

Participatory Research Study into the Sexual Harassment of Domestic Workers in Gurgaon and South Delhi, India and the #MeToo Movement

Fieldwork 1 – Research Report

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17th September 2018



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I. Introduction

Sexual harassment. A pervasive issue that is often talked around or swept under the rug. “The number of women that gather the courage to speak up against men who harass them are few and just the tip of the iceberg in relation to the enormity of what happens in reality (Farrell, 2014: 37).”¹ October, 2017, saw the beginning of a shift in this as the important and necessary conversation about sexual harassment, particularly in the workplace, was propelled into international dialogue by the use of two little words alongside a hashtag. Actress, Alyssa Milano, encouraged women to use ‘#MeToo’ on Twitter if they had ever experienced sexual harassment or sexual assault. This movement has allowed for the different perceptions and meanings of sexual harassment to come to light. This was in response to the multiple allegations of sexual harassment and assault, spanning decades, that came out against movie producer, Harvey Weinstein. This wave of ‘#MeToo’ has gained so much traction as it has been fronted by famous, white women. However, the ‘Me Too’ was originally founded by African-American activist, Tarana Burke, who wanted to create a space for women of colour from lower socio-economic backgrounds, in the United States, to come forwards, share their experiences and begin a process of healing. This new wave of ‘#MeToo’ seemed to be concentrated in Hollywood but expanded globally and could be seen across various social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram. Women and men from all over the world began sharing their stories of sexual harassment and assault. Even though ‘#MeToo’ has become this global phenomenon and Burke’s years of work has been recognised, it has very much been confined to the middle and upper classes of society.

But, many vulnerable groups of society are taking this chance, taking ‘#MeToo’ to be part of the narrative, to tell their stories and to have their voices heard. “One of the most powerful things about ‘#MeToo’ has been its ability to allow people to expand the conversation beyond celebrity. The reality of seeing everyday people — friends, neighbours, co-workers, family — disclosing their various experiences with sexual violence has been jarring for many and enlightening for most (Burke, 2017).” These vulnerable groups include domestic workers. There has been a call to bring “domestic employment out of the shadows and into the spotlight” as this line of work is generally not registered, often ignored by national labour laws and the workers are susceptible to various forms of abuse, including sexual harassment (Stites, 2018). Ai-jen Poo, executive director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance in

¹ This does not negate the fact that incidences of women on men and same sex sexual harassment do also occur.

the United States, commented that domestic workers are “coming forward to as part of the #MeToo Movement to say, not only are we not alone as domestic workers, we are not alone as women working in the economy (Stites, 2018)”. ‘#MeToo’ is predominately a social media movement, and as the scope of domestic work spans globally, access to social media is not something all domestic workers possess.

As ‘#MeToo’ is still relatively new, its relationship with domestic workers is an area that has room for exploration. My interest in this topic brought me to India. The aim of this research is to see what a campaign like ‘#MeToo’ could like for domestic workers in India, who are not exposed to the movement in the same way as domestic workers would be in the United States. But, before answering this question, it was important to understand how sexual harassment is dealt with in India and how these workers understand and perceive sexual harassment, the latter being a significant portion of this project. This research was carried out in two communities in Gurgaon and South Delhi respectively, with the support of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF), and is an extension of an ongoing MFF project of addressing sexual harassment in the workplace, under the platform of ‘Making Workplaces Safe.’ Conducting this research with the support of these organisations allowed me to interact with these more vulnerable groups of society as stable relationships had been built and trust had been established. This was important to PRIA, MFF and myself as sexual harassment is a sensitive issue to discuss, therefore, a safe space was created were these women could engage in the research.

- Section II of this report will highlight the context of this research study including a brief overview of what sexual harassment means, what it is to be a domestic worker and the context within India.
- Section III will detail the methodology and research methods utilised in this study.
- Section IV will examine the analysed data gathered from the research and provide an in-depth discussion of this data.
- Section V will conclude the report.

II. Context of Research

i. What is Sexual Harassment?

