



CORRUPTION THROUGH A GENDERED LENS

ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Corruption Through a Gendered Lens

Asia and the Pacific

The research would not have been possible without the involvement and support of Transparency International chapters in Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary.....	2	Sustaining an unequal status quo.....	17
Key themes in the Focus Group Discussions (FCD).....	2	Intersectionality	18
Introduction	4	Gendered treatment from public officials and experiences of corruption	19
How gender is thought to impact experiences of corruption.....	6	Treatment by public officials	19
Gender norms and experiences of corruption.....	6	Gendered dynamics underpinning vulnerability to bribery and sextortion	20
Gender, intersectional inequalities and the impacts of corruption	7	Intersectionality and experiences with corruption vulnerability to bribery and sextortion	22
Gender and Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) responses in Asia and Pacific: Key findings.....	8	Gendered norms and sextortion	22
Perceptions of corruption and anti-corruption	9	Gendered dynamics in reporting and refusing to engage in corruption	23
Experiences with public services.....	9	Gendered awareness around accountability rights and institutions.....	24
Sextortion	12	Policy recommendations and concluding thoughts	25
Awareness and exercising rights to information in Asia.....	13	For governments	26
Methodology for Focus Group Discussions	14	For anti-corruption-focused policy actors and civil society groups	26
Participants	15	For Researchers.....	27
Participation in the Focus Group Discussions	15	For All Working to Stop Gendered Corruption	28
Recognition of limitations	15	Endnotes.....	29
Gender norms and expectations of women.....	16		
Pressure felt due to gender norms	16		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents findings from a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants from four Asian and Pacific countries: Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Each discussion sought to deepen understanding of key findings from analyses of Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) Asia and Pacific data that examined the relationship between gender and attitudes to and experiences with corruption. More broadly, the discussions explored gender norms, inequality and how gender shapes peoples' experiences with public officials. The findings suggest that gender inequality is exacerbated by corruption and frustrates anti-corruption efforts. They indicate that corruption cannot be effectively controlled in these regions without addressing the ways in which it is gendered.

Key themes in the Focus Group Discussions

Gender norms. Entrenched gender norms support male dominance and leadership and encourage women to be socially passive and take on domestic/ caretaking roles. These gender norms promote gender inequality more broadly, and underscore peoples' experiences with public officials.

Corruption patterns. Women have unique sources of vulnerability to corruption and are more likely to be victims of sextortion. Sextortion involves "an implicit or explicit request to an individual to engage in any kind of unwanted sexual activity in exchange for exercising power entrusted to someone occupying a position of authority".¹ Women face different and potentially more pressure to pay bribes or engage in sextortion, especially on behalf of those they care for. Given prominent gender stereotypes, public officials likely view women as an "easier target".

Intersectional experiences. Marginalised people belong to social groups that are systemically disadvantaged on the basis of race, class, age, ethnicity, religion, physical ability, gender identification, sexual

orientation and/or another defining group feature. An intersectional lens focuses on how marginalised people can be discriminated against or disadvantaged due to more than one of these features of marginalisation. Intersectional factors such as being a woman and having a disability, or being poor, living in a rural area, working as a sex worker and/or being part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) community were discussed in FGDs as uniquely shaping experiences with public officials and corruption. Some groups of marginalised women are disproportionately targeted with sextortion advances and less likely to challenge or report requests to engage in corruption.

Reporting corruption. Gender norms shape willingness to report corruption. Men are often socialised to be confrontational and women to be passive. Consequently, men are probably more comfortable reporting corruption. Caretaking responsibilities can undermine reporting; women may be reluctant to report out of a fear that doing so would jeopardise access to services for their family in the future.

Refusing to engage in corruption. For very similar reasons, gender norms also shape refusal to engage in corruption. Refusing to engage in corruption can involve challenging public officials, which is a trait that is generally more valued in men than women. Again, women shouldering caretaking responsibilities may fear that refusing to engage in corruption will undermine their family's access to services.

Awareness of accountability rights and institutions. Analyses of GCB Asia shows women are less likely aware of their right to request information from public institutions, and of their country's anti-corruption commission. Reflecting on these findings, the FGDs

suggested that women, who are busy with caretaking responsibilities, tend to have less time to seek out this kind of information. In contrast, men are more likely to prioritise such matters, given the higher social expectations of them to do so. Broader systems of inequality likely matter too. For example, the FGDs noted that rural women are disproportionately illiterate, and as a result less likely aware of their rights to request information and to demand accountability.

Unique barriers in reporting sextortion. According to the FGDs, sextortion is often not reported because it is very difficult to prove, victims are fearful of being victimised by reporting authorities, and there is shame and stigma surrounding victimisation. Victims may not be aware that they can report sextortion as a form of bribery or corruption.

Sextortion reporting in surveys. Though research on sextortion makes clear that women are disproportionately targeted, analyses of GCB Asia and Pacific data showed that more men than women report that they have experienced or know someone who has experienced sextortion. Reflecting on these findings, several FGD participants suggested that it is more common for men to discuss sex socially than for women. As a result, men may have more awareness about sextortion and/or be more comfortable discussing it with a survey enumerator.

Several lessons emerged from the study findings that can help those working to control corruption and eliminate gender inequality in Asia and the Pacific.

The results suggest that governments should:

- + Create gender-sensitive corruption reporting mechanisms that are safe and accessible to all groups of women.
- + Invest in “sextortion-sensitive” reporting responses and resources for victims so that female victims of sextortion receive clear guidance on reporting, including the costs involved, and reporting prompts support from a range of services that sexual abuse survivors need.
- + Consider promoting gender balance among personnel in sectors and activities that are vulnerable to sextortion.
- + Develop legal frameworks for sextortion to enable the prosecution of cases and provide officials with bespoke training on sextortion.

Anti-corruption policy and civil society actors should:

- + Empower women – and marginalised women in particular – in anti-corruption and other governance systems. This should contribute to the creation of solutions that are sensitive to the lived experiences of women.
- + Consider developing strategies to raise awareness on sextortion, challenge preconceived gender stereotypes and norms among the public and public officials, and inform people of their rights to services, access to information and corruption reporting channels. Messaging must be carefully designed and tested before it is deployed. For sextortion, policy actors should learn from lessons on raising awareness about gender-based violence.
- + Consider contextual and intersectional factors when gender is mainstreamed into anti-corruption efforts. Effective gender mainstreaming requires the consideration of gender at all policy stages of an anti-corruption intervention. This will probably vary across these regions as there are differences in the entrenchment of gender norms and in the intersectional inequalities that are experienced. Policies need to be designed to address specific concerns in each country to be contextually appropriate.
- + Work closely with gender-focused civil society organisations that seek to challenge the gender norms that shape corruption experiences. Given that changing social norms is an intractably complex task, a growing coalition will be key.

For researchers:

- + Further research is needed into gender and corruption in Asia and the Pacific. This is important to develop country-specific initiatives. Research should build on the methodology of this report and address its limitations where possible.
- + Those who administer corruption surveys should learn from the evolution of research on other sensitive topics. They should test whether strategies used in these sensitive areas could be applied to measure and examine more accurately women’s experiences with corruption and sextortion.
- + More research on sextortion is needed, as it is relatively scarce. Research should focus on the impacts of sextortion on victims and society, sector-specific sextortion patterns, and what factors facilitate successful prosecution.

INTRODUCTION

It is evident that corruption hinders developmental progress and exacerbates inequalities, and its harmful effects disproportionately impact the lives of the world's most vulnerable.^{2,3}

Marginalised women – women belonging to social groups that are systemically disadvantaged – are recognised as being uniquely vulnerable to corruption, and disproportionately impacted by the negative impacts of it.⁴ The interplay between gender inequality and corruption is significant in Asia and the Pacific. Corruption levels and gender inequality remain stubbornly high across many countries in these regions. As this report makes clear, there are reasons to believe that gender inequality is not only exacerbated by corruption, but also frustrates anti-corruption efforts.

