



***“Ched-chad sabke saath hoti hai, kaam ke raaste mei bhi aur kaam ki jagah pe bhi” (Every domestic worker faces sexual harassment on her way to work and her workplace)***

**Women domestic workers of Harijan Basti, Gurgaon undergo a peer-led participatory training session on sexual harassment in the workplace and the SHW Act, 2013**

**Date: 16th February, 2022**

**Place: Harijan Basti, Gurugram**

**Number of Participants: 25 Women Domestic Workers**

**Resource Persons: Programme Staff, Martha Farrell Foundation**

**Field Facilitators: Sarita Devi**

### **Introduction**

#मेंभी is a program that seeks to address the issue of sexual harassment in the world of work of women domestic workers. Led by Martha Farrell Foundation in partnership with UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women and Girls, #मेंभी 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. In line with the goals of the program, women domestic workers in Harijan Basti, Gurugram (NCR), took part in a participatory training session on the topic of sexual harassment in their world of work.

A baseline survey conducted by Martha Farrell Foundation in 2018 with 291 women domestic workers revealed that 84 women said yes to being sexually harassed at their workplaces. Out of these 84 women, 19% chose to ignore the incident, 15% shared their experiences with friends or co-workers, 13% changed their way to work and 2.3% had to quit their jobs. 17 women domestic workers could complain to the police but could not share any outcomes of filing a complaint. Only one of the 84 women domestic workers could complain in the building when she was sexually harassed. Data on this issue continues to be collected through the #मेंभी project. This lack of awareness regarding what constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace, as well as the redressal mechanisms for the same, form the basis of the need for the participatory training sessions on the topic.

Envisioned as an exercise bring about a conscious and holistic understanding of the Protection of Women from Sexual Harassment Act of 2013, and its provisions, the 25 participants in this session were given a brief introduction about the goals and objectives of the #मेंभी project. Following this, an orientation session on what constitutes sexual harassment at the workplace, and the legal redressal mechanisms for the same was conducted with and for women domestic workers.

### **Highlights from the Conversation**

Women domestic workers gathered at the Harijan Basti Swabhiman Kendra (a Community Support Center run by women domestic workers in Gurugram, supported by the Martha Farrell Foundation). As field facilitator Sarita had already met with the new women domestic workers who were to now be a part of the #मेंभी project and its meetings, MFF programme staff provided a brief introduction to the project and its objectives. In addition

to this, the training participants were also briefed about the concepts and definitions of sexual harassment at the workplace, as it relates to their world of work.

Women domestic workers began the discussion with voicing their challenges in travelling to work, as well as at households they work in. “*Raaste mei ched khani*”<sup>1</sup> and a perception of unfair practices at their workplaces formed a majority of the responses to this question.

While women voiced their challenges to safety on the streets, however, they did not refer to these challenges as ‘sexual harassment’, nor were they aware of the fact that their experiences of harassment on the roads, was also an experience of workplace sexual harassment. Consequently, none of the women who had experienced workplace sexual harassment had sought redressal; this was due to various reasons such as lack of awareness about their rights under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act (2013), no knowledge of the institutional redressal mechanisms, the stigma and shame attached to reporting, and financial constraints.

Box 1: Domestic Worker Savita (name changed) shares her understanding of sexual harassment:

*“Hum sab ne kaam pe jaate waqt cher khani sehi hai, ya pehle sehe hongee”* ( All of us experience sexual harassment on our way to work, or have experienced this in the past)

Through the discussion, participants began sensitising their counterparts about the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace in relation to their experiences of it, definitions of ‘employer’, ‘workplace’ and ‘world of work’ under the Act and their rights to safe, conducive workplaces, free of sexual harassment. For the first time in their lives, participants came to the realisation that they had rights in the workplace, and that sexual harassment is not just wrong, but illegal and an impingement of their rights.



*Women domestic workers participating in a discussion on Sexual Harassment at Workplace*

<sup>1</sup> “Eve teasing” on the way to and back from work: the usage of the word “teasing” is indicative of how normalised and trivialised women’s experiences of gender-based violence in the public and professional realms is

Participants were also sensitised by Program staff on the provisions in the Law for redressal of their complaints of sexual harassment in the workplace, the process and authorities - many expressed that they had no idea about Local Committees in their district, or the nodal officers in their block.

To further the discussion, participants were also shown a map from a Participatory Safety Audit<sup>2</sup> (PSA) of a nearby area that was created previously, and how the women domestic workers of that area marked safe and unsafe spaces. Participants felt that this would be an important tool to ensure safety in their world of work, and readily agreed to conduct a PSA of their own community.

### Key Learnings

- Women domestic workers had a limited understanding of what constitutes Sexual Harassment at Workplace, and the redressal mechanisms provided for the same under the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace Act (2013)
- The participatory training session proved to be an effective mechanism for women domestic workers to share their experiences of sexual harassment in a safe, trauma-informed space
- The importance of gathering in a safe space — in this case, the Swabhiman Kendra in Harijan Basti, was felt by all participants. A safe, quiet, and clean environment as a meeting place for women domestic workers allowed for more effective and open discussions
- Women domestic workers also identified several barriers to reporting instances of sexual harassment, including non-institution of Local Committees, or their lack of accountability
- Fear of loss of jobs, backlash from family and community members force women domestic workers to keep silent about their experiences of sexual and gender-based violence

### Next Steps

- The field facilitator will support participants to fill the baseline survey form to understand their knowledge on the issue of sexual harassment at workplace, and the law that prevents, prohibits, and addresses it.
- The women will conduct a Participatory Safety Audit of their community, after which a PSA map will also be created.
- The women will use the Resource Centre as a space to hold conversations around safety in their world of work and build solidarity among each other.

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<sup>2</sup> A Participatory Safety Audit (PSA) is a technique whereby participants are invited to visualise their communities in terms of the levels of safety in their surroundings. A 'Transect Walk' is usually conducted prior to a PSA, wherein participants walk through their communities and observe areas that they believe to be 'safe' or 'unsafe'— a facilitator also provides other guiding questions during this activity. Participants are then invited to create a safety map that details their observations during the entire process.