The terminology of sexual harassment is something that is relatively new. “Three decades ago, there was no word or phrase to define certain behaviour or conduct that was sexual in nature and inappropriate to the context in which it was expressed (Farrell, 2014: 54).” Barr (1993) identifies that academic definitions of sexual harassment concentrate on behaviour underlined with sexual connotations that is not welcome or called upon. Sexual harassment is an issue that is being addressed across the globe, however, there is still no “generally shared social definition of that would help people who are targets of sexual harassment to readily identify such behaviour (Uggen and Blackstone, 2004: 48).” Sexual harassment has different layers and can fall under four different categories; verbal, non-verbal, visual and physical; it can range on a scale from ‘mild misbehaviour’ to rape (Farrell, 2014). In other terms, sexual harassment is about power, and the abuse of that power. In the context of the workplace, sexual harassment is regarded as one of the most extensive and insidious forms of gender discrimination and can be a cause for extreme humiliation and loss of self-esteem (Farrell, 2013). Sexual harassment in the workplace is one of the most underreported form of gender-based violence (PRIA & MFF, 2017).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) offers its own definition of sexual harassment in its ‘Code of Conduct of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Brochure’: “Sexual harassment is defined as any behaviour of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of women and men, which is considered as unwanted, unacceptable, inappropriate and offensive to the recipient, and that creates an intimidating, hostile, unstable or offensive work environment” (ILO, 2015). The ILO also identifies that sexual harassment in the workplace can take two forms: the first being ‘Quid Pro Quo’ where job benefits are made conditional in exchange for demands that are of a sexual nature. The second is the creation of a Hostile Work Environment; this is regarded as the “subtle yet more pervasive form of sexual harassment, whether verbal, non-verbal, physical or visual, are so severe that they create a hostile or abusive work environment that is intimidating or offensive (ILO, 2015b; Farrell, 2014: 57).” In a significant amount of cases, women have adopted a culture of silence and have ‘learned to ignore’ certain forms of sexual harassment, passing it off as ‘male behaviour’; such as eve-

teasing², passing comments, wolf whistling, etc. Farrell (2014) stresses the need for women to be aware of all forms of sexual harassment and that men need to be vigilant that overstepping the bounds of acceptable norms of behaviour can have serious consequences.

ii. What is a Domestic Worker?

Domestic workers hold a significant share in the global workforce and among the most vulnerable groups of workers. Also referred to as the ‘invisible workforce’, they work in private households where terms of employment are often unclear, they are unregistered and are excluded from the sphere of labour legislation (ILO, 2018; Poo, 2017). Domestic work includes tasks such as cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, taking care of children or elderly members of a family, gardening and driving for a family. Domestic workers can work on a part-time basis where they might work in either one or multiple houses while living in their own home; this is referred to as a live-out domestic worker. Full-time or live-in domestic work consists of the worker residing in the home of their employer (ILO, 2018; NCW, 2010). The ILO (2018) has reported that there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide, excluding children, and it is a highly feminized sector; 80% of all domestic workers are women, or in other terms, 1 in every 25 working women is a domestic worker. “The endless and repetitive labour provided by them is not acknowledged as valuable work (Mehrotra, 2010: 3).”

Domestic workers face a number of challenges in their working life. They often receive very low wages, fewer benefits, work excessively long hours, less legal and social protection, rarely have days off and are vulnerable to mental, physical and sexual abuse (ILO, 2018; WEIGO, 2018). The ILO (2018) suggests that the “exploitation of domestic workers can be attributed to gaps in national labour and employment legislation, and often reflects discrimination along the lines of sex, race and caste.”

iii. Indian Context

In India, there have been a number of measures carried out to address the ubiquitous levels of workplace sexual harassment. The first major contribution was the Vishakha Guidelines, formulated by the Indian Supreme Court in August, 1997. This was a landmark event as, for the first time in the country, sexual harassment in the workplace was recognised as a criminal

² Eve-teasing is a euphemism used in India for describing unwanted sexual advances or remarks on women by men in public places.

offence (Farrell, 2014). Sixteen years later, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 was established. However, there are elements of these measures that need to be questioned. For example, the 2013 Act marginalises different groups of women. For example, a critical analysis of this Act was conducted by the Gujarat National Law University where it was highlighted that agricultural workers and women in the armed forces are excluded (Gujarat National Law University, 2014). Furthermore, domestic workers were only included in the Act after campaigning by activists (Newslick Report, 2018).

India accounts for 4.2 million out of the world's 67 million domestic workers and primarily comprises of women. This highly feminized profession is largely due to the gendered norm surrounding housework; "value is not ascribed to women's work in their homes, and by extension, even paid work in others' homes is not given any value or regarded as work (Mehrotra, 2010: 3)." Domestic workers in India earn between ₹1,000 - ₹ 3,000 (€12 - €36) per month (PRIA and MFF, 2017). However, issues of non-payment of wages is frequent, along with no weekly leaves or holidays. This work is also undervalued owing to the fact that it is often performed by poor, migrant women from lower castes. Thus, a mentality of inferior status in their work, both in their own minds and in society is created. Mehrotra (2010) suggests that domestic work needs to be projected in the larger context of patriarchy and subjugation of women.