Broader recognition of the gendered nature of corruption's harm has encouraged many calls for anti-corruption approaches to become more sensitive to the experiences that women have with corruption.⁵ This report recommends enhancing gender sensitivity in Asia and the Pacific. The mainstreaming of gender into anti-corruption programming should lead to greater effectiveness generally and specifically in the types and patterns of corruption that disproportionately impact women. However, such efforts require a clear understanding of how experiences of corruption are gendered in specific contexts.



Merkle and Kubbe⁶ observed that research on gender and corruption has expanded over the last two decades but only recently started to focus on gendered impacts of and experiences with corruption. These issues have been addressed broadly, with a discussion of the gendered nature of corruption for women across contexts.⁷ While they are important for highlighting shared experiences, such examinations risk masking ways in which gender norms shape the experience of corruption in specific settings. Moreover, research on gender and corruption to date has primarily been based on a binary understanding of gender. It is blind to the impact of how intersectional factors shape women's vulnerability to corruption. Intersectional factors like race, class, age, ethnicity, religion and physical ability very likely make certain groups of women uniquely vulnerable to corruption. Consequently, this persistent gap in research remains a jarring omission.⁸ For Asia and the Pacific, there have been only a couple of very recent examinations of gendered experiences with corruption. These have been valuable for uncovering how gender shapes vulnerabilities to and experiences with corruption in the countries of Myanmar and the Solomon Islands.⁹

This report builds on the nascent regional attention by using an explicitly comparative lens. It draws on two sources of data. First, it summarises key findings from analyses of Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) in Asia and the Pacific that explore how gender is associated with experiences and perceptions in the region.

More substantively, it discusses the findings from a series of ten focus group discussions (FGDs). These gather the views of 139 participants from

four Asian and Pacific countries: Cambodia, Fiji, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. The FGDs further explored gendered attitudes and experiences with public officials in these regions. They focused on gender norms and expectations in the region; ways in which experiences with public officials, corruption and reporting corruption are gendered; beliefs in the causes of sextortion; and the degree to which awareness of sextortion is gendered. Several profound insights emerged from these discussions. Participants made clear connections between the drivers of gender inequality and corruption in their countries. Across countries, the FGDs suggested that many similar gendered dynamics shape vulnerability to corruption and the experiences people have with public officials. Some clear country-specific findings were highlighted, including the ways in which certain groups of women – like rural dwellers, poor people, disabled people and sex workers – are uniquely vulnerable to corruption and often least empowered to demand accountability. These findings further underscore the need to tailor gender mainstreaming in anti-corruption work to specific contexts.

The next section of the report reviews relevant literature. The focus is research that examines how gender impacts the experiences and effects of corruption. Next, key findings of the GCB in Asia and in the Pacific are highlighted. Also discussed are questions raised by stakeholders in response to these findings. These questions inspired some of the inquiries addressed in the FGDs. The report then describes the methodology used to undertake the FGDs and discusses the findings of these discussions. Concluding thoughts centre on policy recommendations and lessons drawn from the analysis.

HOW GENDER IS THOUGHT TO IMPACT EXPERIENCES OF CORRUPTION

According to Kubbe and Merkle, research has only focused recently on the gendered impacts of and experiences with corruption.¹⁰

Previous examinations of gender and corruption have been dominated by the questions of which gender tends to be more corrupt and whether high levels of corruption are associated with gender inequality, in particular with reference to political participation.^{11,12,13,14,15} However, many of these explorations tended to reinforce gender stereotypes. The finding that gender representation was associated with lower levels of some measures of corruption was often interpreted in a way that cast women as an “anti-corruption force”, with assumptions that women are “less selfish, more trustworthy, empathetic, compassionate, charitable, public-spirited or altruistic than men”.¹⁶

In contrast, recent research has sought to explicitly understand how gender norms, which are underpinned by historical events and cultural values and not uniformly entrenched across contexts, shape the experiences people have with public officials, other power holders and corruption.^{17,18,19,20} Such research challenged notions that gendered differences in experiences with corruption are innate to being biologically female or male. It also recognised that the relationship between gender and corruption is contextually dependent. The centrality of gender norms in emerging research has helped the field to start to move from what was almost an exclusive focus “on a binary conception of gender with particular attention to the experiences of women and girls”.²¹ Promisingly, attention is now being paid to how forms of femininity and

masculinity shape experiences with corruption^{22,23} and the unique experiences of transgender and non-binary persons.^{24,25}

Gender norms and experiences of corruption

Gender norms are considered to underpin key differences in the pressures on ordinary people to engage in corruption. According to Hossain et al.,²⁶ due to similar experiences with gender role socialisation, women globally are far more likely to shoulder caretaking responsibilities for the family. As a result, they may feel pressure to engage in corruption on behalf of those they care for.²⁷ Certain gender stereotypes entrenched in some parts of the world encourage women to be socially passive. Because of this, women may be seen as an “easier” target for corruption as they are perceived as less likely to question requests for bribes or report them.²⁸ Indeed, in Asia and the Pacific, similar problematic gender norms have been identified and are said to often support “male dominance, violence and toughness but limit (women and) girls to subservient, domestic and reproductive roles”.²⁹

Additionally, emerging research on sextortion reflects growing recognition that women are also often the “...subjects and objects of different corrupt practices and behaviours”.³⁰ Sextortion involves “an implicit or explicit request to an individual to engage in any kind of unwanted sexual activity in



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exchange for exercising power entrusted to someone occupying a position of authority".³¹ Women are far more likely to be victimised with this form of corruption.³² Transgender and non-binary persons are also probably disproportionately targeted.³³ For this discussion, gender norms are recognised as playing a significant role in cultivating sextortion. For example, norms that encourage sexually aggressive behaviour in men contribute towards perpetration, and norms that encourage chastity and sexual modesty in women contribute towards impunity around the issue.³⁴

Recent research has begun to unpack the ways in which the interplay between gender norms and inequality shape experiences with public officials.^{35,36} Marginalised women belong to social groups that are systemically disadvantaged, on the basis of race, class, age, ethnicity, religion, physical ability and/or another defining feature. Marginalised women are increasingly understood to be impacted disproportionately and uniquely by corruption. To be clear, research on the impact of a woman's unique position in society and corruption is relatively new and incomplete. Most of the focus has been on the experiences of poor women, rather than on any other intersectional experience that might shape vulnerability to corruption and its harms. As research relates to poor women, they are discussed as being

uniquely vulnerable to corruption for a few reasons. They are unable to pay for privately provided services so poorer women are more likely to be dependent on state-provided health and education facilities. This dependence increases the odds of being asked for a bribe from these services.^{37,38} Poor women are considered vulnerable to corruption because they are more likely to be illiterate and unaware of their rights and entitlements³⁹ and they have less bargaining power when confronted with corrupt officials.⁴⁰

Gender, intersectional inequalities and the impacts of corruption

By perpetuating unequal access to power and resources, corruption reinforces social inequality, including gender and intersectional inequalities. The relationship between corruption and gender inequality is significant for Asia and the Pacific, as these regions continue to struggle with bridging gaps between genders across a range of measures. For example, women are estimated to make up most of the poor population in Asia and the Pacific.⁴¹

Indeed, research has shown that women – and marginalised women particularly – are especially vulnerable to the negative impacts of corruption.^{42,43} Corruption harms development prospects and increases the costs associated with basic state-

provided goods and services, on which some groups of marginalised women are disproportionately reliant.⁴⁴ Moreover, as corruption undermines the rule of law, it arguably hinders the extent to which women's rights, and the rights of marginalised people more generally, are ensured and protected.^{45,46,47}

Research has highlighted the ways in which gender inequality manifests itself in direct experiences with the state. When they are unable to pay bribes, women – and especially poorer women – are said to be at a disproportionately higher risk of being exposed to physical abuse and requests for sextortion.^{48,49} As women may be fearful of such exchanges and abuse, they are more likely to go without basic services like healthcare, education or legal support.^{50,51} All of this works to further entrench gender inequality. Given their status as gender-marginalised people, the same may be true for non-binary and transgender people.

