

Field Facilitators Discuss the Issue of Sexual Harassment and the World of Work of Women Domestic Workers and Learn Participatory Research Methodologies

Date: 3rd and 5th August

Place: Martha Farrell Foundation Office

Number of participants: 12 (7 Field Facilitators and 5 Domestic Worker Champions)

Facilitator: Martha Farrell Foundation Staff

Introduction

The informal nature of women domestic workers' work and workplace makes them highly vulnerable and invisible in the eyes of the law and society. In 2018, a participatory action research study led by the Martha Farrell Foundation and PRIA found that sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers is not only prevalent, but highly silenced. Although protected under the SHW Act, 2013, women domestic workers are unable to access justice under it for various reasons:

- Cultural stigma, shame and silence
- Lack of awareness of redressal procedures
- Economic and social insecurity

Moreover, the law that protects them - the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 - is ambiguous on the redressal process of complaints of sexual harassment filed by women domestic workers.

'Making Workplaces Accountable towards Women Domestic Workers: Effective Implementation of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013)' is an initiative by the Martha Farrell Foundation and supported by the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, to strengthen institutional mechanisms under the SHW Act, 2013, and ensure prompt and sensitive delivery of justice to women domestic workers for their experiences of sexual harassment in the world of work. The project envisions working with domestic workers from 13 districts of Delhi-NCR, Local Committees (appellate bodies set up in the District Administration under the SHW Act, 2013 to redress instances of sexual harassment in the world of work of informal workers) and police to set up a revised redressal procedure under the Act, to ensure women domestic workers in the 13 districts are able to seek such justice.

Throughout the project, six identified domestic worker champions and grassroots-level development professionals doing rights-based work are simultaneously being capacitated in methodologies of participatory research and action to take forward awareness generation, baseline data collection, advocacy and implementation of a revised redressal process with and by women domestic workers seeking justice for their #MeToo experiences under the SHW Act, 2013, in line with the project objectives.

At the outset, in August 2021, the six field facilitators underwent a training program on sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers and the role and use of participatory training methodologies to gather data on the issue for the baseline study.

Highlights from the Training

- Project Orientation

The field facilitators (domestic worker champions, domestic workers and social development professionals) who will serve as focal points for #MainBhi were introduced to the goal of the project and the purpose behind it, as well as their integral role as

facilitators for the entire process. The target locations and numbers under the project and the complexity of the issue that they will grapple with came out through a discussion on sexual harassment at the workplace. Most field facilitators identified are domestic workers themselves, and others are members of organisations that have worked very closely with women domestic workers and are aware of their unique contexts and challenges. The knowledge generation through the participatory training was therefore, in line with some of the findings of the Foundation on the issue and the world of work of women domestic workers. Participants in the discussion picked up on the topic and shared examples from their experiences of how women domestic workers experience sexual harassment in their world of work.

Box 1: Participants' Experiences of Sexual Harassment

"Humne aisi bohot si kahaniya suni hai jismein kam umr ki gharelu mahila kaam pe jaati hai aur kuch mahino mein pregnant bhi ho jati hai" (I have heard many stories that young domestic workers go to work and get pregnant in a few months) - Mary, a domestic worker champion and field facilitator under the program

"Mujhse Mukherjee Nagar ki mahilao ne btaya ki unko karyasthal pe unhe yaun dhang se shoshit kiya jata hai, zyadatar bade umr ke pursho dwara" (Women Domestic Workers from Mukherjee Nagar have told me that they get sexually harassed at their workplace by old men) - Bibiyana, Union worker and field facilitator under the program

"Maine khud kayi baar yaun utpeeradh jhela hai, building ke guard aate jaate mere upar gande comment kiya karte the" (I have faced sexual harassment at workplace several times. The building's guard used to pass sexual remarks and comments when he saw me) - Sarita, domestic worker champion and field facilitator under the program

- Deep dive into the issue

The participants were then led into a deeper discussion around the forms and types of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers and the rights of women, the processes under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 for redressal.

Using an activity, participants were able to identify different forms (physical, verbal, visual and non-verbal) and types (quid pro quo and hostile work environment) of sexual harassment at workplace. An introduction to the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013 was given to gain knowledge on women domestic workers' rights under the Act and its redressal mechanisms.

Box 2: Participants' Statements on Sexual Harassment at Workplace

"Galat neeyat se choona yaun utpeeradh hai" (To touch someone with a bad intention is sexual harassment)

"Yaun utpedan sharirik sambandh ke liye majboor karna hai" (Sexual harassment can also be compelling someone to have sexual relations)

"Baar baar chedna, zabardasti karna, seeti bajana, ishaare se bulana yaun utpeeradh hai" (Sexual harassment includes things such as whistling, making inappropriate remarks and gestures)

The participants were then oriented with the extended definition of ‘workplace’ under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Act, 2013. Particularly for women domestic workers, who live in communities with colleagues and peers working in the same houses as themselves (as drivers, security guards, etc.), the world of work looks very different to what one would traditionally identify the workplace as. At any point in their lives, therefore, they can be at risk of sexual harassment in the workplace.