Domestic work in India is not a recognised form of labour in India, and as such, domestic workers are not provided any protection under labour laws dealing with issues such as social security and working conditions and they cannot have any unions. India, is one of few countries who have not ratified the ILO's Domestic Workers Convention.³ It can be seen domestic workers are constantly left aside and disregarded. In relation to sexual harassment of domestic workers, provisions were included in the Sexual Harassment Act 2013 but, as mentioned above, they were only included after the extensive campaigning of activists. Under the Sexual Harassment Act 2013, Local Committees (LC) are to be constituted in every district in the country in order to receive complaints of sexual harassment. There are three

³ C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189); *Convention concerning decent work for domestic workers*. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189

main reasons why LCs are established. Firstly, when there is no Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)⁴ available, an LC is required. Secondly, an LC must be constituted if these organisation or workplace has less than ten employees, including domestic workers, construction workers and homemakers; the invisible workplaces (PRIA, 2013). And, thirdly, LCs are to established when a complaint needs to be made against the most senior person of the organisation or workplace. LCs are extremely important for domestic workers as they form a significant part of the unorganised work sector and are vulnerable to acts of sexual harassment. However, domestic workers are often unaware of such a committee and not all districts have initiated an LC. It is evident steps have been made to address sexual harassment among domestic works, but, “while the inclusion of domestic workers in this Act is a much-appreciated step, the mechanisms to ensure a safe working environment for domestic workers needs more teeth” (Varghese, 2016: 16).

In the United States, domestic workers have taken ‘#MeToo’ to share their grievances and make their voices heard. However, in India, the picture is quite different. The ‘#MeToo’ movement has mainly had an impact among formal workers and students of elite colleges: "The #MeToo campaign has resonated with the educated middle-class women who are employed, who dare to speak, and who are fighting for their space and are active on social media" (Dhillon, 2018). On the other hand, Dhillon (2018) states that for domestic workers, an incident of sexual harassment in the workplace, similar to those in the stories recounted by thousands of women and celebrities in the light of ‘#MeToo’ could be described as a minor difficulty and even if they wanted to use social media to put across their experiences, many cannot as only 30% of internet users in India are women.

Thus, what would a campaign like #MeToo look like when it comes to domestic workers’ issues in India?

⁴ Under the Sexual Harassment Act 2103, ICCs are be instituted in each district to receive complaints of sexual harassment where the employee count is over ten; for example, larger businesses and corporations.

III. Methodology and Research Methods

This research was carried out over a period of ten weeks from May through to July 2018. I was based in PRIA's headquarters and MFF in Delhi and would commute to Gurgaon, Haryana by metro or Uber. Going into this research, I wanted to ensure that all participants felt they were in a safe environment where they were comfortable and could speak freely. All participants were aged 18 and over and were provided with consent forms, allowing me to use their stories and thoughts as part as my research. They were also guaranteed anonymity; this extended to the three animators and one translator who assisted me, domestic workers themselves from the communities I engaged with, whom I regarded as my co-researchers. Having their assistance created trust among the women involved as there had been established relationships. Based on the nature of my research with wanting to understand how these domestic workers viewed and understood sexual harassment, I adopted a qualitative, participatory research approach.

My initial methodology consisted of semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. However, upon entering the field and beginning this section of the research process, it became evident that I would need to change the course of my methods. When the topic of sexual harassment was broached, it was shut down quite quickly by the women, with responses like *'it doesn't happen'* or *'I don't know what it is'*. I was aware that I may encounter some difficulties as sexual harassment is a sensitive topic, however, I was at a stage where I was not getting any responses. I had a great support system with the team at MFF in many respects, and my field supervisor and I developed a new approach. I decided upon using three different methods to collect data. The first was the use of questionnaires. With the second I relayed four different scenarios of sexual harassment during focus group discussions, with each scenario falling under one of the four categories, and had the women respond to whether they agreed or disagreed with it being sexual harassment; therefore, a quantitative approach was adopted for this approach. And, the third approach was an art-based project, making a patchwork saree with different stories and perceptions of sexual harassment. I bought fabrics and arts and crafts supplies and provided them to the women as a way for them to work with. In this case, they could speak out about sexual harassment without having to physically speak about it. I saw a shift in my research as these approaches proved more successful and the women began to open up more.