It is important to consider the likely impacts of sextortion. As noted above, women are far more likely to suffer the consequences of being victimised. As a form of sexual abuse, many victims of sextortion endure physical and psychological trauma.^{52,53,54} Sextortion can result in sexually transmitted

diseases and early, unwanted pregnancies. Victims can feel great shame, and suffer consequences like being expelled from their school, their home or even their community.⁵⁵ Consequently, victims are often reluctant to report sextortion, which again contributes to impunity for perpetrators.⁵⁶

Increasing attention has been paid to the “gender and corruption nexus” but more work is needed to explore the impact of a range of intersectional experiences. It should be recognised that gender norms and their relationship with corruption are contextually dependent. More research on sextortion is also needed. Given the fear, shame and stigma associated with being a victim of sextortion, it remains intractably difficult to research, measure and systematically record the phenomenon. This is incredibly important as it shapes our understanding of the gendered nature of corruption more broadly. Research will remain incomplete and arguably gender-blind if it does not explicitly consider the fact that women are disproportionately likely to be forced to pay for a bribe with a sexual act and are unlikely to report such victimisation to officials or survey enumerators.^{57,58} This latter issue is considered in more detail in the next section, which discusses how and to what extent survey data sheds light on the gendered nature of corruption.



GENDER AND GCB RESPONSES IN ASIA AND PACIFIC: KEY FINDINGS

Transparency International's GCB provides the most comprehensive survey data available to examine reported experiences and attitudes towards corruption and anti-corruption.

Its most recent Asia wave was conducted between March 2019 and September 2020. In total, 19,416 adults took part across 17 countries. Similarly, Transparency International conducted its first ever Pacific wave of the GCB from February to March 2021. In the Pacific, 10 countries were surveyed with 6,000 adults taking part.⁵⁹ The results of both waves have been analysed to examine whether and how gender is associated with attitudes of and experiences with corruption and anti-corruption.^{60,61} Key findings from these analyses are summarised in this section. The FGDs further explore some of these key findings.

Perceptions of corruption and anti-corruption

Analyses of GCB data suggest that perceptions of corruption and anti-corruption efforts in the region are largely not gendered: men and women have strikingly similar pessimistic outlooks. Most of the people surveyed in these regions believed that their government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves and that corruption is a major problem in their government. In Asia, more than a third of men and women believe that corruption is on the rise, while a majority of respondents in the Pacific held this view. The same percentage of women and men disagreed that the government considers the views of people like them in decision-making (33 per cent in Asia and just 14 per cent in

the Pacific). Finally, close to a third of women and men in both regions believe the government is doing badly at fighting corruption and do not agree that ordinary people can make a difference in this fight.^{62,63}

Experiences with public services

Data from the GCB makes clear that requests for bribes are common for men and women in the region. In Asia, nearly one in five people who used a public service in the year prior to the survey reported paying a bribe. In the Pacific, the figure was one in three. Quantitative analyses suggest that the likelihood of paying a bribe for most services is not associated with being a woman. As an exception, there is a suggestion of gendered bribery patterns in the GCB Asia data, where women were found to be disproportionately more likely to pay a bribe when they seek official documents. Women living in rural areas in Asia were found to be more vulnerable to paying bribes for public health services than all men and urban women.

In the Pacific, willingness to report bribery was not associated with gender. A similar analysis was not conducted with GCB Asia data. In the Pacific, only one in eight respondents who paid a bribe in the previous twelve months said that they reported it to the authorities. In Asia, only one in fourteen said they reported the bribe.

While certainly instructive, the results are not consistent with the impressions given by the broader literature on corruption and gender. The findings largely suggest that women and men are similarly vulnerable to requests for bribes in the region. However, as reviewed above, others have suggested that women are uniquely vulnerable to requests for bribes from health and education sectors in particular.^{64,65} Furthermore, women's relatively marginalised status in society means they may be seen as an "easy target" for corruption more generally.

In relation to the bribery rates estimated from GCB data, some have argued that surveys like the GCB may inadvertently underestimate women's vulnerability to corruption, as explained in more detail in boxes 1 and 2. Moreover, given their short form, surveys are naturally limited in their ability to illuminate the extent to which treatment from public officials and with corruption is indeed gendered. These observations inspired a focus in the FGDs on the following questions: To what extent are women treated differently in such interactions and how? How are the experiences of being asked for a bribe, refusing a bribe or reporting a bribe different for women?

Photo: PACAF/Flickr



Hidden experiences with sextortion

Household level surveys are innately limited in their ability to capture the extent to which bribery is gendered. This is because women are disproportionately asked for bribes in the form of sexual favours (sextortion). Given the fear, shame and stigma associated with victimisation, victims are probably reluctant to report their experiences to a stranger conducting a survey, especially if the survey enumerator is a man. Additionally, awareness of sextortion is quite low globally. Victims may not identify sextortion as a form of bribery or corruption. Given the psychological coercion often involved in sextortion, victims may not identify their own experiences with the label of sextortion, even if they are aware of the phenomenon. For these reasons, sextortion largely remains hidden in statistical accounts of corruption, which means that the extent to which corruption is gendered is underestimated.

Gendered sensitivity bias

Emerging research suggests that women may be more reluctant to admit to a survey enumerator that they have paid a bribe when they are asked directly. Agerberg⁶⁶ compared estimated bribery rates in Romania from a survey that asked respondents directly about paying a bribe, as the GCB does, and from the results of a list experiment. A list experiment is a methodology used to study sensitive issues like drug abuse, cheating and vote buying. The respondent is not asked to directly disclose information about the sensitive item (in this case bribery). Instead, they indicate how many items in a list apply to them. Bribery estimates are generated by comparing the mean number of items indicated by two randomly selected groups, with only one group whose respective list includes the item of paying a bribe to a public service. The bribery rate is then estimated by comparing the mean number of items that each group reported.

Agerberg⁶⁷ estimates that the “list experiment bribery rate” among women is three times as high as the rate estimated from using a direct survey question. This supports the notion that women in his study were indeed more reluctant to report to a survey enumerator that they had paid a bribe when they were asked directly. It is not clear how generalisable these findings are beyond the study that was conducted. However, if indicative of broader trends, these findings would mean that surveys that directly ask about experiences with bribery seriously underestimate the extent to which women are victims of bribery. This is not a minor concern: all cross-national surveys that attempt to measure bribery rates (including the GCB) follow current international best practice, which advises that surveys ask about experiences of bribery directly.⁶⁸

Sextortion

The GCB also asks about sextortion. As it is recognises that victims are very likely reluctant to report an experience with sextortion to a survey enumerator, the GCB does not ask respondents directly about their personal experiences. Instead it asks: *“Thinking about your own experience or experiences had by people you know, how often, if at all, has a public official implied either openly or suggestively to either yourself or someone you know, that they will grant a government benefit in exchange for sexual favours?”* One in nine people in Asia and, startlingly, over a quarter in the Pacific reported that they have experienced sextortion or know someone who has. Table 1 shows that there are very large variations across countries in the two regions.

