ passion to join gender issues discussion and reflection, and improved those policy makers’ engagements in conflicts mediation and domestic violence prevention with a gender equality perspective. For example, 62.5% of participants mentioned that "Domestic violence intervention with the perspective of gender” was the most impressive part of the training, and 87.5% of participants indicated they totally agreed that "the gender mainstream should be applied in mediation".

The participatory trainings also had significant effectiveness on changing participants’ opinions regarding to gender issues. Before the trainings, 85% of participants thought domestic violence cases could be mediated, an belief considered incorrect and intolerable in the Global North, in that common knowledge dictates that no type of domestic violence can be tolerated. In other words, if domestic violence occurs, the approach should be to firstly seek legal help to stop the violence and punish the perpetrators by laws, not to mediate. After the trainings, only 47% of participants thought domestic violence could be mediated. The participants who had inappropriate opinions concerning how to handle domestic violence cases had decreased 38%. Another consensus is that no excuse can justify domestic violence behavior, thus the victims of domestic violence should not take any responsibility for the violence they suffered. However, 36% of participants thought that “domestic violence victims should be held responsible for their situation” before the trainings. After the trainings, this percentage decreased to 22%.

Regarding participants’ perceptions of “the most inspired part of the training,” the evaluation results which have been coded include:

- The concept of "equality" and "democracy."
- Mediator's equal position with clients.
- The importance of empowerment.
- The difference between mediation and arbitration.
- Multi-agencies cooperation for women.
- The importance of team work for participatory trainings.
- Participatory training method is helpful for team work and team trust.

In order to better conduct future trainings, participants were invited to give their suggestions to improve the training. There are three points mentioned by most participants. First of all, they hoped to extend the training time for more practice and participants' exchange. Though two-day or three-day training for only one theme is already longer than most of governmental trainings, participants had a big passion for the participatory training and looked forward to more practice of the skills they learned from the participatory trainings. Secondly, participants would like to receive follow-up trainings to enhance the skills they learned and to get guidance when they had questions. Thirdly, the participants hope that more front-line officials could have opportunities to accept participatory trainings. Because of complicated limitations, each local agency only had one to three representatives who had opportunities to attend the participatory trainings.
5. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Since the trainings were conducted without an immediate focus on analyzing their effectiveness, the collection of evaluation data was not always consistent across training events. As such, not all of the data have been presented here. As such, this study serves as a snapshot of the effectiveness of participatory training in governmental setting, particularly in China. Further research should focus more extensively on more statistical analyses of such training.

6. CONCLUSION

This study offers a glimpse of the power of participatory training to changing the hearts and minds of government officials in China and promoting gender equality in legal practice. Participatory training combined with appropriate scope of governmental officials’ duties is an effective advocacy approach to encourage Chinese governmental officials in building a vibrant civil society in which gender equality is an important focus.

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