Though I could not carry out any in-depth one-on-one interviews with the domestic workers, I did conduct an interview with the head of the Delhi division of the National Domestic Workers' Movement (NDWM), with the aid of a member of the MFF team who translated, which was recorded with the permission of the participant and transcribed. By including this interview, I could get a sense of how domestic workers' rights are fought for and it broadened my mindset to differentiate between those speaking *for* domestic workers and what domestic workers say themselves.

Due to a staggered start in beginning the data collection, the time frame of my research became an issue and well as continued concern over the responsiveness of the participants and I was anxious that I would not gather substantial data. However, in the time I did have, I built a rapport with these women, and was satisfied with how the research progressed and the data collected. The women I engaged with were part-time/live-out domestic workers and I worked around their schedules, as many had given up their free-time in between houses to participate. I had a total of 45 participants in the focus group discussions, 14 from Gurgaon and 31 from South Delhi, where they filled out the questionnaire and responded to the scenario questions. Between the women from Gurgaon and South Delhi, 14 provided art pieces for the saree project.

The number of participants in a group varied depending on the availability of the women. This section will provide a brief overview of the demographics of the women who participated in this study. In Gurgaon, the focus group discussions were carried out in the home of one of my assisting animators. All of the women participating from Gurgaon were migrant workers from the states of West Bengal (78.5%) and Bihar (21.5%). In South Delhi, I was brought to the homes of different domestic workers in two different communities/colonies in close proximity to each other to carry out my research. All the participants from the South Delhi group had originated from Delhi. Group sizes were generally small, ranging from 2-5 women. The age range of participants spanned from 18-50+ years of age allowing for a broad range of perspectives and insights. The ratio in age groups are as follows: 31% were between the ages of 18 and 29; 58% were between the ages 30 and 49; and 11% were over the age of 50. The years spent as domestic worker varied also. 31.1% of women have been a domestic worker between 6 months and 4 years; 35.5% have worked between 5 and 9 years; 24.4% have worked between 10 to 14 years; and 4.4% have been working as a domestic worker for 15 to 20 years, while another 4.4% didn't comment.

Like many others, domestic workers work to provide for their families, as such 88.9% of the women were married, 6.7% were unmarried, and 4.4% did not comment and 7 out of 45 women did not have children.

In participatory research fashion, I took the opportunity, with assistance from the MFF team, to share some of my findings back with the women, display the art project and gather their thoughts and opinions on what I had learned. I also wanted to get the male perspective on what had been shared, therefore, there was one sharing to a group of four men and then to a mixed group of around thirty, where over half were men.⁵ None of the domestic workers or male respondents I engaged with were aware of the #MeToo Movement, so this gave me an opportunity to explain its origins and what it has become. My sample size was small and is not fully representative in context to the number of domestic workers in Gurgaon and South Delhi respectively. And, I was only able to hold focus group discussions with part-time/live-out domestic workers, thus full-time/live-in workers, are, unfortunately, not included in this narrative. Nevertheless, a dialogue, in these communities, about sexual harassment was created and I was able to see how sexual harassment is viewed and discussed in a context and culture different from my own.

The following section will present the main findings that arose from the questionnaires and scenarios posed and from the art project, and the analysed data will be highlighted in a detailed discussion.

⁵ The majority women in this sharing group had not been participants in my research, however some of those who engaged in my study were there to observe.

IV. Results and Discussion

This section will be divided into five parts, with the first four highlighting the key findings from the different forms of data collected and the final part discussing the results in more detail and how it fits into the larger context of ‘#MeToo’ and what it means moving forward.

i. National Domestic Workers’ Movement

As previously noted, domestic work is not a recognised form of labour in India, therefore the workers are left unprotected on a number of levels. However, there are those who are willing to fight for these workers and to see a change in the system. I thought it would be important to have the perspective of the NDWM in order to have a better comprehension on how the rights of domestic workers are being fought for. Through my interview I learned what the NDWM do. They work to set up unions for domestic workers. Though domestic work is not a recognised trade, a few states have their own states laws in which they include domestic work as a trade. There is a total of eight states where they have formed domestic workers’ unions. However, this is a difficult challenge because of legal and trade issues as well as corruption in the system. For example, it was stated that they have been trying for 2-3 years to set up a union in Delhi. The NDWM are also working to establish a minimum wage for domestic workers.