Table 1: Highest and lowest sextortion rates across Asia and the Pacific

	Asia	Pacific
Lowest	Japan: 2% Myanmar: 3% South Korea: 3%	Tonga: 5% Samoa: 10% Fiji: 11%
Highest	Thailand: 15% Indonesia: 12% India: 10%	PNG : 51% FSM : 46% Solomon Islands: 33%

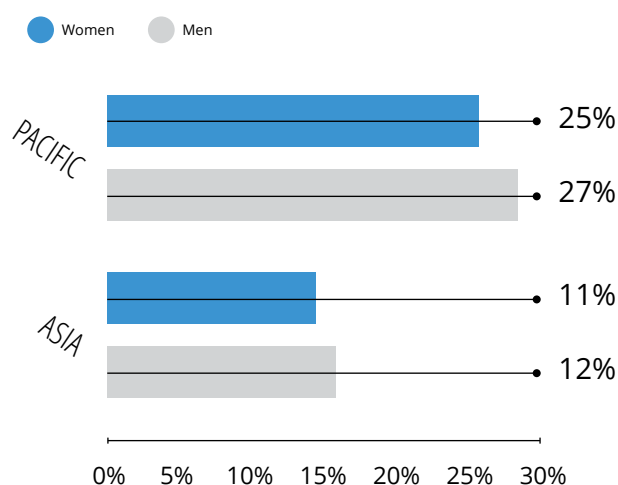
Source: GCB 2020 of 15 countries in Asia (N: 16,637); GCB 2022 of 8 countries in the Pacific (N: 5,130). Note: highest and lowest three countries in each region based on the percentage of people who have experienced sextortion or know someone who has. Abbreviations: Papua New Guinea (PNG), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

The question wording recognises the sensitivity of the topic but remains limited in its ability to gauge sextortion rates accurately or point to who in society is most vulnerable. This is because it is not clear whether a respondent who answers in the affirmative is discussing their own or someone else’s experience. In addition, various respondents in the same social network could report the same sextortion case. This may help explain why the reported rates are very high for several countries in the Pacific (Figure 1), where relatively small populations and dense social networks give the impression that “everybody knows everybody”. It may be the case, for instance, that people report news coverage of a sextortion case as “someone they know” who has experienced sextortion.

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Notwithstanding these limitations, it is puzzling that in Asia and the Pacific slightly more men than women report that they have experienced or know someone who has experienced sextortion (Figure 1).⁶⁹ Evidence shows that men, transgender and gender non-conforming people are impacted by sextortion. However, it is clear that women are overwhelmingly disproportionately targeted.⁷⁰ Why is it that men report experiencing or knowing someone who has experienced sextortion at higher rates than women in Asia and the Pacific?

Figure 1. Gender differences in responses to the sextortion experience question



Source: GCB 2020 of 15 countries in Asia (N: 16,637), GCB 2022 of 8 countries in the Pacific (N: 5,130).

One possibility is that men may be more comfortable discussing sextortion with survey enumerators than women, and so report knowledge of it more often. Relatedly, men may somehow have higher rates of awareness about the issue, even though they are not as likely to be victimised. To make sense of these statistical trends, the FGDs discussed this issue.

Awareness and exercising rights to information in Asia

Finally, in the GCB Asia survey, to understand women's depth of knowledge about recourse in corruption cases, respondents were asked whether they were aware of their right to request information from the government, whether they had contacted a public body to request information, and whether they knew much about the country's anti-corruption commission (ACC). Analogous questions were not asked in the Pacific. In this case, analyses of responses revealed clear gendered patterns. They indicate that women in Asia are less likely to be aware of their right to request information from public institutions. Perhaps, as a result, women are less likely to exercise this right. Finally, women were less aware of their country's anti-corruption commission. On this point, 64 per cent of women reported knowing nothing about their country's ACC.

Table 2: Highest and lowest rates of female awareness of the right to request information

Highest	Mongolia: 64%
	Bangladesh: 60%
	Philippines: 58%
Lowest	China: 21%
	Thailand: 21%
	Cambodia: 28%

Once again, country-level statistics reveal considerable variations in awareness levels among women across the region. Table 2 shows that only 21 per cent of women in China and Thailand report being aware of their right to request information from public institutions, while the rate is 64 per cent for women in Mongolia. Understanding the gendered barriers to awareness of these issues was explored in the FGDs.

In summary, the analyses of GCB data in Asia and the Pacific largely suggest that gender is not very influential in shaping attitudes about corruption or the likelihood of paying a bribe for most services in these regions. In GCB Asia data, awareness of anti-corruption institutions and awareness of the right to request information is associated with gender. However, women are less likely to be aware of both and less likely to exercise their right to request information. These findings are seemingly at odds with emerging research that has made clear that experiences with corruption are indeed shaped by gender norms. Given its short form, survey data is limited in its ability to answer the following questions. How do gender norms shape the way public officials treat ordinary people in Asia and the Pacific? How, if at all, are the experiences of being asked for a bribe, refusing a bribe or reporting a bribe different for women and other marginalised people? Finally, the analyses of GCB data are puzzling in relation to reporting experiences of sextortion to survey enumerators. Why is it that more men reported experiencing or knowing someone who experienced sextortion than women? Finally, what role do gender norms play in facilitating or frustrating efforts to measure who in society is most vulnerable to sextortion? These and other related questions were explored in our FGDs.

Source: GCB 2020 of 15 countries in Asia (N: 16,637), GCB 2022 of 8 countries in the Pacific (N: 5,130). Note: highest and lowest three countries in each region based on the percentage of women with awareness of their right to request official information.

METHODOLOGY FOR FOCUS GROUPS

In total, ten FGDs were held across Cambodia (2), Fiji (4), Indonesia (2) and Sri Lanka (2). A total of 139 participants attended these discussions.

Not all participants identified as male or female, but most did. There was a near even split in male- and female-identifying participants. The mean number of participants for each focus group is 14 and the median is 10.⁷¹

Each focus group was facilitated by a moderator with the assistance of a co-moderator from the national Transparency International chapter, many of whom had previous experiences in moderating FGDs. All moderators used a moderation guide,

Table 3: Focus group details

Country	Date	Location	Composition
Cambodia (2)	26 June 2023	Phnom Penh	Women
	29 June 2023		Men
Fiji (4)	27 June 2023	Suva	Women
	28 June 2023		Men
	29 June 2023		LGBTQI & people living with disabilities
	3 July 2023		Women
Indonesia (2)	5 July 2023	Jakarta	Women
	5 July 2023		Men
Sri Lanka (2)	11 July 2023	Jaffna	Women/transgender people
	20 July 2023	Matara	Men

which worked as a “rough script” to ensure that the FGDs addressed the same core questions and topics. These included:

the social status and social expectations of women

- + the extent to which women and men are treated differently by public officials, including in their experiences of being asked for or having to pay a bribe and in reporting bribery
- + the gendered experience of sextortion and the extent to which awareness of sextortion is gendered

- + the awareness women have of, and their tendency to invoke, their right to request information from public institutions

Moderators were encouraged to facilitate free discussion and to help participants to explore connections, provide personal experiences and not feel too constrained by the “script”. Co-moderators focused on taking notes. All FGDs were conducted in the dominant language associated with their respective location.

Participants

Considering the sensitive nature of the topics discussed, and in an effort to create a safe space where participants would feel open to share their thoughts freely, the FGDs were largely held separately for male and female participants. In Fiji, where four FGDs were held, an effort was made to gather participants of similar ages. Each Transparency International chapter recruited the participants for their respective FGDs. This involved reaching out to personal and professional networks. Many of the FGD participants work for a variety of civil society organisations, focused on a wide range of topics like women's rights, human rights, gender-based violence, governance and service delivery. Government employees and officials participated in several focus groups, along with journalists, researchers, teachers, students and unemployed people. All participants had completed college and many had a university education.

