

A conversation with Breakthrough India, April 16, 2018

Participants

- Sohini Bhattacharya – CEO & President, Breakthrough India
- Dr. Leena Sushant – Director of Research, Breakthrough India
- Chelsea Tabart – Research Analyst, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Breakthrough India.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Ms. Bhattacharya and Dr. Sushant of Breakthrough India to learn about Breakthrough India's work. Conversation topics included Breakthrough India's randomized controlled trial (RCT) and its plans for future follow-up.

Overview of Breakthrough India's work

Breakthrough is a human rights organization based in India that works to change gender norms around violence against women and girls and focuses on preventing sex-selective abortion, domestic violence, early marriage, and sexual harassment. Breakthrough uses a mixture of multimedia campaigns, trainings in schools and neighbourhoods, and community engagement to advance this goal. It focuses extensively on young people through trainings that help them to develop a stronger identity, the confidence to make their own life decisions, and a sense of personal accountability to prevent violence and discrimination against women and girls. In the short term, this allows girls to complete at least secondary education and delay the age of marriage.

Randomized controlled trial

From 2013-2017, academics from the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) conducted an RCT on the impact of Breakthrough's school-based gender sensitization program in Haryana state, where the 2011 census indicated that the sex ratio is 830 girls for every 1000 boys, the most skewed child sex ratio in India. The RCT was conducted in 314 schools across four districts, with seventh and eighth graders in 150 randomly selected schools receiving the two-and-a-half year intervention. Researchers surveyed over 14,000 students and found statistically significant improvements in both gender attitudes and gender behaviors among children who participated in the intervention. Participants were in grades nine and ten during final data collection.

The objectives were to see whether the intervention changed gender attitudes and aspirations among both boys and girls, and if so, whether the changed attitude translated into changed behavior and whether it had the same impact on both boys and girls. The endline showed significant increases in both the gender attitude index and the gender behavior index among boys and girls, but it did not find a robust change in the aspiration index.

The ultimate aim of Breakthrough's program is to improve agency and self-empowerment for girls so that they can complete school, delay marriage, make choices around careers and marriage, and live a life free from violence and discrimination. In partnership with J-PAL, Breakthrough further plans to conduct a follow-up survey to measure the program's long-term impact on participants' (or spouses' in the case of male participants) education, labor market, and marriage and reproductive outcomes in 2022, five years after final data collection.

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