“There is no minimum wage for domestic workers. There is no welfare mode.”⁶ – Head of NDWM, Delhi

I broached the topic of sexual harassment, and asked if that was an issue they dealt with in their organisation. The NDWM is more concerned in dealing with helping to get the children of domestic workers into education and keeping them in school. They also help with health issues and access to medication. Sexual harassment was not a main concern to them. The interviewee was unfamiliar with the #MeToo Movement when I asked. After I described the movement, I asked whether ‘#MeToo’ could work for domestic workers in India. He believed that yes, but would work best on an offline basis. This observation proved to be significant as I analysed that data I gathered from my work with the domestic workers and the sharing sessions.

⁶ Welfare modes are bodies that supports domestic workers in the form of social security schemes. They provide insurance, some of them could also provide pensions; a social security system. NDWM fights for this.

ii. *'What is Sexual Harassment?' Questionnaire*

Attempts to do one-on-one interviews in this case proved to be insufficient. Therefore, I presented the women with a questionnaire of three components⁷. The first part was a multiple answer choice question in which I asked what is sexual harassment.⁸

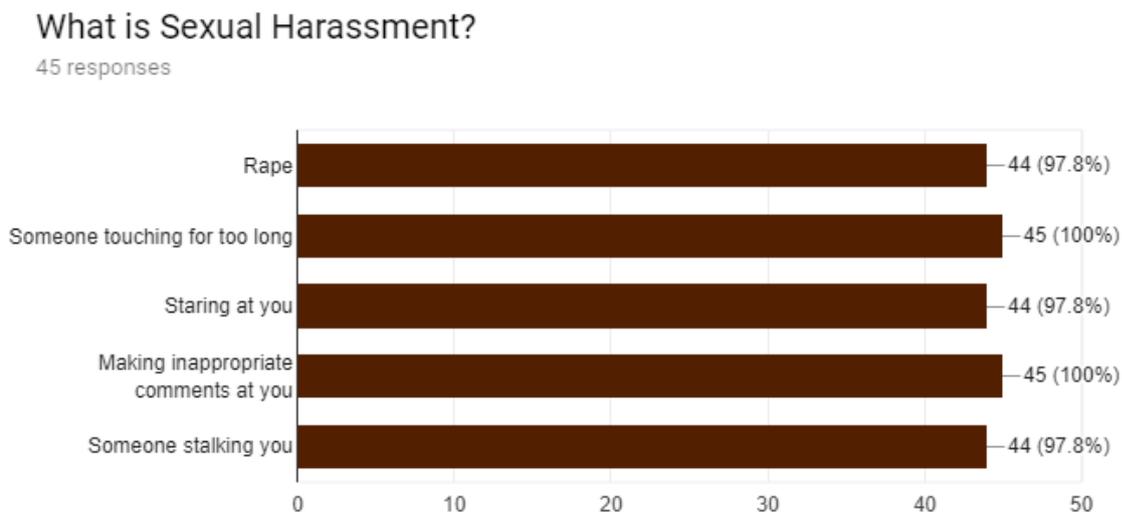


Figure 1: Responses to Part 1 of 'What is Sexual Harassment?' Questionnaire.

From Figure 1, only 1 respondent out of 45 disagreed that rape was a form of sexual harassment. The same respondent also disagreed that stalking and staring fell under forms of sexual harassment. 100% of respondent felt that prolonged touching and inappropriate comments were acts of sexual harassment. The reason I began the questionnaire with this MCQ was to open up the discussion on sexual harassment as my previous methods had failed and it also nullifies the previous statement made to me that they didn't know what sexual harassment was.

As this basis was set, the following questions allowed for more descriptive answers. I followed through with asking if they or anyone they knew had experienced any of the acts displayed in Figure 1. This was a sensitive question to ask, however, I assured them I would not push for an answer, but they were quite open with me. Out of 45 women, 29 (64%) said

⁷ See Appendix 2.

⁸ The answers chosen as part of this questionnaire were derived from examples of forms of sexual harassment I came across during my previous reading on the subject.

they had never experienced anything like that. The remaining 16 women (36%) said ‘Yes’ with eleven of the women voluntarily providing more detail of their experiences. Seven of them had been stalked or followed. Three of the women had experienced Quid Pro Quo forms of sexual harassment by the guards of the apartment complexes in which they worked.