Participation in the Focus Group Discussions

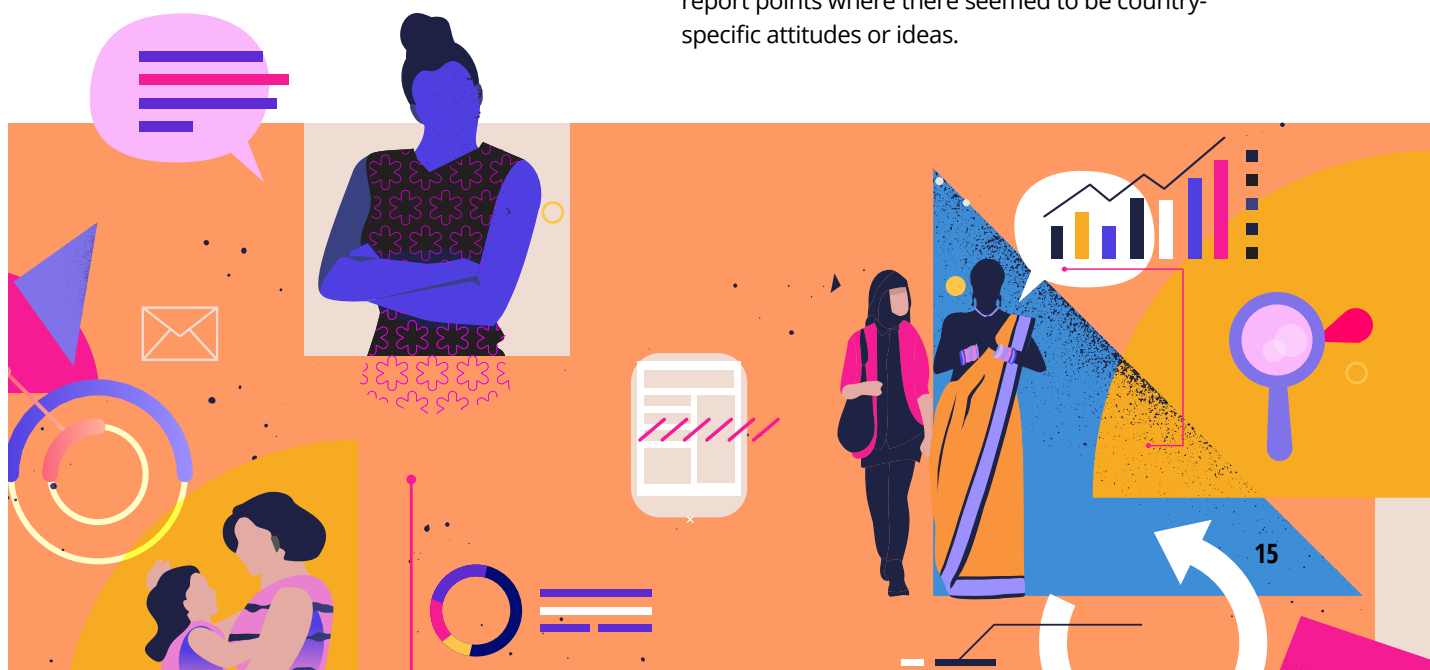
Prior to the FGDs, all participants were given an information sheet that described the project as aiming to "contextualise and further explore gendered attitudes and experiences with public officials". The main topics of discussion were outlined. Respondents were told that their input would remain confidential, and that they did not have to answer questions that they were uncomfortable with and could leave at any time. All respondents signed a consent form, confirming that they had read the information sheet and were participating voluntarily. Only a small minority of participants remained silent during parts of some of the FGDs; most appeared to speak freely and enthusiastically. None left early.

Recognition of limitations

FGDs are an important research method for exploring commonly held attitudes and perceptions. However, like all research methods, they have considerable limitations. FGDs can only accommodate a relatively small number of participants. Consequently, they are not designed to measure generalisable attitudes and beliefs. As most of our respondents had some higher education, the findings should not be seen as representative of their country's populations, much less in the wider regions. Future research could build on this project by facilitating FGDs with different segments of the population.

Some may have felt social pressure during the FGD, which could have hampered their willingness to share. Given the topic's sensitivity, this may have been the case, especially during the discussion about sextortion. To be clear, none of our FGD questions asked about personal experiences with sextortion. All participants in all but one of our FGDs seemed comfortable discussing this topic. As the exception, in the FGD among women in Cambodia, the co-moderator reported that participants' body language suggested that a minority may have been uncomfortable during parts of the discussion on sextortion. Notably, there was broad agreement in both FGDs in Cambodia that women are generally less comfortable discussing sex socially.

Finally, any research report based on FGD data is naturally limited in its ability to reflect all the views voiced. For this reason, the report largely emphasises points on which there was broad agreement within FGDs related to the aims of this study. Indeed, given the range of countries where FGDs were held, each with very different economic, political and cultural characteristics, it is notable that many discussions, across countries, emphasised the same or very similar themes. Wherever present, an effort was made to report points where there seemed to be country-specific attitudes or ideas.



GENDER NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS OF WOMEN

The literature reviewed in Section 2 makes it clear that gender norms underpin gendered experiences with public institutions and broader patterns of gender inequality.

Given their importance, the FGDs first explored participants' beliefs about how gender norms work in their own countries to shape social status and people's expectations.

Pressure felt due to gender norms

Across FGDs, participants broadly agreed that there remains strong pressure for women to be the primary caretaker in the household, and to do most

or all housework and cooking, while men are more likely expected to refrain from such duties. Gender norms around femininity, which are seemingly present in all four countries, were described as pressuring women to act "politely", to be socially reserved and not to express strong opinions. In contrast, men face pressure to take on leadership roles and to be outspoken. These reflections are consistent with the observations of others regarding dominant norms in the region, as noted in Section 2.



There was broad agreement among participants in Indonesian, Cambodian and Fijian focus groups that gender norms and expectations have changed somewhat or are beginning to change for some women. In a focus group conducted with young women in Fiji, for example, it was observed that women are far more likely to find employment outside of the household than in the past. This has shifted social expectations for some women. However, all agreed that, generally, women's status in society still lags behind that of men.

Sustaining an unequal status quo

Consistent with the broader literature, most of the participants in the FGDs agreed that gender norms in their country contribute towards sustaining a status quo that leaves many women less comfortable with and having less time and energy to meaningfully contribute to policy processes, and disadvantaged in their employment opportunities.

In society, women are not expected to be vocal. Women are often left out of substantial discussion, including in policy-making processes. Even when injustice happens to women, it is very difficult for women to stand up and speak up without being blamed.

Female participant (Indonesia)

Career growths for women are hindered by household chores or family burdens. Some women have to quit their jobs after delivering babies so that they can take care of the newborns.

Female participant (Cambodia)

Several of the FGDs concluded that gender norms sustain the dominance of men in leading roles in politics, government, NGOs and the private sector. These were thought to contribute to gender inequality, more broadly, as women remain disproportionately underrepresented and have supporting roles in such institutions.

A lot of people still think that women cannot be leaders, women cannot be the breadwinner. Even unmarried women must take care of the family.

Female participant (Indonesia)

In some places in Fiji [women] are still considered to be in the kitchen and not to come in and take part in community-wide consultations.

Female participant (Fiji)

By several measures, women are underrepresented in leadership positions across the region. Women held only 20 per cent of seats in national parliament and their representation in managerial positions in the private sector is far below parity (20 per cent). In local government, women's representation falls below the global average (36 per cent) in most Asia-Pacific countries.⁷² Such gendered exclusion is well understood to undermine the odds of policy processes reaching effective policy solutions that are sensitive to the lived experiences of women.⁷³

Intersectionality

Many of the focus groups discussed the impact of dimensions of intersectionality. For example, there was broad agreement that economically privileged women in Indonesia face different social expectations, especially around working outside the home and even in holding leadership positions. However, this degree of privileged experience was considered to have limitations, especially in relation to the sexual objectification of women:

“ Women in Indonesia are always objectified, despite our social statuses. Even when a woman is a president or ex-president.