Box 3: Participants’ Statements on what constitutes the ‘workplace’ and ‘employer’

“Karyasthal humare ghar se shuru ho jata hai” (The boundaries of our workplace extend to the paths we travel to and back from our homes, as well)

“Jab tak mai ghar na pohochti hun, tab tak mera karyasthal hai” (Till the time I reach my home, all the area I cover is my workplace)

“Meri kaam ke ghar pe saare log mere niyokta hai” (Every member of the family that I work for is my employer)

- Participatory Action Research Methodology

The participants were oriented to participatory action research methodologies and its relevance to the project. The project employs a cascading cyclical model to ensure input and capacity building, knowledge sharing and data collection, taking place hand in hand.

Each stakeholder - be it the women domestic workers, the field facilitators or the program staff - is an equal owner of the knowledge and information generated through the project activities.

Learning at every level is a two-way process. For instance, the baseline survey form that field facilitators had to get filled would not be administered ‘to’ women domestic workers. Rather, it will be filled ‘with’ women domestic workers, facilitated by conversation - for instance, domestic workers would need to be made aware of their rights under the Law and what constitutes sexual harassment, which would empower them to speak up about instances of such violations in their lives, leading back to data creation for the project.

Every step of the process of creating the baseline survey questionnaire was also co-developed with women domestic workers (field facilitators), which made it trauma informed, survivor centric and context specific.

Field facilitators were encouraged to fill their survey questionnaires with small sample sizes of women domestic workers in their targeted communities first, before challenges and roadblocks thrown up by them were addressed collaboratively to ensure the process would be smooth and effective.



- Deepening understanding on the issue

The trial data collection conducted by field facilitators deepened every stakeholder's insights on the issue. Learnings included: women domestic workers did not feel safe talking about their experiences because of the possibility of backlash from their communities and employers. Women domestic workers were also not aware of what really constituted sexual harassment - many limited their understanding to the physical form of sexual harassment.

Box 2: WDWs Statements during the baseline survey

"Mere saath aisa kuch nahi hua" (Nothing like this has happened with me)

"Yeh form ration ke liye hai?" (Is this form for ration?)

"Ek guard hassi mazak se choota hai" (One of the guards touches me jokingly)

"Yeh humse kaise sawal kar rhe ho?" (What kind of questions are you asking?)

"Woh police ke paas gyi thi but kuch nhi hua" (She went to the police but they did not do anything)

"Kya karengey yeh bharke?" (What will we do after filling this?)

"Yeh sawal survey mei hai ya tu puch rhi hai?" (Is this question in the survey or are you asking it?)

The lessons gleaned from the exercise added more layers of understanding to the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers - lack of reporting or data around instances of sexual harassment in the world of work of domestic workers is not indicative of a lack of such instances happening.

- Linking the Self and Personal Experiences to the Research Process

Through the process of conducting the survey and meeting with women domestic workers in the *bastis* (settlements) directly to foster learning, the field facilitators were able to link themselves' and personal experiences to the process of data collection. Deriving from their learnings, the methodology was evolved. Conversations and focus group discussions became more central to building solidarity and trust with women domestic workers and drawing out the stories in a safe and confidential environment. Methodologies such as Small Group Discussions (SGDs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Participatory Safety Audits (PSAs) came through as tools for engagement.

Field facilitators also simulated experiences from the field through role plays to bring out some key learnings and work out strategies to mitigate challenges during the session.



Key Learnings

- A praxis led approach during the two day training workshop led to better motivation and confidence among field facilitators to take forward the project
- The nature of the issue of sexual harassment is such that the field facilitators have also lived in a culture of silence around it. Participatory training approaches for orientation of field facilitators enabled them to link their own experiences and use them as tools to build engagement, solidarity and a sense of trust with their peers

- Sexual harassment at the workplace is an issue which are often unheard and unsaid. However, lack of data around the issue, particularly in the case and context of women domestic workers, does not mean such instances are absent in their lives

Next Steps

- Field facilitators will take forward a Participatory Action Research project to introduce and take forward the project across the target communities they will work in
- Data collected through the research will be analysed and validated with and by women domestic workers
- Learnings from each stakeholder - program staff, field facilitators and women domestic workers - will be captured, to evolve strategies to strengthen project implementation and effectiveness