“The guard said ‘you love me and I will give you better job opportunities.’” - Gurgaon

“Our guard from the workplace was following and the next day he followed me again and was offering me ₹500” - Gurgaon

“Where I used to work, the housekeeping staff tried to sexually harass me, they tore my clothes.” -Gurgaon

The main emotion that they felt when these incidents occurred was anger. When asked if they had told anyone, 14 out of the 16 women who responded ‘Yes’ said they had told someone about what had happened. In most cases it was a family member out of fear. In some cases, reporting to a superior proved to be successful and the perpetrator was, somewhat, punished; one of the women said she reported to the control room and the guard that had harassed her was fired. On the other hand, however, the victim can face consequences for speaking up. Ten of the women I spoke with said that they knew somebody who had experienced one of the above examples of sexual harassment, seven of whom had told someone about the incident.

“Out of fear, I told my husband.” - Gurgaon

“I told everyone but when I informed my madam she hit me.” - Gurgaon

In conducting this research, I wanted to gather different perceptions and views on sexual harassment. Some examples had been set with the first section of the questionnaire but I wanted to see if any other types or words relating to sexual harassment would arise. Therefore, I posed the question *What, according to you, is Sexual Harassment?* The responses were varied, with some repeating the given examples. The reoccurring words and comments that were said are as follows:

“Eve-Teasing”

“Rape”

“Forcibly Touching in Wrong Places”

“Lewd Comments”

“Ogling”

“Stalking”

“To affect someone deep inside”

However, 2 out of the 45 women, refused to answer the question.

The current ‘#MeToo’, initially surrounded workplace sexual harassment, but has expanded to all forms of sexual harassment that happens anywhere. Therefore, in conjunction with the question on what *their* perception of sexual harassment is, I asked them where and when does sexual harassment happen. Two women, again refused to answer, while two others said they haven’t seen it. The remaining 41 women were expressed multiple answers. Frequent answers were that it happens in workplace and on the way to and from work. Others said it was a common occurrence on the road, at the market, in and around their homes.

“These things happen inside our houses, on our way to the workplace and also at our workplace.” - South Delhi

“Every place, workplace and while coming home.” - Gurgaon

iii. Is This Sexual Harassment?

Following the questionnaires during the focus discussion groups, I posed four different scenarios of sexual harassment where the central character was a female domestic worker. Each scenario falls under the categories of verbal, non-verbal, visual and physical, respectively. The scenarios are as follows:

- 1. Zara is a domestic worker. She is making dinner for her employers in one of the 3 houses she works in. her employers are sitting at the table in the kitchen. The madame goes to the washroom. While the madame is in the washroom, the sir tells Zara that he likes how her hair looks today and that she looks beautiful. Zara shies away. Zara’s employer asks her if she has a boyfriend/husband, Zara replies ‘yes, I have a husband’. Her employer responds by saying her husband is a very lucky man. The madame comes back into the kitchen. - **Verbal***
- 2. Diya is cleaning in the living room. Her male employer comes home early from work. Diya greets him and he winks at her. He then sits down on the sofa. He sits and looks at Diya. She doesn’t think anything of it. He stays seated just staring at her while she cleans. When Diya turns around, she notices that her employer was looking at her rear. – **Non-Verbal***
- 3. Anika is cleaning the room of her employer’s 19-year-old-son. On his desk are 2 pornographic magazines and on his bedside table is a box of condoms. - **Visual***

4. *Lakshmi is going through security on her way into the building where she works. There are two male guards present. One of the male guards is about to start frisking Lakshmi when she notices he doesn't have a hand machine. She asks for a female guard, but he ignores her and begins frisking Lakshmi. He runs his hands firmly over body and slowly pats on her chest and rear. – Physical*

The following graphs represent the answers given to each scenario and viewed by age. In understanding the different perspectives, I wanted to see if there was a generational divide in what these women viewed as sexual harassment.