Female participant (Indonesia)

There was broad agreement among the focus group conducted with older women in Fiji and a focus group conducted with men in Cambodia that rural dwelling women are very likely disproportionately impacted by gender norms, with the understanding that such norms are entrenched in rural communities. A participant in another focus group in Fiji discussed the three-dimensional intersectional experience of being a woman, having a disability and living in a rural area, associated with pressure to not make waves or speak out:

“

I think from the disability family, most of the time in rural settings people see us, our disability as a woman, [and they think or say] ‘oh no you can’t say anything if you are born a woman with a disability.’ But you know as time goes on, I think it’s about time for you to make noises unless or until we tell the policy-makers, or whoever, we need to be vocal. Not to be told, ‘oh because of your disability you don’t say anything’.

Female participant (Fiji)

To summarise, it appears that there is a regional trend, as all FGDs similarly described how gender norms and gendered expectations foster systems of gender inequality, which impact the lives and opportunities of men and women.

GENDERED TREATMENT FROM PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND EXPERIENCES OF CORRUPTION

Building on themes that were presented in the previous section, all FGDs made explicit connections between how dominant gender norms shape the experiences people have with public officials and with corruption.

The FGDs made it clear that gender has a dynamic impact on corruption patterns. Discussion participants reported that women, and especially marginalised women, are often treated worse by public officials, have gendered sources of vulnerability to corruption and sextortion, and experience greater degrees of intimidation in bribery exchanges.

Treatment by public officials

In almost all FGDs, the participants broadly agreed that men are treated better in their interactions with public officials. Many agreed that women were more likely not to be taken seriously and respected, and more often questioned or challenged when seeking basic services. Participants in a focus group in Sri Lanka reported that women are often not prioritised

Photo: Billow926/Unsplash



in queues at public institutions and are told to wait longer than men. Participants in an FGD in Cambodia hypothesised that men are treated better because men have easier communication or better rapport with public officials, who are mostly men. Focus groups in Sri Lanka and Fiji voiced a different opinion. Participants suggested that women can receive preferential treatment when male public officials are sexually attracted to them. This paradoxically indicates a privileged position for “attractive” women and that such women are more often objectified by male public officials.

Additionally, several FGDs pointed out that intersectionality matters. They emphasised that women who enjoy a range of privileges are treated better and with more respect than marginalised women. Indeed, these observations are reminiscent of calls in the broader literature to look beyond the influence of gender alone.⁷⁴ On this topic, two focus groups – one of women in Cambodia and a diverse group in Fiji – observed that public officials routinely disrespect sex workers and the police do not take seriously their reports of rape or other abuse. Such treatment, it was reported, causes sex workers to avoid public officials, even after they have been sexually assaulted. In a similar vein, FGDs in Fiji, Cambodia and Sri Lanka agreed that LGBTQI people

are treated badly by public officials, often with sexual harassment and assault:

A Fijian focus group noted that women with a disability do not receive the same degree of respect from public officials as their able-bodied counterparts. It was hypothesised that this is probably because public officials are not trained to deal with people with disabilities



When being criminalised, sex workers will be taken to the police station and have to spend time in the cell while the other party gets to walk out. Same in healthcare as treatment is always different. If a transgender comes in there are giggles from the staff and delays in the service... sex workers and those with a disability also face delays.

Fijian participant (diverse participants)



To be honest the treatment is always different, you walk in looking like a male dressed like a female at the same time they'll be giggling on the side. It's either that or the service will be delayed or it's just you being turned a blind eye on. So these are some of the things that we as a community have faced over the years, particularly for both the sex workers community and the LGBTIQ. And these are some of the things that hinder our access to these services and it has stopped us from actually accessing these services.

Fijian participant (diverse participants)

Gendered dynamics underpinning vulnerability to bribery and sextortion

The FGDs made clear that bribery was a fact of life for all participants, irrespective of gender identification. It was discussed how gendered social expectations shape women's unique experiences. Notably, discussion on this topic focused on women's experiences, rather than the experiences of men, transgender or gender non-conformist people.⁷⁵ In the first instance, in line with the growing attention paid to sextortion, the FGDs in Indonesia and Sri Lanka observed that bribery requests are inherently gendered because women are more likely to be asked for a sexual benefit, while men are almost always approached for money or goods.



Women are not just asked for money, but also sex.

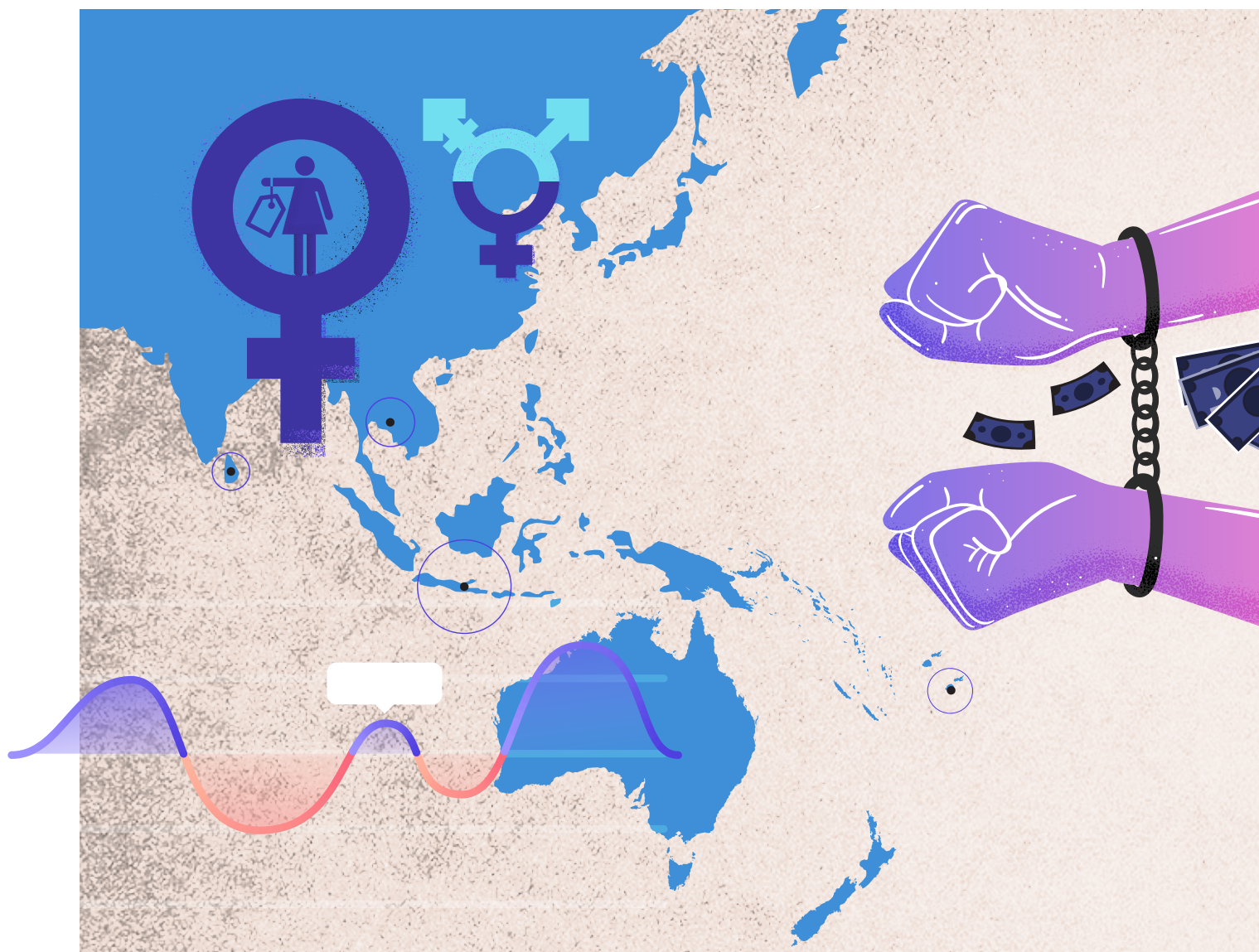
Female participant (Indonesia)

