"Pehle jab koi puchata tha ki kaha ja rahi ho? Tab mai bolti thi ki Kothi ja rahi hu kaam karne Lekin ab mai bolni hu ki mai duty karne ja rahi hu"
(Earlier when someone had asked where are you going? Then I used to say that I am going to Kothi to work, but now I say that I am going to do my duty.)

Highlights from a participatory training workshop on sexual harassment at workplace with women domestic workers of Govindpuri, Delhi

Date: 10th January, 2023
Participants: 63 women domestic worker leaders
Location: Arya Samaj Mandir, Govind Puri
Resource Person: MFF Program Staff

Introduction

#पहलें is an initiative to strengthen institutional mechanisms under the 2013 Law for the protection of women from sexual harassment in the workplace, led by women domestic workers and the Martha Farrell Foundation, funded by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

A study conducted by the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) in collaboration with women domestic workers in Delhi-NCR discovered that 100% of 1939 women domestic workers had experienced sexual harassment at work, with a further 77.2% having experienced it in their direct workplace (home of their employers). None of them, however, were able to file a complaint to seek justice under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition, and Redressal) Act of 2013. The Act is one of the few pieces of legislation in India that covers domestic workers as a group. Given its high prevalence, sexual harassment in the workplace of female domestic workers is an urgent issue.

A refresher participatory training session on the issue and the law was facilitated in Govindpuri, a small community in the South East district in Delhi, which is home to many women who work as domestic workers in houses in the neighbouring areas of Shiva camp, Jasola, Jal Vihar, Munirka, Taimoor nagar, Devli, Tigri, Haji Colony, Johri Farm, Okhla Vihar, Noor Nagar, Sanjay Camp, Dakshin Puri and Nehru Nagar of South Delhi. Belonging to migrant families who moved to Delhi in search of work, most women in the area work to supplement their family income and ensure they can make ends meet. Ages of women domestic workers in the area vary, but across the board, challenges of low wages and lack of paid time off persist in their professional lives, adding to their vulnerability.

The session was designed to start conversations on these issues, their linkage to the issue of sexual harassment at workplace, its forms and types and the rights of women to safe and dignified workplaces.
Insights

Speaking about sexual harassment and experiences at the workplace is extremely difficult for women domestic workers, because of the deep rooted fear of backlash from community members, employers, and fear of loss of job. As most participants were part time workers, there was also a fear of losing other work opportunities. Building a circle of trust, and enabling the creation of a safe, judgement free space for discussions was instrumental in opening up the conversation.

Since this was a refresher training for community members, women domestic workers could easily distinguish between different types and forms of sexual harassment, as well as what constitutes sexual harassment of women at work. They discussed arguments on victim-blaming, women empowerment, and gender-based violence amongst themselves and were made aware of the redressal mechanisms available under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. Taking this a step further, participants were taught about the complaint mechanism in a Local Committee, as well as how to write a descriptive complaint report with in-depth details.

Discussions on redressal mechanisms as stipulated by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013
In the coming months, women domestic workers have decided to take part in the ‘Demand Campaign’ as a part of International Women’s Day and will go to the District Magistrate’s office in their respective districts with their demands for more information on the Local Committees set up to address sexual harassment complaints in the district.