Women domestic workers in Faridabad learn about their right to safety from sexual harassment in the workplace in a participatory training.

**Date:** 14th July, 2022  
**Place:** Faridabad  
**Number of participants:** 45 women domestic workers  
**Resource Persons:** MFF Programme Staff

**Introduction**

#मेहरी is a program addressing the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of women domestic workers. Led by Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) in partnership with UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls, #मेहरी has been developed with and for women domestic workers, to strengthen and build accountable institutional mechanisms that prevent, prohibit and redress cases of sexual harassment.

The baseline study conducted under the project with women domestic workers of Anangpur, Faridabad, found that the village is home to many women domestic workers who have migrated to the district in search of employment. Women domestic workers generally work in high rise residential towers and buildings, several of which are present in the area. Women domestic workers residing in the village said they are vulnerable to sexual harassment at workplace in the hands of their powerful and financially sound employers.

A participatory training session on key concepts and issues related to sexual harassment at the workplace, and the processes and mechanisms under the Law, was organised with 45 participants in Anangpur village. The only available community space, which is sheltered and open for use to women, is the Church in the neighbouring Gadakhor Basti. The same was chosen for the training session.

**Highlights from the Conversation**

An ice-breaker session was facilitated to begin the session, to help participants to begin speaking up and overcoming their hesitation. Case studies were used to trigger conversations on concepts such as ‘workplace’, ‘world of work’, forms and types of sexual harassment, among others, and participants were encouraged to participate in an art-based group activity to present their understanding of the concepts.
This mix methodology approach supported participants to begin working together, explaining and supporting one another to understand the issue and the Law.

Women domestic workers shared that men stare, comment and ridicule them from their community, to their workplaces. A woman domestic worker further shared - “jis kothi me kaam karte hai woh hai mera office (the house that I work in is my office).”

Learning about Bhanwari Devi, a social worker, whose fight for justice after a group of men gang-raped her led to the landmark Vishakha Guidelines in 1997, the first ever legal document addressing the issue of sexual harassment of women at the workplace in India, and subsequently the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, which carries forward the spirit of the Vishakha Guidelines, helped women understand the extent and gravity of the issue. Participants expressed their solidarity with Bhanwari Devi and resolved to also work together to advocate for safety and dignity in the workplace of women.

Participants' Responses to Case Studies are Captured Below:

**Case Study 1 -** विम्ला जो 32 साल की है, वो एक घर में काम करती है, जिसमें 4 सदस्य रहते हैं (मामी, पापा, बेटा, बेटी) एक दिन घर के लोग सब बाहर गए थे, बस बेटे को छोड़ कर। बिहारी दीवी में असलील गाने सुन रहा है, जिस वजह से घरेलू कामगर को अजीब लग रहा, उसको डर लग रहा। क्या ये यौन उत्पीड़न है?

(Vimla is a 31 year old domestic worker who works for a family of 4. One day all family members were out except for the son of the couple. He was listening to inappropriate songs on the television which made Vimla uncomfortable and scared. Is this sexual harassment at workplace?)

Women domestic workers’ responses-

“Agar sirf akela ladka kaam ki jagah pe ho toh darr toh lagta hi hai. Mujhe ek kaam mila tha ek single ladke ke yaha par maine woh kaam darr ke maare nhi liya” (If there is only a man at the workplace then I feel scared. Once I got a job to do for a single man. I did not take it because I felt scared)

**Case Study 2 -** रेशमा एक घर में काम करती है, काम पर आने समय बिल्डिंग के गार्ड ने उसे देखकर होठ से कुछ इशारा किया, क्या ये कार्यस्थल पर यौन उत्पीड़न है?

Women domestic workers' responses -
(Reshma is a domestic worker who was going to her workplace. The building's guard looked at her and made inappropriate gestures with his lips. Is this sexual harassment at workplace?)

Women domestic workers’ responses-
“Bilkul galat hai. Jab mai kaam pe jaa rhi hun toh woh building bhi mera karyasthal hogi” (This is completely wrong. If I am crossing the building to reach my workplace, the building is also my workplace)

Case Study 3-  सीता को उसके नियोक्त देर रात बचने की कहते है और घर मे आए पुरुष मेहमान की मलिश करने भी कहते है और उसके इस बात को मानने पर उसकी लन्दनवाद बदलने का बादा भी करते हैं। क्या ये यौन उत्पीड़न हैं।
(Sita's employer makes her stay late at night during a party. He asks her to give him and his friends a massage. He offers to give her a raise in exchange. Is this sexual harassment at workplace?)

Women domestic workers’ responses-
“Kayi baar hota hai, iske badle woh. Par mahila darrti hai toh kuch bol nhi pati” (This happens many time, employers offer something in exchange of something. But women are too scared to talk about it)

Case Study 4-  रमा रोज़ चुकी पैदल एक कोठी मे काम करने जाती है. कुछ दिनों से घर के रास्ते मे एक लड़का उसका चेहरा करता है. वह उसके पीछे चलता है और कोठी पोहोचने से पहले अपना रास्ता बदल लेता है. क्या यह यौन उत्पीड़न है? 
(Rama walks to her workplace everyday. For some days, a boy follows her to her workplace and changes his direction when she is about to reach her destination. Is this sexual harassment at workplace?)

Women domestic workers agreed that this is inappropriate behaviour. They were explained how stalking on their way to work falls under sexual harassment at workplace.

Women domestic workers’ responses-
“Jab kaam ke liye nikalte hai toh building bhi karyasthal hai. Guard log bohot badtameezi karte hai” (when we get out to work, our building is also our workplace. Guards behave inappropriately with us)
“Yaha pe sabke saath karyasthal pe yaun utpeeran hua hai, koi khulke nhi bolta kyunki sab darrti hai” (Everyone here has experienced sexual harassment at workplace. No one speaks up because they are scared)
“Agar raaste mei koi chede aur humne ulta jawab nhi diya toh uss aadmi ko aur badhava milega” (If someone sexually harasses us on our way to work and we do not say anything in return, then the person will be encouraged to do it again)

When told about the redressal mechanisms under the Law, a participant reflected “Par Local Committee hai kahaan? Kuch hua toh kahan jayengey?"(but where is the local committee? Where will we go if something happens to us?)"

This despite the fact that in an earlier conversation with the Chairperson of the Local Committee of Faridabad, during the baseline study, the Local Committee representatives said that the committee was functioning effectively. It is evident that although the committee exists, domestic workers have no awareness of it, or how to reach it.

Another participant reflected, “Gharelu kaamgaar ko ched-chad ko leke chup nahi rehna chahiye. Kyunki hamari ladai apni pechchan aur nuntam majdoori ki hai (domestic workers must not stay silent about the workplace sexual harassment, our fight is for our recognition and rights, and minimum wages)”
Key Learnings

Women domestic workers find it difficult to share about their experiences of sexual harassment at workplace among a large group of participants. Small group discussions and art-based activities can help build group solidarity and trigger these critical conversations. For women domestic workers, the issue of sexual harassment at workplace isn’t just about sexual violence, but also deeply linked with allied challenges related to their social and financial security, experiences of discrimination and lack of access to labour rights.