FGDs in all countries suggested that women are victimised with requests for bribes or a sexual benefit because they are seen as “weaker” than men. Many of the gender norms discussed in the previous section that encourage women to avoid voicing strong opinions and promote being passive and reserved were pinpointed in these discussions. Such norms were seen as contributing to the beliefs of public officials that women lack “courage” to challenge requests for bribes or sextortion. This gives the impression that they are an “easier target” for these types of corruption. Such beliefs probably link to the observation made in FGDs that women are more likely questioned when they seek basic services, and to other observations made in the FGDs, where it was reported that male public officials often try to intimidate women physically or verbally in their requests

“

If compared to man, woman are targeted asking for money related to services they have requested. For example, my wife was asked for money at the border checkpoint, but they never asked me for bribery.

Male participant (Cambodia)



“Women are being asked for bribe more frequently than men because women have not been provided [an] opportunity to express their ideas or making decision in their families since they were young. This act has affected them in challenging with public officials relevant to bribery.

Female participant (Cambodia)

“Women tend to look at the whole social spectrum within the family and within the community, while men tend to be focused on particular things. So, when women come out of their comfort zones at home, they are out there to provide for their home so when things like that [a request for bribery] happen, they take it upon themselves. If I do this, I can provide for this, I can cover this. And it also comes with social expectations whereby you see a working woman there is a lot of pressure on them to also provide and it usually ends on this note [with bribery].”

Fijian participant (diverse participants)

Gender norms around caretaking were also mentioned as factors that shape the experience of bribery and sextortion. For example, in Cambodian and Indonesian focus groups, participants agreed that women are more likely to be asked for a bribe

or for a sexual benefit for services that relate to caretaking, like health and education. As a specific example, there was broad agreement in both Indonesian focus groups that men are probably less frequently targeted for bribery from education officials because they are not seen as being “in charge of parenting”. Several participants noted that, because of entrenched gender norms around caretaking, women may be more willing to engage in corruption if it means securing basic services for those they care for:

Intersectionality and experiences with corruption

Many of the focus groups discussed the impact of dimensions of intersectionality on bribery. It was argued that sex workers and poorer women are more vulnerable to requests for bribes (FGD in Cambodia), and that sex workers were especially vulnerable to sextortion (FGD in Indonesia). In Fiji, participants hypothesised that rural women are more vulnerable because they are more likely to lack knowledge about their rights and entitlements (or are assumed to lack knowledge), and so are seen as an “easy target” for bribery requests.

Gendered norms and sextortion

The FGDs in all countries emphasised the role that gender norms play in underpinning sextortion. There was broad agreement in an FGD in Fiji that sextortion’s roots lie in gender norms that encourage men to be “sexually charged” and to sexually objectify women. Both focus groups in Cambodia and another in Sri Lanka noted that public officials often feel confident that victims will not report sextortion, given the associated shame. This contributes to a perception of impunity around sextortion. This issue, of how the act of reporting sextortion is gendered, is discussed in more detail in Section 8.

In summary, the FGDs indicated that women in the region – and some groups of marginalised women especially – experience more pressure to pay bribes or engage in sextortion on behalf of those they care for and are seen as an “easy target” for bribery. It was reported that, for many women, experiences with public officials are unfortunately marred by intimidation and even assault. Such gendered patterns have important consequences and sustain gender inequality. As others have observed, women and especially marginalised women may be fearful of such exchanges and, as a result, are more likely to go without basic services like healthcare, education or legal support.^{76,77}

GENDERED DYNAMICS IN REPORTING AND REFUSING TO ENGAGE IN CORRUPTION

All Focus Group Discussions made clear that most people, irrespective of gender, do not report corruption. This was attributed to a lack of trust in anything being done and concerns about confidentiality.

A breach of confidentiality could lead to retaliation. Other factors cited by participants included a lack of awareness of reporting channels, difficulty in proving acts of corruption, and costs of litigation in time and money. Finally, several participants made the case that people are unlikely to refuse to pay a bribe because so many others in society pay bribes:



95 per cent of the society is willing to pay bribes to get their work done or get rid of penalties. Therefore, it is difficult to refuse giving bribes for the rest as they are helpless.

Male participant (Sri Lanka)

Photo: U.S. Agency for International Development/Rawpixel



Several focus groups discussed why reporting and refusing to engage in corruption may be gendered. Gender norms were once again noted as likely to be influential. For instance, focus groups in Cambodia and Indonesia mentioned that men are socialised to be outspoken and even challenge others and are therefore more likely to report or refuse to engage in corruption than women, who are socialised to do the opposite.

Moreover, norms around caretaking were considered to shape willingness to report. In FGDs in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, it was suggested that women would be reluctant to report corruption because they would be more fearful that doing so would jeopardise access to services needed by the family in the future. A related but slightly different observation was made in all Fijian FGDs. Participants suggested that women are more likely to worry about the consequences for the perpetrators' families if the perpetrator of corruption is punished, and as a result may not report corruption.

“ Women are found less reporting or refusing paying bribe compared to men because they do not have courage to deal or challenge with public officials related to bribery.

Male participant (Cambodia)

“ The way women are treated when they file a complaint is different compared to men, as women are seen as the second sex, weaker, less prioritised, taken less seriously.

Male participant (Indonesia)

Gendered awareness around accountability rights and institutions

As noted in Section 2, previous analyses of GCB Asia survey data revealed that women in Asia were less likely to be aware of their right to request information from public institutions, and of their country's anti-corruption commission.⁷⁸ Such gendered awareness patterns have direct, important consequences. For example, women in Asia were less likely to exercise this right. Reflecting on these statistical findings, our FGDs discussed potential gendered barriers to awareness in their own countries.

Many of the focus groups (all except those in Sri Lanka) agreed that social expectations around caregiving impact awareness levels. In common, the discussions suggested that women, who are busy with caretaking responsibilities, may have less time to seek out information about their rights to information or about accountability institutions. Additionally, it was suggested that men would be comparatively more likely to prioritise seeking out information, as they have more time and there are higher social expectations of them to do so. Finally, focus groups in Cambodia and Fiji hypothesised that women may be less informed about how and where to report.

Focus groups in Cambodia and Fiji suggested that women may be too shy to ask questions about anti-corruption and rights to information and more reluctant to request information given gendered norms around female passivity and being submissive. Focus groups in Fiji observed that too few efforts are made by government and the public sector to raise awareness around such issues for women. They doubted that any such effort reaches rural women.

Relatedly, an FGD in Indonesia suggested that gender inequality, more broadly, shapes awareness of issues like this. The suggestion was that women's lower degree of access to education means that a higher percentage of them are illiterate. Ultimately, illiteracy undermines awareness of rights. Indeed, across these regions the degree of gender parity in literacy rates varies considerably. However, on average, it is still slightly in favour of men.⁷⁹ As a group, rural women are disproportionately more likely to be illiterate, including digitally illiterate.⁸⁰ As these FGDs suggested, rural women's relative illiteracy probably presents specific challenges to raising awareness about accountability-focused rights.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

This report explores the impact of gender on experiences with public officials and corruption in four countries in Asia and the Pacific.