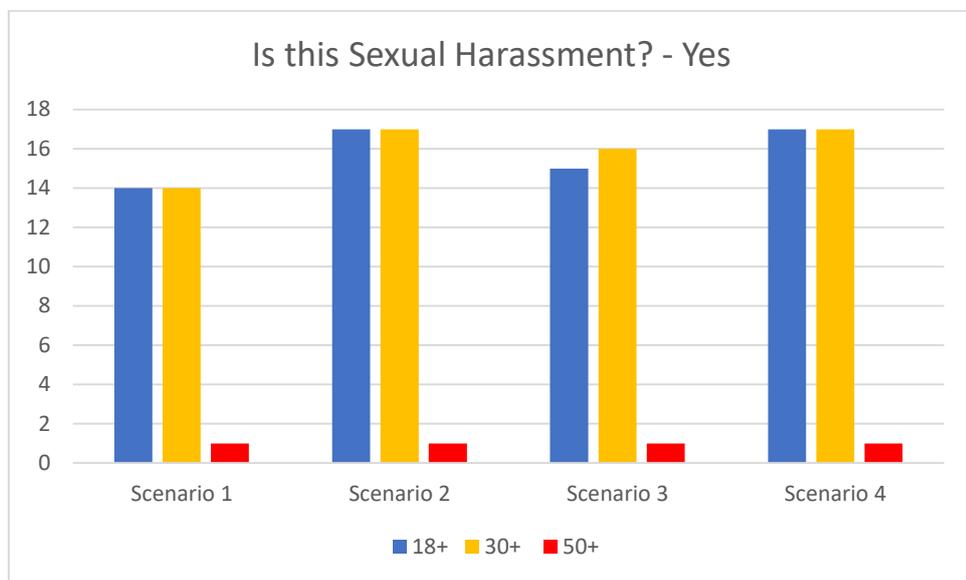


Figure 2: Respondents who said 'yes', by age.

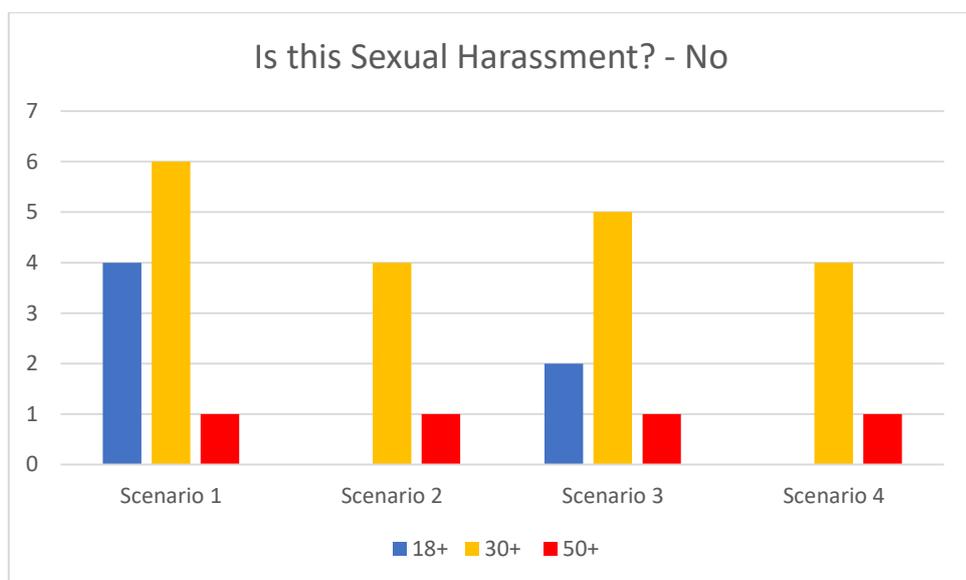


Figure 2: Respondents who said 'no', by age.

Scenario 1 depicted an example of verbal sexual harassment. 27.5% disagreed that this was sexual harassment. Looking at Figure 2, 12 women in the 18+ age group agreed it was sexual harassment, as did 12 women in 30+ group. Scenario 2 demonstrated a scene of non-verbal sexual harassment, 87.5% agreed that this was sexual harassment. Figure 2 shows that 17 women in the 18+ group and 17 from the 30+ group said yes. Scenario 3 was an example of visual sexual harassment; 20% said they disagreed with this being an act of sexual harassment. Figure 3 shows the highest level of disagreement came from the 30+ age group. Finally, scenario 4 depicted a scene of physical sexual harassment, like with scenario 2, 87.5% agreed. Figure 2, demonstrates that the 18+ and 30+ age group were on par with their consensus. It was shown that there wasn't a significant generational divide in the perceptions of sexual harassment.

iv. *Art Project: Saree*⁹

Among the domestic workers, the third round of data I collected was through the medium of art. The idea was to make a patch work saree where the women could share their perceptions and stories of sexual harassment without have to physically speak it. Fourteen women contributed to this project. With this project and through the translations, I saw from some of the stories that sexual harassment, sexual abuse and child abuse were synonymous in the minds of some of the women who contributed. Some took the opportunity to write out what they feel about sexual harassment, while others painted and cross-stitched. The domestic worker who worked alongside me as my translator provided a cross-stitch art piece, depicting the outfit she was wearing when the grandfather of the home she worked in told her she should wear short clothes and that she looks nice in them. There were two paintings of a girl crying into her hands with a man standing nearby. The majority of pieces had some form of writing on them. Some of the most striking stories and perceptions were:

“When somebody touches us inappropriately, we get really scared and we don't have the guts to tell anybody.”

