

“Hum log kahin bhi surakshit nahi hai, khaas kar ke mahilayein. Na ghar pe, na raaste mein, na basti mein”
(We, especially women and girls, are not safe anywhere. Not at our homes, not on our way to work
and not in the communities we live in)

Women Domestic Workers of Indira Kalyan Camp undertake a safety assessment of their world of work

Date: 31st August, 2022

Place: Indira Kalyan Camp, South East Delhi

Number of participants: 15 women domestic workers,

Resource Persons: Program Staff, Martha Farrell Foundation

Field Facilitators: Gudiya

Introduction

Martha Farrell Foundation, in partnership with women domestic workers in Delhi-NCR is working towards strengthening mechanisms under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 for women domestic workers; to enable effective prevention, prohibition and redressal of experiences of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers. With support from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, this project #मेंभी is aimed at creating a safe and gender-just world with and for women domestic workers.

The issue of safety in the world of work for women domestic workers is a multi-layered challenge. A baseline analysis of data collected with and by women domestic workers of Delhi-NCR on the issue of safety and sexual harassment in the workplace found that the challenges are manifold. There is a lack of awareness among women of the law, issue and their rights to safety; at the same time, there is a gap in the establishment and effectiveness of the Local Committee mechanism mandated under the law to ensure women work in safe conditions. A third challenge is analysis of the multifaceted challenges in the world of work of women domestic workers, which encompasses not just the home of the employer, but community spaces, roads, public transportation, society premises, and so much more.

In this initiative to strengthen mechanisms under the law for a safer, dignified and violence-free world of work, women domestic workers undertook a Participatory Safety Audit¹ of Indira Kalyan Camp (a settlement in Delhi’s South East Delhi district),

The settlement is located near Gautampuri in South East Delhi. Field facilitator of the district has been holding rigorous focussed group discussions and personal interactions on the issue of sexual harassment at workplace with women domestic workers of Gautampuri. To expand the conversation on the issue and to include more women domestic workers in the movement, field facilitator Gudiya approached the nearby settlement Indira Kalyan Camp by building contacts with women who live there. After visiting the settlement and interacting with its residents, it was found that women domestic workers are eager to speak up about the challenges they face in the communities and their workplaces.

The Process

The session began with a rapid analysis of the community space. Women domestic workers discussed, deliberated and drew certain conclusions that were noted by the facilitator:

1. “Yahaan mahilaon aur ladkiyon ki safety ka bohot kharab haal hai. Jo bol pate hain unko kam dar lagta haa, par kuchh logon ki zindagi mein bohot darr rahta hai (The safety situation is extremely bad in this area. Some people, who are able to speak up feel a little less scared, but most people live in extreme fear for their safety)”
2. There are about 200 families living in the community space

¹ A Participatory Safety Audit (PSA) is a participatory tool for researchers to undertake a spatial analysis of a particular area and map the level of safety/unsafety in the area, based on their lived experiences and realities.

3. Most families have migrated from neighbouring and other states of India to live in this community because of the job opportunities available in Delhi
4. Most women in the community have taken up jobs as women domestic workers to support their families, and travel to residential areas near the community. Some of the women also travel long distances for work.
5. The community space lies in the middle of Phase 1 and 2 of Gautampuri, a large migrant and informal settlement in South East District of Delhi.
6. Challenges within the community include finding safe drinking water, and clean water for household use. Further, the public toilet within the community space is the only option for many families to use to relieve themselves. However, the toilets are not accessible 24/7, so many residents have no space to relieve themselves, apart from the time slot when it's open (early in the morning until 10 a.m.).

Following the rapid assessment, women domestic workers were asked to create a map of Indira Kalyan Camp. Women discussed, and then started drawing the roads, marking popular spaces such as the community temple on the map.



Women drawing a map of their community

After drawing the map, women were asked to map the spaces on the map that make them feel particularly unsafe. While some participants said lack of safety wasn't the biggest challenge in their lives, others began discussing some of the spaces in the community where they felt the most scared visiting.

To build consensus, participants undertook a transect walk covering the community space and had in-depth discussions on the safety challenge in the community, before marking the unsafe spaces on their map.

Key Challenges Identified

The discussions and deliberations shed light on some of the most pressing challenges to safety in the world of work of women domestic workers in Indira Kalyan Camp:

1. Many women and girls are unable to relieve themselves when they need to, given that the public toilet in their community is closed after 10 a.m. Instead, they go to use the public toilet in a neighbouring community in the evening or night. The way to the neighbouring community is dark and dangerous, and the risk to personal safety from sexual harassment is extremely high in the area.
2. The space around the entry gate to the community space is usually occupied by men who sit in large groups and sexually harass women and girls who pass by. Women need to cross this gate to go to work, and every time they do, it is a risk to their safety.
3. There is no one to monitor the community toilet. Women shared that men often enter the women's toilet to use it, which makes them feel very unsafe.
4. There is an old *peepal* tree in the community, under which men sit during the day and consume alcohol and gamble, and misbehave and harass women and girls.
"Yeh peepal ke pedh pe muhole ki hi log rehte hai. Yeh bahut unsafe hai, ladke aur aadmi sharaab pi pite khule mei aur jua bhi khelte hai"
5. The police are not receptive to complaints and concerns raised by the community, they only come when there is a fight or incident. However, no regular police patrolling unit is deployed in the community.
"Jab koi maar peet hoti hai, tab hi police ati hai"
6. Men in the community also fight with one another, shout and abuse one another in public spaces. These are the same spaces that women cross to go to work, and the same spaces where their children play. The safety challenge in the space creates a lot of fear among women who have to leave their children behind at home to go to work.
"Jaha khade hoke gaali galoch karte hai, wahi hamare bache khelte hai."

Way Forward

The spatial analysis and community-led problem identification is only the first step towards completing the PSA process. Through this process, women domestic workers were able to build consensus on the challenges they experience in relation to their personal safety from sexual violence in their world of work. Intersections of religion and caste further exacerbate this challenge. As a next step, women domestic workers will validate their data with members of their community and add layered challenges to it. Following this, they will also work together to identify and co-develop solutions to the challenges to safety, identify and reach out to relevant stakeholders and decision makers to ensure solutions are implemented. Their advocacy to envision and define the workplace of women domestic workers using this lens, and then co-developing solutions to prevent sexual harassment in these spaces in partnership with district administration and local committees will continue, in the endeavour to strengthen the 2013 law to protect women from sexual harassment for women domestic workers.