It is hoped that its findings will support those working to control corruption in the region. It provides additional insight into how gender shapes vulnerability to corruption and readiness to report it, and on what can be done to improve the situation.

This conclusion includes recommendations drawn from the findings of the study. The steps will help to mainstream gender into anti-corruption efforts and highlight where additional policy and research attention is needed.

Photo: PACAF/Flickr



For governments

- + **Governments should create gender-sensitive corruption reporting mechanisms.** Reporting mechanisms should be safe, accessible to all groups of women, confidential and eliminate opportunities for retaliation.⁸¹ Such reporting mechanisms would benefit all and probably have a positive effect on reporting more generally.
- + **Governments need to invest in “sextortion-sensitive” reporting responses and resources for victims.** Reporting sextortion should prompt “the types of support that sexual abuse survivors need, including, but not limited to, physical and psychological health services, and financial and legal support”.⁸² In addition, victims should be given clear legal and procedural guidance on reporting and information about any likely costs involved. There should be a fund to help offset costs, especially for those who are unable to pay.⁸³ Female victims should be able to report to women, and sensitivity training should be considered for officials investigating and making decisions about reported cases.⁸⁴
- + **Governments should consider promoting “gender balance among personnel in sectors and activities vulnerable to sextortion”.**⁸⁵ Doing so would ostensibly address organisational environments that embolden perpetrators and could tackle concerns raised in the FGDs about how many women are vulnerable to sextortion when they are desperate to secure services for those they care for.
- + **Governments should develop legal frameworks for sextortion to enable the prosecution of cases and provide justice officials with bespoke training about sextortion.**⁸⁶ Having the appropriate legal framework in place and officials who are more sensitive to the issue will encourage reporting. Legal training programmes should aim to raise awareness about sextortion among prosecutors and judges.

For anti-corruption-focused policy actors and civil society groups

- + **Anti-corruption policy actors and civil society groups should empower women, particularly those who are marginalised, in anti-corruption and other governance systems.**⁸⁷ Women tend to bring different issues

to the table, not only as political actors but also as activists.⁸⁸ The empowerment of women in governance systems should steer action in ways that are sensitive to the lived experiences of women.⁸⁹ For groups of women who are probably new entrants to policy and governing processes, such as those who are poor, from rural areas or from another socially marginalised group, such efforts should consider providing support and capacity building around leadership for them.⁹⁰

- + **Anti-corruption policy actors and civil society groups should consider developing strategies to raise awareness about sextortion, challenge preconceived gender stereotypes and norms among the public and public officials, and inform people about their rights to services, access to information and corruption reporting channels.** Without awareness or sensitisation messaging campaigns, it is difficult to know how policy actors could try to change the norms that inform gendered experiences in the immediate term. Awareness-raising efforts on sextortion should focus on positioning sextortion “as a significant form of corruption in the eyes of both policymakers and the public”.⁹¹ Doing this would encourage victims to report sextortion safely and create momentum for needed policy reforms.⁹² Given the likely inequalities in awareness levels on all these issues in the region, such campaigns should be tailored and targeted to specific audiences, to reach the people who are least aware as a priority. Efforts should be made to reach women where they are most likely to encounter messages.

However, awareness raising on these issues is no easy task. A growing body of research shows that it is difficult to achieve effectiveness through messaging campaigns centred on “social bads” like corruption and gender-based violence.⁹³ For both topics, research suggests that messaging efforts are often ineffective and can even backfire.^{94,95,96} Therefore, these campaigns must be carefully designed and ideally tested before they are deployed, so that policy actors can make sure they will work as intended.^{97,98} Policy actors should be guided on what types of anti-corruption messages are most likely effective^{99,100} and on the topic of sextortion. Lessons should be gathered from those who raise awareness of gender-based violence.¹⁰¹

- + **Anti-corruption policy actors and civil society groups should seek to make anti-corruption policies gender sensitive in ways that are contextually appropriate and recognise important intersectional factors.** The effective mainstreaming of gender into anti-corruption work should differ across these regions. Asia and the Pacific constitute a diverse array of countries, with variations in the entrenchment of gender norms and gender inequality. Policies must be contextually appropriate and designed to address specific concerns in each country.¹⁰²

Efforts to mainstream gender also need to consider intersectionality. The FGDs across all countries touched on how intersectional factors interact with the gendered nature of corruption, leaving poor and rural dwelling women, sex workers and transgender people more vulnerable to specific corruption experiences and impacts. A consideration of intersectionality will require “thinking beyond binary categories of gender, and consider more plural forms of masculinity, femininity and non-heteronormative genders”.¹⁰³ It should take into account other types of identity dimensions (for example, beyond race, able-bodied/disability, age or poverty), like the experience of migrants and sex workers. Without considering gendered and intersectional dimensions of corruption, policies are more likely to be ineffective, and even risk having unintended negative consequences for those already marginalised in society.¹⁰⁴

For researchers

- + **More research is needed on gender and corruption in Asia and the Pacific.** While the findings in this report make clear that corruption and its impacts are gendered, continued research is required on gendered experiences in Asia and the Pacific. This should focus beyond the countries included in this study, and more extensively in the included countries. Such examinations are important to the development of actionable country-specific initiatives. They should build on the methodology of this report and address its limitations where possible. The logic here is simple: to design and implement effective policies, policy-makers require reliable information on how and the extent to which corruption experiences are gendered and impacted by other forms of marginalisation.



Photo: Elina Sazonava/Pexels

- + **Those who administer corruption surveys should learn from research on other sensitive topics. They should test whether strategies used in those areas could be transferred to measure women's experiences with corruption and sextortion more accurately.**

Emerging research suggests that women may be more reluctant to admit that they have paid a bribe in a survey when they are asked about it directly. This is because for many women bribes may be a "sensitive" topic to discuss. Current efforts to ask about sextortion in surveys are limited for a similar reason. Survey research on gender-based violence, domestic abuse and other sensitive topics has developed a small range of methodological strategies to measure the prevalence of these issues using surveys. Some of these strategies may help in future efforts to measure personal experiences with bribery and sextortion.

- + **More research on sextortion is needed** as it is relatively scarce.¹⁰⁵ Feigenblatt¹⁰⁶ identified several areas where a deeper understanding is needed, including on the impacts of sextortion on victims and society, sector-specific sextortion patterns, and what facilitates or frustrates successful prosecution. Research should also examine how intersectionality impacts vulnerability to and the experience of sextortion.

Many of the policy recommendations discussed thus far promise to help nudge the needle by working to protect the rights of women and other marginalised groups from corruption, supporting demands for accountability and gradually uprooting the beliefs that underpin gendered experiences with corruption. The good news is that anti-corruption reformers are not alone in trying to reframe gender norms and gendered expectations.

Anti-corruption civil society and policy actors in Asia and the Pacific should therefore identify, create links and ultimately work closely with gender-focused government agencies and civil society organisations that are seeking similar social change. Efforts to mainstream sextortion into anti-corruption and anti-sexual abuse programmes will require strengthening collaboration across these two overlapping areas. Such coalitional work will be in the interest of all. It promises to identify new windows of opportunity and develop common solutions. Given that changing social norms is an intractably complex task, a growing coalition and sustained, strong resolve will be key.

For all working to stop gendered corruption

A clear theme in this research is the role that entrenched gender norms play in underpinning gender inequality and gendered corruption experiences. The implication is clear: the gendered nature of corruption in Asia and the Pacific will not substantively change until broader societal changes are made. Such changes must work to challenge toxic gender norms and associated gendered expectations. This is no easy task and there is no clear rule book to follow that will guarantee society-wide change.

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