“Whenever a man harasses a woman, she shouts for help, but nobody comes to rescue her.”

“Whenever a boy sexually harasses me or other girl, we feel really bad and uncomfortable but the irony is we keep tolerating all these things which is not right. Therefore, if somebody is

⁹ See appendix 1 for photos.

doing wrong with us we should raise our voice and become self-independent so we can save ourselves from these incidences.”

The saree was left with MFF to use in future projects and to expand on, for more awareness to be raised on the issue of sexual harassment among domestic workers.

v. *Discussion*

Despite my initial struggles in the beginning, the response I got was incredible. Having said that, the reluctance before spoke volumes. It demonstrated the fear and nervousness to speak out. I saw a change in these women from when I first met them to the end of my field visits. Prior to the 14th June, there was a reluctance to speak and I could see the issue of sexual harassment made them nervous. However, on the 14th June, a domestic worker from the community I was engaging with in Gurgaon, one of their own, was attacked and beaten by her employer. Since then I saw a shift in the numbers of women who showed up to participate in my research and their willingness to speak out. There was build-up of confidence I saw develop within these women. For example, this community of domestic workers gathered together and protested for their rights and against workplace abuse. My translator was a panellist at a public panel discussion on the issue of sexual harassment on domestic workers, where she shared her stories and stated the work that needs to be done to tackle these issues. The woman who was attacked also spoke to me and shared her stories. From the data gathered above, I see that these women are aware of sexual harassment, where it happens and also their different perceptions, the latter was extremely evident with the scenario examples.

Towards the end of my time in the field, accompanied by the MFF team, I went back to share my key findings with the women and I explained to them what the #MeToo Movement was, as they were unaware. They are aware and agree that sexual harassment happens to them and to other women around them. They spoke about initial fears to speak but they collectively agreed that coming together and collectivizing can make an impact to combat sexual harassment. I also shared my key findings, the art project and what ‘#MeToo’ is to the men in the community. They, too, agreed sexual harassment does happen and that it happens to women in their families and other women they know. During the sharing sessions, I asked how could ‘#MeToo’ function in their communities without the use of social media. The male respondent stated that men should be included in the campaigning of sexual harassment awareness. They also that victims are lacking sufficient support and that there should an

accessible helpline for women to call. There was also the suggestion that They could organise a WhatsApp group among their community to raise awareness and campaign.

V. Conclusion

From the gathered evidence demonstrated above, sexual harassment is a pervasive issue, and it's a global issue and it's not one that can just be ignored. Though there wasn't the use of a social media platform, they were still saying 'Me Too', whether it was in the stories they told me directly or through the medium of art. With this platform, they could remain anonymous but share their stories. Through some of the pieces of art I saw that incidences of sexual harassment went beyond the workplace and depicted acts of child abuse. It can be seen from this, that from a young age, girls are told to keep quiet about these things and only now are they willing to speak up, but without having to say it out loud. This brings me back to what I was told during my interview with the NDWM, that '#MeToo', for domestic workers in this context, could work offline and on a more grassroots, community-based level; '#MeToo' doesn't have to stay within the confines of social media.

Through my research I also saw the importance of community and collectivization with an issue like this. When it comes to sexual harassment, the reason people don't speak is out of fear of not being believed, being further victimized, facing further abuse, the list is endless. While victims are going through a whirlwind of emotions and battles, for the most part, the perpetrators face no repercussions for their actions. Having a community and a support system and a platform like '#MeToo' whether it be on or offline, can make an impact and be a beacon for those who have yet not found their voice or would rather simply stay in the shadows. As Ai-jen Poo puts it; "What is so powerful about this movement is the way that we are speaking to each other, like a call and response between women across so many different experiences and communities and industries. We are saying to each other: I see you. You're not alone. I'm here (Stites, 2018)."

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Art Project – Saree





Appendix 2: What is Sexual Harassment? Questionnaire

What is Sexual Harassment?

1. Rape
 2. Someone stalking you
 3. Someone touching for too long
 4. Staring at you
 5. Making inappropriate comments at you
-

1. Have any of these ever happened to you?

- How did it make you feel?

- Did you tell somebody/report it?

2. Have they happened to someone you know?

- Did they tell somebody/report it?

About:

- Age?
- From?
- Relationship Status?
- Family?
- How long have you been a domestic worker?

1. What according to you is Sexual Harassment?

2. Where does it happen? Does it happen where you work? In what ways?