



EMERGING EVIDENCE

EXPLORATORY REVIEW ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INDIA



Women take a driving safety class at Azad Foundation, an AJWS grantee in Delhi that trains low-income women to work as taxi drivers. While Azad Foundation participated in the research study described in this publication, this photo was not taken as part of the research. *Photo: Jonathan Torgovnik.*

BACKGROUND

In response to the need for an employable, more highly skilled workforce, the Indian government has set up skill-training institutions across the country. In addition, several non-government organizations have emerged in India in the last two decades to provide their own skill-training programs. However, even with the increased availability of education and skill training, women in India still encounter more barriers to employment—such as limited access to existing and emerging opportunities, limited mobility, restrictive social norms and hiring bias—than men do.

RESEARCH GOALS

1. Briefly review current opportunities for skill development in India for girls and women living in disadvantaged communities
2. Gauge the impact of training and subsequent employment on the lives, choices and empowerment possibilities of the girls and women

METHODOLOGY

- **Literature review** of employment, education and skill training and their impact on women’s employment or livelihoods, choices in life and empowerment in India

- **Short-term observation** of skill-training initiatives in India, including government programs and a three-day workshop organized by the Azad Foundation on non-traditional livelihoods in April 2016
- **Informal interviews and focus group discussions** with organizers, trainers and trainees from eight organizations and institutions and with experts who have extensive experience in and knowledge of skill training, education and employment both in India and globally
- **Participant summary:** 41 organizer/trainer/trainee interviews, 10 group discussions with 63 women in total, 19 expert interviews = 123 participants in five Indian states

HIGHLIGHTED FINDINGS

RANGE OF PROGRAM OFFERINGS

- The report provides a detailed description of a range of skill-training programs for women and youth run by the government and by private groups. They include several innovative programs that combine training on hard skills (technical skills relevant to specific jobs), soft skills (social skills that increase employability) and life skills (skills needed for women to increase their power and challenge restrictive gender roles).

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Emerging Evidence is a series of short summaries from research supported by American Jewish World Service (AJWS) as part of our strategy to end early and child marriage in India.

The AJWS-commissioned study described here, “An exploratory review of skill-building initiatives in India and their relation to women’s and girls’ empowerment,” is by Sujata Gothoskar, a Mumbai-based researcher and activist in the Indian labor and women’s rights movements.

SKILL TRAINING AND EMPOWERMENT

- Women experience personal empowerment to varying degrees because of skill-training opportunities. They report gaining the confidence and/or ability to:
 - Increase their earnings
 - Insist on participation in decisions regarding their life choices—such as whether, when and whom to marry
 - Negotiate for further skill training or expanded mobility
 - See their lives in the context of influential social structures, such as sexism
- Employment and income create more powerful roles for women in their families and give them leverage to articulate their desires and act on their aspirations.

IMPLEMENTING SKILL INITIATIVES: CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Skill initiatives alone are not sufficient to improve working conditions or empower youth. Structures like class, caste, gender, sexuality, sexual identity and the rural-urban divide heavily influence, if not determine, individuals' livelihood options. Additionally, poor quality of education remains a major roadblock to advancing in the workforce.
- Strong societal pressure continues to keep women from employment. Young women who train as electricians, plumbers or repair technicians often have difficulty finding jobs, as both employers and consumers reportedly prefer men in traditionally masculine trades.
- Even when offered a range of courses, girls and women often select shorter trainings in more traditional fields like baking and tailoring; their career decisions are constrained, at least in part, by household duties and social expectations for the kinds of work women should pursue.
- Training in general life skills, in addition to more technical skills, offers the potential for greater positive impact on the lives of women and girls—but participants may view this as unnecessary if the curriculum is not meaningfully integrated and relevant to their lives.

- Recent economic growth in India—as well as other countries around the globe—has not generated sufficient growth and diversification of jobs. There is a limit to how much labor the Indian economy can absorb and therefore a limit to opportunities for employment.
- Women's work has historically been devalued and is often unpaid. Many women work in the informal sector in India and lack the formal work agreements that can protect worker rights.

IMPLICATIONS

- Policies to ensure equal remuneration and representation are important complements to skill-building programs. Without these policies, women will continue to be systematically denied employment opportunities.
- More research is needed to examine the changing dreams and aspirations of young women entering the labor market in India and to look at the long-term role of life-skills training in the process of empowering women and girls. These trainings may have implications for reducing early and child marriage, given their potential to increase women's decision-making about their lives and their ability to negotiate for themselves.
- Trades that have traditionally excluded women should be targeted for pilot projects that not only train women, but link them to employment in that field. Given the complexity of matching skill-training opportunities with actual employment, it is necessary to invest in institutions and organizations that can innovate and explore new avenues in the labor market.

“Now that I earn so much, he [my father] does not say anything. I am not sure whether I want to get married or not. But I am sure I want to make something of my life.” — Research Participant

The full research report is available at ajws.org/SkillsResearch

Learn more about AJWS's research on early and child marriage at ajws.org/research or by contacting **Jacqueline Hart, Ph.D., AJWS's Vice President for Strategic Learning, Research and Evaluation**, at jhart@ajws.org.

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